

# **Philippians: Remember for the Future**

## **Sermon 9-9-18**

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#### **Philippians 1:1-11**

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: <sup>2</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup>I thank my God every time I remember you, <sup>4</sup>constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, <sup>5</sup>because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup>I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup>It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. <sup>8</sup>For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup>And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight <sup>10</sup>to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, <sup>11</sup>having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

#### **Message:**

(Play video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oE9qqW1-BkU&t=2s>) As stated in the video, Philippi was one of the first Jesus communities that Paul and Silas started, found in Acts 16. It seemed that wherever Paul and Silas went, God laid before them the opportunity to share the gospel and have people come to Christ. Lydia get's spontaneously baptized. After the heckling of demon-possessed girl for days, Paul casts out the demon in the name of Jesus. And for that, they get thrown in prison in Philippi. An earthquake occurs while they're in prison and you would think this is their opportunity for escape, but they use it as an opportunity to convert the jailor to Christ preventing him from killing himself for believing he lost the prisoners. And then the jailor's whole household comes to Christ. Upon such a great impact by Paul and Silas, the Roman colony can't allow them to stay because it challenges their beliefs and Roman patriotism of the day.

After leaving Philippi and much time later Paul writes this letter. Paul has great appreciation for the people of Philippi. It's a little ironic that at the writing of this letter he's in prison again. Most commonly believed to be in prison in Rome. It seems that when he's in prison, is when his greatest ministry occurs among the

Philippian people. Which, is a little strange. We always think of Paul up and about always on a missionary journey when he has the greatest of conversion experiences. But with Philippi it's when he's in prison.

The people of Philippi are primarily gentiles. They are made-up of Greeks and retired Roman soldiers. There is little to no Jews in this town. So, like stated before, there is a strong Roman patriotism in this town. By Paul proclaiming Christ as King, Paul directly challenges their patriotism around an emperor. And they can't have that. But the people who came to Christ during his time there continue to proclaim Christ and the community of faith grows in Philippi.

Paul's approach to writing this letter is interesting. He starts with his somewhat normal greeting. But then he launches into gratitude. And the key verses that we'll be focusing mostly on today is, <sup>3</sup>"I thank my God every time I remember you, <sup>4</sup>constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, <sup>5</sup>because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now." By this greeting, you can see that even after Paul and Silas were kicked out of Philippi, the ministry continued. This is the amazing part about when the gospel catches fire in our communities. It's not centered around a particular leader, but the movement of Christ is an unstoppable fire. In the face of opposition, like Roman patriotism, the gospel spreads all the more. What I found most interesting about these few verses is the combination of these four words, "thank," "remember," "pray" and "joy." What does thankfulness have to do with remembrance? What does praying have to do with thankfulness? What does remembrance have to do with joy? And any variation thereof. There is something deeply interconnected by these words. More on this later...

Continuing in verse 6, <sup>6</sup>"I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup>It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. <sup>8</sup>For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus." Paul acknowledges that upon his journey through Philippi that Christ came at that time to the people and it has continued to do so. "The day of Jesus Christ" is a common phrase Paul uses to refer to the return of Christ. Paul is proud of the work of the Philippians. He has a fondness and a compassion for these people. This says a lot about Paul's intent in this letter. He doesn't write this letter to admonish or correct the Philippians, but to encourage them. To build them up and to continue to proclaim the gospel even in the midst of opposition. So how do you encourage people in their walk and witness with Jesus without sounding trite? Without it feeling like an empty "ra-ra" speech?

Well...if we go back to verses 3-5, I think we see a little bit of a template. It has to do with those four words: thanks, remember, pray and joy. What does the remembrance do for the soul? For one, when we're going through present hardship, remembering where we've come from and what we've gone through can help get us through the current hardship. Paul remembers how these people came to Christ and the challenging circumstances they inherited by deciding to follow Jesus. Even though they may still face opposition and oppression of the gospel, they can hold fast to where they've come from. It becomes the rock-solid foundation on which they can stand. Let's say they choose to forget where they've come from and what they've overcome with the power of Christ, that leaves them feeling pretty unstable. As if they're going through hardship all-over again without a compass. What they can stand on at this point, is their experience and particularly, their experience with Christ. The more time we spend with Christ, not just from a day-to-day basis, but even from crisis-to-crisis basis, the more we grow in confidence in Jesus and what he's capable of. One of the many reasons that we've gone through sharing our testimonies this year is that by each of us remembering our story and especially Christ's story in us, it solidifies our faith journey. Many of you have commented how it was a valuable exercise to recall your faith journey. To remember how God has seen you through such difficult circumstances. How He has given you such great joy in your life. That, indeed, God has been faithful to you. Even if you flip through the Psalms you'll see the prayers over and over again focusing on remembrance of how God was faithful in the past.

Similarly, this word of "thanks" that Paul offers for the Philippians is incredible. When we're praying for someone else, how often do we go straight to intercession for them? That we jump right to asking God to help another in need. Here, Paul starts off with saying "thanks" because it helps the Philippians feel valued. That they mean something and their work has meant something. It's not in vain and it doesn't go unnoticed. When I was reflecting on this, I couldn't help but recall my times in the hospital as a chaplain. Many times when I would hear the stories of patients they would share with me their most vulnerable fears and their most shameful stories. When it came time to pray in the visit, I often intuitively knew that what they needed was to be thanked. I would pray something like, "Thank you Lord for Joanne and what a blessing she has been to so many." And I would peek my eyes open for a split-second and I would often see tears rolling down their faces. No one had thanked them for being them. For being created. For the value that they held before the Lord. Similarly, when I would be called in for a death situation. You know, when someone is on their last breaths, maybe even hooked up to a machine. I would come into the room, usually with multiple family members. They would want me to offer a prayer for sending of

their loved one who was about to die. One of the first things I asked the family was, “who was this person to you? Tell me some stories about them. What were they like?” Some told endearing stories. Others told humorous stories. Some shared this person’s accomplishments in life. Some shared character traits. When I entered the prayer time, I started by thanking the Lord for this person and all the wonderful memories they’ve created. As sad as a moment as it was for those in the room, it was healing to acknowledge the lovely person, the most positive traits of this person and how God had shaped his or her life on this earth. Now, it isn’t as effective if you focus on the bad stuff about this person. If you focus on the critiques. If you focus on all the mistakes. But again, thanking God for the other in our prayers has incredible impact for the Kingdom of God. It instills mercy, compassion, grace and love. Not to mention, that by thanking someone else in our prayers, in a letter and in person, it strengthens our relationship with them. It tightens the bonds among us. By thanking the Philippians, Paul strengthens his relationship with them.

After thanking them and the Lord, Paul prays for the people. This is when he starts intercession. Notice how Paul doesn’t pray for correction or repentance. He prays for good things. “<sup>9</sup>And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight <sup>10</sup>to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, <sup>11</sup>having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.” Paul wants their love to overflow, to gain more knowledge and insight. To have this sense of discernment and closeness with Christ. So that when they come before Jesus on the other side of death or even upon Christ’s return they will be claimed as righteous. And that Jesus, the son of the God, will be glorified. Paul is claiming a future for these people that is wonderful, majestic and awesome. This is the joy He can claim over these people. This is why, as I imagine, Paul has a huge smile on his face as he writes this letter to them while in prison. He can see and feel how God is well-pleased with these people and wants to continue to see them thrive for the Kingdom of God.

Paul’s positivity though is not Pollyanna or pie-in-the-sky thinking. Paul’s thankfulness, remembrance and joy comes from a place of experience. He can thank them because he knows the great things they have endured and what they have sacrificed for the gospel. Paul can claim these wonderful things for their future because he remembers what they’ve done for the Kingdom of God. His words are rooted in real-life experiences with these people. These are not empty words. We, too, can claim the future that God has for us. We can hope that God has a plan for us. We can hope and take joy in the fact that God has a future for the church. This is not connected to some baseless reality, you all have testified to God’s miraculous actions in your lives. You have testified to how God has seen

you through thick and thin. You remember. So you know that God is faithful. You know that He is good. That regardless of the difficulties we face, you can claim the joy of the Lord because you remember and you are thankful for all that He's done.

Folks, this church has been through a lot over the years. Lots of transitions. Lots of difficulties. Lots of hurt relationships. For as much negative that has happened, you have much more positive experiences to proclaim. To boast about. Christ is real and in your lives. Your testimonies have re-enforced my belief that God is faithful to us all. God is faithful to Providence. Both now and in the past. Providence has a future. It may not be the future we all imagined, but we have a future. And, again, I'm not saying this out of wishful thinking or Pollyanna ideas. Your testimonies prove that God has moved in our midst and we can trust that He will continue to move in our midst. Since we have all experienced the salvation of Christ, not just the mountaintop version, but the consistent version. We've experienced Christ's faithfulness through the multitude of life's ups and downs. This is why we can proclaim the joy of Christ as our Lord and Savior. It's also why Paul can proclaim such joy in his prayers for the Philippian people. My prayer for Providence, for you all, is the same as Paul's, "...that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight <sup>10</sup>to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, <sup>11</sup>having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God." Let the joy and love of Christ from our lives overflow. To remember, thank and bless others around us. Amen.