

Philippians 1:1-11

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[0 : 00] So we're going to look at this book of Philippians. The church in Philippi was planted about 50 AD by the apostle Paul. And you can read the story, and I really encourage you to do that.

In Acts chapter 16, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ took root. We could say took hold of Philippi. Well, we're 10 years on roughly. And Paul the planter is now Paul the prisoner. He's under house arrest in Rome. He is chained to the Roman guards.

He does not know whether he will live or whether he will be martyred. He's sort of on death row with the possibility of release. And the church at Philippi is doing okay.

It's doing alright. It's established. It's got structures. So look at verse 1. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers, with the elders, and deacons.

[0 : 55] There is authority. There is structures in the church. And this church, since it's been planted, has been a great support to the apostle Paul. They've even sent one of their own.

They sent Epaphroditus to give Paul a gift. And Paul was overjoyed to see him. But then Epaphroditus fell sick while he was with Paul. And now he's well enough to go home to Philippi. And Paul sends the letter back. He wants to save postage. And he sends the letter back with Epaphroditus to the Philippians. And the letter which we've got in our hands is full of joy.

It is full of thanksgiving. And it is full of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as you read the letter to the Philippians, it is different from every other letter in the New Testament.

There is no major doctrinal controversy. There is no heresy like in Galatians. You foolish dogs. Or Colossians. But there are undercurrents in the church.

[1 : 53] It's church. And what is church like? It is wonderful. And yet in every biblical church, there are tensions. And there are always undercurrents.

No doctrinal heresy. And yet they've got a couple of women. Do you see them in chapter 4? Chapter 4 verse 2. I entreat Eurodia and I entreat Syntyche. They sit in the back row. They're arguing. Just agree in the Lord.

Get all well-worked with one another. What is the message of Philippians? It's very difficult to pick out one major theme, isn't it? Some people think the big theme is partnership. I think there's something in that.

Some people think it is joy. Some people think it is unity. And so I think it's probably all three. The Apostle Paul is telling them to cheer up. He's telling them to shut up.

And he's telling them to grow up. And so Paul writes to the Philippians. And he wants them to keep united. So to be a Christian, to be a church, to be a faithful church which proclaims biblical morality, which proclaims the message of Jesus Christ, is difficult.

[2 : 55] But it was even more difficult in the Roman Empire. It was becoming a more difficult place to be a Christian. And it was a difficult place to be a church. And the danger is when the world gets hostile, what does the church do?

The church just turns down the volume. And the church goes with a low profile that keeps its head down. And not be so committed to the gospel. And so Paul says, keep going as you are, keep proclaiming the gospel.

And I want us to look this lunchtime at the first seven verses. And I want you to see, first of all, from the Apostle Paul, as he writes to the Philippians, the first thing that I think I have missed often when I've read this letter, and lots of the commentators miss, is gospel affection.

Gospel affection. There is great warmth, isn't there? And great affection in these seven verses. And we mustn't miss that.

Sometimes in our analysing of the text, we miss the tone of the passage. But look how warm it is. I don't know what your thank you letters are like. I wrote one yesterday.

[4 : 01] It was, thank you for such and such. It was very, very kind of you. You didn't really need to come and see us soon. Yours sincerely, Paul. You know what it's like after Christmas when you were a child, and you were forced to write the thank you letter, weren't you?

Do your auntie such and such. Thank you for the woolies. I'm a check. It's very kind of you. Yours sincerely, dot, dot, dot. But it's not like that. You see, the Apostle Paul, it is jam-packed full of warmth and affection.

So he says this, verse three, I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine, for you all making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Look at verse seven. It is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart. Verse eight, for God is my witness. How I yearn for you.

All with the affection of Christ. Verse 12, I want you to know. He's concerned for them. Verse 19, he knows they pray, doesn't he?

[5 : 09] For I know that through your prayers, I know that you pray for me. Look at chapter two and verse 12. Therefore, my beloved, I love you. When's the last time you heard your own minister tell the congregation that he loves them?

It is full of gospel affection. The second thing I want us to see from the text in verses one and two is gospel identity. And this is a key point. Gospel identity.

It's a very surprising verse, isn't it? I think if you and I were going to write it, we would write this. We would rewrite it. We would say, Paul and Timothy, saints of Christ Jesus, to the overseers and the deacons at Philippi, together with all the servants of Christ.

But it doesn't say that. Do you see that? It's the opposite. Who are the servants? Who are the servants? Shut it up. Paul and Timothy, aren't they?

Who are the saints? Yeah, isn't it? So just look briefly at that. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus.

[6 : 14] And the word servant, really there is stronger than just servant. It's a kind of cross between a slave and a servant. It's telling you and I, that Paul and Timothy are not their own. They belong to a master.

And that master is? Christ Jesus. They are Christ's men. And so when they write this letter, they write not with their own authority, but they write with the authority of Christ Jesus.

By calling themselves servants of Christ Jesus, they are, aren't they? Directing their attention away from themselves to Christ. Paul and Timothy are not the all important ones.

Jesus Christ is. In the deepest sense, in the true sense, what Paul and Timothy are saying is Philippians, this is Christ's letter to the church. So actually for the great apostle, he's just a servant. But the real shock is the next part, isn't it? When we find out who are the saints. Who are the saints? To all the saints in Christ Jesus of Philippi.

[7 : 20] So I want you to erase in your mind all those images of icons, of stained glass windows from your mind. Scrap the pictures of monks with fat bellies and bald heads.

Get rid of small dark nuns from your mind. And I want you to imagine three people that I've met this week. One is a cleaner, who is a school cleaner.

Another one is the vice chancellor. He's the CEO of a huge multinational finance company. Sitting in his office dictating a letter. The other is a girl from Sierra Leone who is trying to come to terms with half her family being murdered.

On the surface, those three people have got nothing in common, have they? Absolutely nothing. A cleaner, a CEO, and a refugee.

But I can tell you they are all saints. They are all saints. And that has absolutely nothing to do with how they clean toilets, how they treat employees, and how they forgive murderers.

[8 : 28] They are saints in exactly the same way that I am a saint. Even though you may not think I look like one. And they are saints in exactly the same way as you are a saint if you've believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The reason for that is that a saint is made not by the Pope, it's made by God. And it is somebody who is set apart. And so every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is a saint.

You see the reality of that for a moment? If you are a Christian, you are a saint. A saint who has been set apart to glorify him. You are set apart.

You are different. That is your identity. We as Christians have been rescued from a life of rebellion. And now we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are in Christ Jesus. We are holy. We are set apart. You might not feel that, but it doesn't change the reality. It's vital for you and I to grasp that.

[9 : 31] All of us here are struggling, those of us who are Christians, to live holy and godly lives. It's hard, isn't it? But it's important to know where you start from. It's not as if holiness and living for God is some unfathomable goal that you'll never ever get to.

Some unattainable goal somewhere on the distant horizon. You know when you look for the edge of the rainbow and it just keeps getting further and further away. Is that what holiness is like? Is that what living the Christian life is like?

The more you go on, the further away it seems. Holiness is something that you've been given in Christ. We have been taken into his possession.

So it is not primarily in order to be holy that we should live holy lives. It is because you are holy. We are saints.

It's a big theme of all the apostles' letters, isn't it? Be what you are. Be what you are. You are holy, so be holy.

[10 : 36] Look at verse 27. Brings it up beautifully. Look at verse 27. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel. Conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel.

That is saying, isn't it, live in the light of what Jesus has already done for you. Not to prove your worth or to earn your keep, but because of who you are and what Jesus has done for you.

In the 1940s, the Queen Mother was leaving back in Paris with some of the royal children and the chaplain overheard the Queen Mother say to her children, royal children, royal manners.

Do you see what that is? What is that command she gave? She said, be who you are. Be what you are. Look what it says. Don't you love it?

In chapter 1 and the middle sentence of verse 1. Do you see where they are? Where are they?

[11 : 42] To all the saints, they live in two places. Every saint lives in two places. What is your address? Well, your first address is this. You are in Christ Jesus. That's the most important thing about you.

And the second thing, you are at Philippi. And we have this dual location, don't we, as Christians? We are in Christ wherever we are.

We live it out of healing. A Christian belongs to two worlds. Let me ask you, what is your identity this morning, this afternoon, this lunchtime, whatever time it is?

Have you realised what you are? For the Christians, do we think of ourselves in those terms? Do we think of ourselves in the morning, I am a saint? I am holy. I am set apart.

I am in Christ. And so out of that, I live out a life of holiness. Gospel affection, gospel identity. The third thing is gospel partnership.

[12 : 41] Look at verses 3 to 5, and then verses 7 to 8. Verses 3 to 5. And the phrase in verse 5 is a key one there. It says, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, they've been partners in the gospel.

What does the word partnership mean? What does it mean in the workplace? Partnership then, as it does now, has commercial overtones. So let's say, John and Bob, they put their savings into a fishing boat, and they share a vision, don't they?

They're going to buy a fishing boat and they're going to start a fishing company. And their partnership together in that fishing business is a shared commitment to the same goal.

They are partners together. They have invested in this together. So partnership in the gospel is a shared commitment to the gospel, to the same goals.

And Paul is saying, thank you Philippians, these brothers and sisters in Christ, who from the moment of their conversion, from the first day until now, they've rolled up their sleeves and they've got stuck in and got involved in the advance of the gospel.

[13 : 51] They've continued their witness in Philippi. They've persevered in their prayers for Paul. They sent money to support him in his ministry. And all of that said and testified to their shared vision of the importance and the priority of the gospel.

Paul says, you've got stuck in and you've stayed stuck in. There's gospel commitment. As a church, they'd hang in there. When Paul was suffering for the gospel, they'd stuck by him.

Sinclair Ferguson writes, the real test and evidence of our partnership in the gospel is our willingness to suffer for the gospel and to be unashamed of those who belong to the gospel. Our willingness to suffer for the gospel and to be unashamed of those who belong to the gospel. That's the church. And the Philippians have passed the test. These Christians had stood by Paul. He writes, doesn't he, in verse 7, it's as if they were right there with him in Rome. They stood by him in the dock. Do you remember for a moment what the Philippians had done?

[15:01] They sent him a gift. But Paul is saying, your gift and what you do with your money shows your heart. That is a key biblical principle.

That what you do with your money shows what your heart is like. Think for a moment of ourselves. What does your giving, what does my giving say about my heart? What does it say about our heart? And you see, this partnership in the gospel, it encompasses all of life. So can I ask you, are you a partner in the gospel?

Are you involved in partnership with your church? Are you in partnership with your brothers and sisters, working with them, working for him for the power of the gospel?

Are you in partnership with those who are in Christian ministry? And so let me say, if you're not, why not? Because that is the path of Christian discipleship.

[16:09] What is keeping you this afternoon from wholehearted devotion to gospel partnership? What is stopping you from getting involved, getting stuck in?

Let me say this, you cannot, you cannot, you cannot be in gospel partnership on your own. Imagine if you say, having a partnership in the business, I'm in partnership, who do you work with? I don't work with anyone.

I work with myself. But you're not in partnership, are you? It's impossible. You cannot live the Christian life on your own. You cannot do it. Church life is not as effective as sport.

And look at the joy. Look at the warmth. Look at the affection that there is here. That Paul has for gospel partners. And I want to say that there is great joy that can only be known if you're involved in gospel partnership in a local church.

There is great warmth. There is great joy. There is great affection in gospel partnership. Lastly, fourthly, the Philippians have got gospel security.

[17:21] Look at verse 6. He who began a good work. He who began a good work. And it's as if his mind is going back to Acts 16. Lydia, when Lydia became a Christian.

Come back with me really quickly to Acts chapter 16. Sister, a few pages before. Acts chapter 16. It's on page 1115. Page 1115. Acts 16. It talks about how Lydia came to put her trust in the Lord Jesus.

And it doesn't say that she came to the front. It doesn't say she prayed the prayer. It doesn't say she signed the card. It doesn't say even she'd given her life for the Lord. Now, verse 14.

Do you see what it says? In Acts chapter 16. The Lord opened her heart. Right at the end of the verse. The Lord opened her heart.

It was God who'd begun the good work, wasn't it? And that is true of everyone who is a Christian. It is a work of God. Think of the other two converts. The girl with the evil spirits in Acts 16.

[18:29] Who keeps following Paul around. She's delivered by the power of God. The jailer. His conversion was completely unexpected. It followed an earthquake. He wasn't ready for the gospel at all.

In fact, it was a catastrophe that brought him to the Lord Jesus. And if you are a Christian this lunchtime, it is all because of God. He has become a work in you.

There has been a work of God in the soul of man. And if you're looking for a reason why you're a Christian, do not look at yourself. And it's vitally important that you grasp this.

That God has become the work in you. And it's important because if that isn't the case, salvation is really unsure, isn't it? If I had no other foundation than I had chosen Jesus.

You see, I change my mind all the time, don't I? Every day is different, I've got no security. But our security is grounded in a God who cannot change. A God who won't have a bad day, that won't let us down, that won't give up.

[19:31] I've got two and a half years old, and when we cross the main road Greenford Avenue, and Ellie says, can I hold your hand? I say yes. But the truth of the matter is, when we're crossing the road, Ellie puts her little hand in the mind, and I grab hold of it.

Ellie isn't holding on to my hand really, is she? I'm holding on to hers, and that is the Christian life. God is holding on to you. He has begun it, but do you see what the verse says?

It says, doesn't it, he will bring it to completion. He will bring it to completion. Verse 6, and I'm sure of this, that you began a good work and you will bring it to completion.

A more literal translation is, he's putting the finishing touches to you. It might look in your life as if all sorts of things are going on that you wouldn't want to be going on, and it's very, very painful.

What God is doing is he's putting the finishing touches to your life and getting you ready. And Paul is telling the Philippians, and he's telling us, what he has started, he will bring to completion. And he sees the evidence, verse 5, of partnership in the gospel, and he sees them persevering, and he says, what God has started, he will finish.

[20 : 43] And we look at the church of the Lord Jesus in this country and around the world, and it is so fragile, and it is so uncertain, and we fear what will happen to the church. Well, look at verse 6.

Lord Ruth was the first director general of the BBC. He went into a meeting, I've used this illustration lots of times. He goes into the BBC boardroom, and they're muttering and talking, and when he walks in, he falls silent.

And he says, what were you talking? What were you talking about? And they don't tell him. And he shouts again, what were you talking about? And they said finally, very nervously, they said, we are planning a funeral service for the church, a program on the funeral service for the church.

And Lord Ruth punched the table, slammed the table, and shouted, the Church of Jesus Christ will stand at the gravesite of the BBC. That's true, isn't it? The Church of Jesus Christ will stand at the gravesite of Chelsea Football Club, BBC, the United States of America, China, what years began, he will bring to completion.

A few questions to finish. Where's your identity? Are you a saint? Are you in Christ? Well, if you are, be what you are. Are you in partnership? I want to say to you, get involved in church life, get stuck in.

[22 : 05] For some, it might mean that you need to give more of your time, for some, it would mean you give more of your money, for some, it would mean that you need to get to prayer, for some, it would mean that you write to missionaries, become a partner in the firm.

And then lastly, are you confident? It's a lifelong lesson, isn't it? That our confidence actually does not rest in ourselves, but it rests in him who's begun the work.

That he who has kept us till now, will keep us until the day of Christ Jesus. But what if your answer is no? If your answer is no, well then you're not a saint, you're not in Christ, and you're not in partnership, and you have no confidence for the day when you will meet Christ.

And you need to cry to the Lord today, that he would have mercy on you. Let's pray.