

Philippians 1 21st September 2025

Good morning fellow Saints / Holy People in Christ Jesus,

We have recently finished going through the book of Acts and there are so many amazing stories in that book, from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, to the beginning of the church and the enormous growth of the church as the good news of the gospel was spread to the ends of the earth. There were healings, and visions and dreams, jail break outs, the message that the good news was for all people, there were incredible conversions...notably that of the persecutor and hater of Christians Saul who met was blinded by Jesus on the way to Damascus. This is the man who became better known as Paul and turned from being a persecutor to being persecuted for his faith. He became a zealous follower of Jesus and planted many churches. So, I thought it would be fitting for us to hear from one of Paul's letters that he wrote from prison. His letter to the Philippians. We will look at each chapter over the next few weeks. Let's pray:

Father God, I pray that you will lead us by your Holy Spirit as we look at Paul's letter to the Philippians. Open our hearts and minds to learn from you that we may grow in our Christlikeness. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

I wonder if you feel comfortable being called a Saint? Maybe some of you shine your halo everyday but I suspect many of you feel unworthy of being called a Saint. But that is what we are, however, listen to the proviso...Saints in....Christ Jesus. Paul introduces himself and Timothy as servants or slaves of Christ Jesus but they also were Saints, and we also should consider ourselves as servants of Christ. Being a Saint in Christ Jesus does not mean we have obtained perfection yet, but, like being a slave, it refers to who owns us. The reference to the believers as 'holy-ones' or 'saints' is to those who are consecrated to God. Those who belong to God. When Christ's spirit comes into our lives, we become holy, dedicated to the service of God. Not holy by anything we have done but because of what Christ has done for us.

That is great news, yes? Christ makes us holy and we belong to him.

Who were the saints in Philippi that Paul was writing to? They would have included Lydia and the jailer and his family that we are introduced to in Acts

chapter 16. The Church in Philippi was the first Church in Europe and Paul went there because of a vision he had after the Holy Spirit prevented him from returning to Asia and he felt called to go to Macedonia. Philippi was the first town they came upon.

It was a woman that he meets first by the river who responds to the news of the gospel and her and her household are baptized. She then opens her home and from there begins the first Church in Europe. Lydia was a dealer in the expensive purple cloth and she used her wealth to support the Church through hospitality and through financial giving to Paul for his ongoing missionary journeys.

While in Philippi Paul and his companions are thrown in to jail and we read in Acts 16 of the earthquake that freed them from their chains and how then the jailer saw God's hand at work and asked Paul "what must I do to be saved?" The answer was "Believe in the Lord Jesus". The jailer does so and was then filled with joy because he and his household had come to believe in God.

These were the people that were part of the formation of the Church in Philippi whom Paul now writes to from his arrest in Rome. It is his warmest letter and he writes with much affection for the '*Saints*' there whom he thanks for their kindness and support, both financially and in partnering in the Gospel. His joy in the Church in Philippi stands out. This is one letter where he doesn't have to admonish the believers, they have stood firm to the truth of the gospel. His letter is one of thanks and encouragement that they will continue to persevere until the end in faith and growing in Christlike character.

I pray that you also will be encouraged by the words of Paul. Paul was so faithful and passionate in his prayers for the people of the Churches he had begun. I pray regularly for you all, though no doubt not as much as Paul!

Paul is obviously proud of them, like a parent of children who are following a good path. He thanks God for them and says when he prays for them his heart is full of joy and he is '*confident that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*'. Who began this work in us? – God did and he will continue to work in us. We will continue to be a work under construction until the end of our lives or until Christ returns.

While we are called to turn to Christ and live accordingly, fortunately our salvation and eternal destiny doesn't depend on our own efforts. Paul gives a wonderful assurance of God's involvement in our salvation.

Lydia is a good example of this for it says in Acts 16 that it was the Lord who opened her heart. He was at work in her and continued to be so as she responded to his love and blessings by opening not just her heart but showed the fruit of the spirit in offering hospitality and generosity.

Paul is confident that God never gives up on us and will bring his work to completion.

Why is he so sure? He says he has the Philippians in his heart – he is so affectionate toward them- but *his confidence* is in the fact that they share in God's grace. Paul of all people has experienced God's grace. He was a Jesus hater and persecutor of those who followed Jesus, and yet God called him and poured out his love and grace and mercy upon him. So never think you have done anything that will stop God from loving you, his grace truly is amazing.

Paul then prays for them that their *'love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you will be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Christ Jesus- to the glory and praise of God.'* (1:9-11)

Our salvation is all about what Christ has done for us, but we need to respond, like Paul, and like Lydia and to display God's grace in our lives. Our purpose is to bring glory to God.

What does it look like for our love to abound more and more? It means our love grows deeper. Think about your relationship with someone you love. Has it changed and grown over time as you've got to know them more? A romance may begin on almost superficial love but if it continues then it is usually because there is a commitment to love. Our love should show in our actions – pleasing the other rather than ourselves. We need to be committed to loving God above all and our love for others will flow from that.

Paul modelled this – he was totally in love with his Saviour Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul says that for *‘me to live is Christ and to die is gain’*. Christ was his central love and focus, he couldn’t wait to die and be with God – he was so assured of his salvation and that being with Christ was going to be wonderful. But he also knew he had a job to do ‘here and now’ while still alive, and that was to proclaim Christ.

I love that sentence of Paul’s – ‘to live is Christ and to die is gain’ - and my desire is that that motto would be true in my life though I know I often fall short of that being so. Is that how you feel? Is Jesus your first love? Is he who you live for? Remember when Paul was in Athens where he was distressed by all the idols in the city? Sometimes we can be distracted and lured by all sorts of idols, from wealth to health, to the latest fads and technology and ideas. We need to keep our eyes fixed on Christ.

What does it look like to live as Christ? It is to take on his nature. In the next chapter he exhorts the Philippians to imitate Christ’s humility, valuing others above ourselves. Paul’s prayer was that they would grow more in love and *knowledge*. To grow as a Christian is to grow in one’s grasp of the truth of Christ, in breadth and depth. It means spending time in study of the scriptures and in prayer – to soak ourselves in them and then we will start oozing the love of Christ. I think of that lovely hymn, *“Breathe on me breath of God – that I may love what thou dost love and do what thou wouldst do”*. That’s how Paul was endeavouring to live and that was his prayer for the Church in Philippi and that should be our prayer if we seek to live as disciples of Christ and take our faith seriously.

Has your love for God grown since you became a Christian? Do you seek to please God in all that you do? Do you discern what God desires as to how to live your life?

Paul loved the Church, and his sincere desire was to see them continue to grow in faithfulness so that they would be ready whenever Christ returned. Paul most likely thought that Christ would have returned by now. Jesus tells us in Matthew 24: 44 that we *‘must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect’*.

It is easy for us to be complacent, but we do not know the day or hour when Christ returns and we want to be ready to welcome him with our lives filled with the fruit of righteousness. We want to be showing that we are indeed servants and saints of Christ, living our lives for him and not for ourselves.

I read a novel a while ago called 'Before I Go', it is about a young woman who has just learnt that her cancer has returned and is now terminal and she has about 4 months to live. She begins to make a list of what she has to do before she dies like all the things that need to be fixed in the house and then she starts worrying about her husband and how he will cope without her and so on. On top of her list is to find a new wife for her husband! We often hear of people having a 'bucket list' of things to do before they die – places they want to see and do. But what should we as Christians be doing to be ready?

We should be living our lives for Christ and trusting in his assurance and thinking with joy like Paul of what is to come.

Let's not be distracted by the idols of this world and swayed by false teaching or by sinful desires; these are the things that Paul had to admonish the Galatians and the Corinthians for. Rather let us be like the Philippians, abounding in love, who gave Paul such joy because of their faith and the way they lived.

We may often be neglectful of our call to live like this, frequently failing, ever inadequate and yet we can be assured that God is at work in us and he will never let us go and will carry on his work to completion until the day of Jesus Christ. It is through the Holy Spirit living in us that we will be transformed more and more into Christ's image.

May we live as God's Holy people, saints and slaves to God all to his praise and glory. And let us rejoice in the hope we have in Jesus.

Let us pray: Father God, help us to abound more and more in your love. Thank you for Jesus and that our righteousness is through faith and grace alone. Thanks for beginning a good work in us that you will carry on to completion until the day Christ returns. May our lives bring joy to you as the Philippian Church brought much joy to Paul. Amen.