

"Smells Like Kingdom in Here"

Philippians 1:3-11 January 16, 2019 – Jeff Lyle

Few places in scripture reveal the father-heart of the Apostle Paul more so than the verses in this passage in Philippians. Though Paul could operate in some of the most stunning power from the Holy Spirit, he also understood the importance of nurturing those whom he spiritually fathered. From his words in Philippians 1:3-11, we learn the deep value of intentionally encouraging others in the walks with God. Paul tells the Philippians that they brought him joy. He let them know that he was praying for them. He reinforced that their hope in Jesus must remain strong as they look for deep growth in the love of God toward each other. Before he finishes his empowering words here, Paul reminds them all that the return of Jesus must remain at the forefront of their thinking. The aroma Paul releases in this encouraging passage is the fragrance of the Kingdom. May we all breathe it in deeply.

I. Kingdom Hearts Are Intertwined with Others (7-8)

A. The church-planter was an intercessor (3-5) - "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."

One might wonder how the Apostle Paul spent his free-time. From the various letters he wrote, we discover that intercession comprised a sizable portion of his life. While traveling in missionary journeys, raising funds for the poor, establishing churches, training leaders and writing letters, the Apostle frequently mentions a prayer life that motivates us all. When he prayed for the Philippian Christians, he testified that it brought him joy. He appreciated them. He did not forget how they had been faithful to help him from the day he first established a community of believers there. Paul was an amazingly powerful believer, but his strength did not undermine his loving fondness for the Philippian church.

B. The apostle was a prophet (6) - "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

Paul could never know how this one verse would embolden and encourage Christians down through the centuries. He tells his readers that God is not done with them yet! The invisible work of spiritual growth and sanctification continues as long as we are alive. Paul left no doubts about the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in their lives as he expressed his certainty that the same One who began their spiritual birth would continue to pour into them until their

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physical death. We need not despair of ever being forgotten or left incomplete by God. His plan has been enacted over our lives and He never misses a day of work on our behalf. Rest assured that the same God who initiated spiritual life in you is deepening it, enriching it, and purifying it today in you.

C. The thinker was a feeler (7a) - "It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart..."

May all of us who are hard-wired by God to think deeply and live with a tilt towards the objective, the analytical or the structural elements of the faith not fail to cultivate tender hearts of love toward others. Clearly, biblical truth is essential to the Christian life. Yet, in all of our theology, bible dissection and systematized doctrine, if we are not engaging our hearts with others, we are missing a massive component of the purpose in the gospel. Paul did not just know the Philippians' names, he felt deeply for all whom he knew. Kingdom undoubtedly leadership requires sharp minds. Perhaps more importantly, Kingdom leadership requires love. A sharp mind in the absence of love results in lots of action, but little progress. Paul grew in love as he interceded for the Philippians. The thinker was also a feeler as God imparted to Paul the heartbeat of His Son via the ministry of intercession.

D. The prisoner was a liberator (7b) - "...for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel."

Grace - *the great equalizer in the Kingdom.* The same Gospel which anchored the Philippians' lives also anchored the life of the Apostle. Beautifully, Paul did not regard himself a superstar in the Church. He knew, as the chief of sinners, that he was only alive by the grace of God. The Philippians were equal partakers in that grace. They shared the same spiritual substance with Paul. Paul was suffering for his commitments to Christ as he wrote them from his incarceration in Rome. Yet, he did not feel abandoned in his isolation. He sensed that the church at Philippi were still loyal to him as he continued his defense and advance of the Gospel. Though Paul had lost his physical freedom, he could take great satisfaction that he was still being used of God to further set people free.

E. The soldier was a lover (8) - "For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

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Not for the first time, Paul communicated his love and affection for them. It was no token sentiment that he felt for them. He yearned after them. Perhaps his absence from them had made his heart grow fonder. What is beautiful is that Paul's suffering and loss did not result in self-pity or bitterness. He did not make it all about him. Clearly in a more difficult circumstance than the Philippians, Paul still intentionally brought forth treasure to enrich them as he wrote this letter. Suffering and pain can adversely impact all of us. We must keep our hearts warm when the cold winds of pain blow against us. This stout believer was enduring hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Yet, with all of the pain and loss, the soldier remained a tender lover of souls.

II. Kingdom Understanding Matures with Time (9-10a)

A. Paul prayed for their love to grow (9a) - "And it is my prayer that your love {agape} may abound more and more..."

Having exemplified his own deep love for them, Paul now moves into a call for them to love one another. He intentionally uses the Greek word for God's love - *agape*. This is a love that always seeks the highest good of the other person. His expectation is that they will pursue a near-volcanic level of love growth. We are not to be casual about our need to grow in love, for it is a primary attribute of Jesus Christ. He wanted all of the Philippian believers to continue to abound in the expression of their love for God and one another. None of us have tapped out the limits of love. As immeasurable as God's love is for us, that is how much we can continue to grow in our own love. Paul recognized this as being so essential for them (and us) that he made it a matter of regular prayer on their behalf. This emphasis forces us to ask concerning our own hearts, "How am I doing in the pursuit of growing in love for God and others?"

B. Paul prayed for their vision to sharpen (9b) - "...with knowledge and all discernment..."

Knowledge - big picture foundational. Discernment - specific, precise insight; skilled perception

Paul also wanted them to deepen in their spiritual perception. They needed to mature in the skill of seeing things as God sees them. There were objective Kingdom matters concerning which they needed deeper knowledge. When they understood those matters, they also needed to discern what to do with the knowledge they had

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received. While Paul seems to mostly emphasize the heart in this passage of scripture, he did not bypass the call for them to develop sanctified minds. Christians who have no appetite for God's truth will not pursue knowledge. Eventually they will stagnate in their walk with God because there is no objective truth able to be accessed by them. We pursue truth to gain Kingdom knowledge. We want knowledge because it provides a foundation for discernment. All of these things lead to deepening wisdom which empowers us to be fruitful in God's Kingdom.

C. Paul prayed for them to hold to Kingdom values (10a) - "...so that you may approve what is excellent..."

Once knowledge and discernment are gained, we are able to clearly see the differences between what is bad, what is good and what is best. Paul's end-game desire for the Philippians is that they would commit themselves to those things which contain kingdom excellence. Life is full of distractions, and many Christians have fallen to giving the best of themselves to things that are less than excellent. Because we have limited resources, we are incredibly helped by discerning those things which are best and giving the bulk of ourselves to them. Doing an inventory of our lives from time to time is healthy. We must remain discerning concerning the excellent things - things worthy of devoting our precious resources.

III. Kingdom Commitment Comes with Rewards (10b-11)

A. What we retain (10b) - "...and so be pure {pure-hearted, sincere} and blameless..."

When we live in a consistent manner that directs the best of our lives into the most excellent things, we will hold a to a pure-hearted direction. We will be blameless before God and people because He will be directing our paths towards that which is an accurate reflection of His own nature. While true Christians will inevitably encounter opposition, those who oppose us should have no ammunition that we hand them by living in ways that are inconsistent with the character of Jesus. Our testimonies to others are incredibly important. While we should never be controlled by what others think of us, we should certainly be concerned with the reflection we present as Jesus-followers. Paul understood that discerning Christian present the purest reflection of their Savior. He prayed that the Philippians would grow in this area.

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B. What we remember (10c) - "...for the day of Christ..."

This is the event unto which we aim our lives. Jesus is returning to earth. He will judge our lives and evaluate the fruitfulness that came forth from what He has invested in us. The Day of Christ is the most monumental event in human history. God's son will return to earth and, after this, there is no possibility of altering anything we have done with our lives. Yes, we all are accountable, and King Jesus expects a hearty return on His investment. Paul frequently reminds His readers that our present-day actions and pursuits have an eternal impact. As a wise Kingdom leader, he was pointing us all toward that moment. How often (or infrequently) do we allow the return of Jesus to penetrate our day-to-day thinking? In the end, only those things done for the glory of Jesus will retain eternal value. The rest will be burned up. A commitment to keeping the return of Jesus front and center in our thinking will undeniably flavor our lives in such a way that we have great joy when we stand before Jesus. Do not waste your life on lesser things. Jesus has something far better for you between this moment and the day of his return.

C. What we reproduce (11a) - "...filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ..."

We are made righteous in our position at the very moment we trust in Jesus as Lord. The validity of our faith is seen, in part, by a practical righteousness that proceeds from the life of Jesus being at work within us. Paul prays for Christians' lives to be FILLED with the righteous fruit that comes from spiritual union with Jesus. We have a part to play in this process. We intentionally die to our flesh and the world. We intentionally commit to Jesus and His righteous ways. We do not flirt with sin. We do not choose disobedience over love. In the end, all human lives reproduce on the outside whatever is at work on the inside. For true believers, righteousness is the fruit of our faith.

D. What we relish (11b) - "...to the glory and praise of God."

This is what we long for - God to be glorified through our lives! We want our lives to render praise unto the One who loved us, sought us, saved us and shepherds us. At the end of the age, and throughout the everlasting age to come, the glory of God is the great anthem. Nobody struts sin eternity. There is no chest-thumping in glory. Jesus Christ is the radiant glory of the eternal city. He receives the praise, the honor and the worship. Because that is the reality in glory, we must embrace that priority in our lives now. So important was this that Paul interceded for it to be the ever-growing reality for

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the Philippians. May we also humble ourselves, call upon our great God and do whatever is required so that we may be used by Him for the glory of His Son all throughout our remaining days.

WELCOME TO MINISTRY

Paul describes his life in 2 Cor. 11:23-28

Constant and difficult work

Whipped and beaten more than he could count

In prisons more frequently than any others

Receiving the severest sentence from Jewish authorities: 39 lashes with the whip on five different occasions

Beaten with rods three times

Stoned to the point of dying

Shipwrecked 3 times, spending a night and a day in the waters of the sea

Constant traveling by foot while on land

Enduring terrifying storms while at sea

Under the constant threat of thieves

Threatened and attacked by his fellow Jews

Threatened and attacked by the Gentiles

Dangers of the city

Dangers of the barren desert

Dangers among fake Christians

A wearied and painful body

Sleepless nights

Voluntarily and involuntarily deprived of food

Often without warm clothing or shelter

The constant demands of all the churches he pioneered.