

03.30.2025

Philippians 4:21-23

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- Good morning! Please open to Philippians 4:21-23. After 7 months, we're finally finishing Philippians today! I don't know about you, but I've thoroughly enjoyed it.
- What could be more fitting for a church than to be told over & over & over & over & about 15 more overs to pursue unity and humility, to die to self, to serve others, to sacrifice for others. To imitate Christ in His deference, His condescension for us and for our salvation?
- We need this constant refrain because of how pervasive, persistent and powerful the presence of pride actually is in our lives.
- Hopefully, you have at least enough humility by the Spirit to see just how unhumble you actually are. As C.S. Lewis wrote: *If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.*
- Those who are most humble don't wallow in pity, but they do see themselves clearly & see themselves in light of Christ & therefore think of themselves as quite proud. As a test of pride, ask yourself: how much conflict do I have with others? How often do I disagree with God? How often am I willing to rebel against His authority by word, thought, feeling, or action? How long would it take me to identify sin in my life? These are all measures of narcissism. They're examples of the fact that you think of yourself as capital K king even if you confess Christ as king.
- If humility is the adhesive that binds two or more sinners together in marriage or church or any other community, then pride is the repelling force that pushes them apart.
- So as we begin this final sermon, my encouragement to you is to once again assume the worst about yourself and the best about God. Don't assume that you have graduated beyond the need to hear this again and don't imagine that this text is extraneous or superfluous.
- All Scripture is inspired. Nothing is gratuitous or irrelevant. That's our confession. Even the genealogies & the census numbers & yes even these concluding remarks.
- There are no texts that are more or less inspired. The gospels aren't more inspired than the letters of Paul. The NT isn't more inspired than Old. Red letters aren't more inspired than black.
- While some parts of the Bible are more helpful than others in some ways, none is more inspired or more authoritative.
- So what I want to encourage us to do this morning is to squeeze every last bit out of Philippians.
- This reminds me of a conversation we were having with the Gabas the other day. We were talking about I would say thrifty, but you might say cheap, Gaba and I are and I mentioned how Kaci & I approach the concept of the proper time to dispose of the toothpaste quite differently.

- About a decade ago, we had a discussion about toothpaste because she was throwing away a tube that still had a lot of juice left. So I told her that it was still good to go and she gave me a hard time and said I was crazy. Ironically, we were both right.
- So I got it out of the trash and used it for the next like 5 days. Now, to be fair, the last two days it took me an extra 2 minutes to brush my teeth because of the amount of effort it took to squeeze out some paste.
- But, I still made my point, which is that I'm a weirdo cheapskate who acts like I lived through the Depression or something. Anyway, my obsession notwithstanding, I actually want to commend that approach when it comes to Scripture.
- I want to suggest that for most of us, when we study the Bible, there is typically a lot of meat left on the bones, a lot of paste in the tube. I would imagine that most of us, when we get to Paul's concluding remarks in a passage like today's we just kinda gloss over it. We've already moved on at least mentally, we've checked out.
- So I want to encourage us not to do so today. I think there is some good meat here.
- Let's pray for the will and ability to get to it. Prayer: self, others, me.

***Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. (Philippians 4:21)***

- One of the interesting facts about Paul's letters is how they both overlap with and differ from the general pattern of ancient letter writing. There's a lot of similarity, but also some substantial dissimilarity.
- Typically, at the end of a letter, even today, there is some sort of sign off. We might say sincerely, or love, or regards or as Ed always ends his emails with hugs and kisses.
- But in the ancient world, what was typical was to write farewell or good luck or just goodbye. That sounds funny to us. If you ended a text or email with goodbye, you'd seem like a robot, but that was a traditional ending in that culture.
- But Paul changes that up.
- In most of his books, before he wraps things up, he sends some greetings.
- Now, don't move past this too quickly. What's the purpose of a greeting? Well, the word signifies hospitable recognition. The word could also be used to communicate a salutation by means of some sort of sign. Greet one another with a holy kiss for example. Or this same word was used in military contexts for a salute or in contexts of relating to royalty as a greeting by way of prostration.
- And the idea is that you recognize someone. You affirm that they exist and that they matter to you. You say it and show it by your words and some sort of action, hug, kiss, handshake or whatever.
- Think about being mad at someone and ignoring them. Or think about being self-absorbed. In that moment, you're lost in your own world. In order to greet someone properly, we have to get over our grievances, overlook offenses, crucify bitterness, and we need to be looking outward rather than inward.
- And look at the word greet. Its in the plural and the idea is probably that he is writing to a group of people and wants them to greet others on his behalf.
- So what group? Well, think back to the very first verse in the book:

- *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons...* (Philippians 1:1)
- Most likely, Paul is expecting the overseers, the elders, the pastors, to read this letter and to greet others.
- Have you ever talked to a buddy on the phone and said, tell Karen and the kids I said hello. Or tell Dad I love him or something like that?
- Well, here is a precedent for that. That's what Paul is doing. He's most likely telling the elders to tell the rest of the church that he says hello, but more than just hello...remember that the greeting was more formal than that in that context. Give them a hug, give them a kiss, warmly embrace them, truly welcome them, send my regards and love.
- But this particular book is distinguished from other epistles. In many of Paul's other letters he doesn't just give a generic call to greet every saint, but rather he names names.
- For example, in Colossians, he says to greet Nympha and Archippus, in 2 Timothy, he says to greet Prisca and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorous. And in Romans, he singles out over 25 names for greetings!
- What makes this so interesting is, as we've often remarked, Paul has an unusual relationship with the Philippians. This is perhaps the most intimate of all his letters. So its kinda surprising that in the most intimate letter, he is so generic with his greeting and doesn't single out a single person by name, not Lydia or the Philippian jailer or anyone else.
- But if you think about it in the context of the book as a whole, it begins to make sense. After all, there is division in the body. Perhaps naming someone might seem to be taking sides and maybe he doesn't have enough information to do so. He doesn't want to unnecessarily bias the church or offend an innocent party so he just offers up a general greetings rather than risk misunderstanding. He is not showing partiality or favoritism. He is being promiscuous in his greetings!
- Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. That's one of Paul's default favorite titles for Christians. Don't think of saints like in RC theology, as particularly holy Christians, biblically saints are any and all who are positionally sanctified by Christ. The word saint is literally holy ones. All Christians are by definition saints because they are all holy in Christ. We'll come back to that later.
- The primary image of sanctification that we see in Scripture is that it is a positional reality that defines who we already are. We are already holy in Christ, set apart for Christ, consecrated to Christ.
- So when we speak of sanctification, we mean that we are in the process of becoming who we already are. Like a boy growing into manhood, so a believer grows into their identity. We don't believe that boys can become women or women become men and neither do we believe that non-Christians can grow in holiness except by becoming Christians. And once you are a Christian, you are declared to be holy. And the mandate on our lives is that we might become who we already are.
- We are saints, so live like it. We've seen that message over and over in Philippians because it is Paul's theology of transformation.

- Christ is humble. You are in Christ so therefore live like it by dying to self and serving others. Christ is loving. You are in Christ, so therefore live like it by sacrificing yourself for others.
- And this is helpful to remember in the context of calling for greeting every saint. By remembering not only that we are saints, but that so are others, we are more likely to overlook those offenses and slights and to pursue reconciliation and friendship and warmth of affection toward one another. When we have to greet one another warmly, it helps to thaw any iciness we might be feeling. Its hard to stay mad at them when you have to smile at them and give them a hug and tell them you love them.
- So he sends greetings and in those greetings he calls them to greet. But it isn't only greetings from HIM. It is also those who are with him. He writes about the brothers who are with me. This probably isn't a generic reference to all the Christians in Rome or wherever he is imprisoned, but is mostly referring to a close group of Pauline associates such as Timothy or Luke, though we don't really know who exactly was in this group or how large it was.
- And then beyond this band of brothers, there is a more generic group that wants to say hi. We'll see them in vs. 22.

***All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. (Philippians 4:22)***

- Now, it isn't only the group of associates, but a much larger contingent of those who are around Paul. This probably just refers to the larger church in the city in which Paul is imprisoned. We've argued for the idea that Paul is in Rome as that's the general scholarly consensus although not established as certain.
- Regardless, it shows a mutual reciprocal love among the churches. We talked about that a bit last week when we considered the passages showing that not only did the Philippians support Paul, but they begged him for the opportunity to help other churches with financial support.
- Look back at 2 Corinthians 8:4
  - *begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints... (2 Corinthians 8:4)*
- We read about that in Romans 15 as well:
  - *At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. (Romans 15:25-26)*
- I mention that just to warn us as a church against insularity. If you want to know why we pray for other churches regularly, this is it. And I know of at least a couple of other churches that have regularly prayed for us as well. And we are currently trying to come up with some missions opportunities to partner with other churches in the work of the gospel.
- I don't think this text or any other prescribes an exact formula for how churches have to partner with each other, but it should at least encourage us to be aware and appreciative of the labor of others in the kingdom.
- And of all of the people who send greetings, he singles out one group in particular, those of Caesar's household.

- Now, a few things to note here.
- First, who is Caesar? Well, the term Caesar was originally the surname of Julius Caesar, but eventually it was used as a title for the Roman Emperor to show some sort of relationship to the same dynasty.
- As the events of the NT are unfolding, there are various Caesars raised up to lead the Roman Empire. In order, they were Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. Depending on when you date Philippians, the current Caesar as Paul is writing this would have been Claudius or Nero.
- So, apparently, some of Caesar's household are converted.
- Now, the second thing to understand about this is that the ancient biblical concept of household is different from our modern conception. My household just includes my wife and children, but a biblical household was often much larger and could include extended family, in-laws, servants, slaves, and so forth. As Joseph Lightfoot notes:
  - "The 'domus' or 'familia Cæsaris' (represented by the Greek οἰκία Καίσαρος) includes the whole of the imperial household, the meanest slaves as well as the most powerful courtiers." (Joseph Lightfoot)
- So, this does not necessarily mean that someone in Caesar's family was converted within a couple of decades of the resurrection. That's possible, but improbable at this point. That's not what household inherently means.
- It most likely refers to some of the servants or slaves who had some sort of attachment to Caesar's household. After all, for a number of decades, Christianity mostly made headway in the lower classes.
- Or it could simply refer to members of the imperial guard. After all, Paul had already written about them back in chapter 1. Look back at vs. 12-13
  - *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.* (Philippians 1:12-13)
- There Paul mentions that members of the imperial guard have heard the gospel. It is entirely possible that some of them were converted and thus composed the household of Caesar that Paul mentions in chapter 4.
- But another factor that makes identifying this group difficult is that when it comes to the Emperor, his "household" could refer to any in his employ or service whether in Rome or even in Roman provinces.
- I mention that because some have taken this reference to Caesar's household as proving a Roman provenance, that is that Paul is writing from a Roman prison. While I think that is most likely, I don't think this passage helps all that much in making that case because Caesar's household would extend throughout the Empire.
- In other words, what we know is that this group had some sort of connection to the Emperor, but what we don't know was what type. They could have been family members, or officials, or slaves or even guards. They could have been in Rome or some other province. We don't know.
- Regardless of the exact identity of the group, the effect is similar. Whether it is a member of Caesar's family or a slave, the fact still remains that the gospel was taking root. Lives were being changed. The gospel was going forth. That would serve as

encouragement for the Philippians as they shared in Paul's ministry. Remember that language from previous passages, they viewed themselves as co-laborers in the mission.

- And that mission was bearing fruit! Tangible, visible fruit. Even in Caesar's own household.
- A century and a half later, the church father Tertullian could write of Christians:
  - "We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you—cities, fortresses, towns, market-places, the very camp, tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum,—we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods."  
(Tertullian)
- Like a tiny mustard seed that grows into a tree or leaven that leavens a whole loaf, so the gospel eventually permeated the empire. We see a little hint of that growth here in Philippians.
- Let's keep going. Vs. 23.

### ***The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. (Philippians 4:23)***

- I think just about every time I have preached a Pauline epistle, I've made mention of the fact that every single letter begins with some version of the words grace and peace to you and ends with some version of the phrase grace be with you. Notice those prepositions.
- Grace TO you in the beginning. Grace WITH you at the end.
- And I've mentioned that I think that forms an inclusio or bookends such that Paul assumes that the letter itself is a means of grace.
- Grace comes TO us as we read this book and it remains WITH us as we meditate on it, marinate in it, reflect upon it, let it abide in us.
- As Paul writes in Colossians 3
  - *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...* (Colossians 3:16)
- That means our responsibility toward Philippians has only begun. We now have a responsibility to abide here. To dwell in the book and let it dwell in us. The fact that we have finished Philippians doesn't mean that Philippians is finished with us.
- So we have a divine obligation to think about and abide in this word and let it abide in us.
- If you want to be transformed to be more humble, you have to fight for it, train for it. I don't think coming to church a couple of times a month or a quick 5 minute daily devotional is gonna cut it.
- Am I saying that if you just spend more time in prayer and Scripture and you really commit yourself to church and community that your life will be awesome and you'll experience perfect peace and contentment? No, but I am saying that it's pretty presumptuous to expect peace and contentment and humility if you aren't engaging in the very means that God has established to grant those things.
- So Paul writes grace be with you.
- I'm reminded of the way that a Jedi would also say may the force be with you. Well, in Paul's theology grace is the force. May grace be with you.

- Which grace? The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is interesting in that grace comes to us from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in the beginning of the book, but at the end he only mentions Jesus.
- And that fits the rhythm of his other letters. Don't take my word for it, check out the pattern.
  - *The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.* (Romans 16:20)
  - *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.* (1 Corinthians 16:23)
  - *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.* (Galatians 6:18)
  - *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.* (1 Thessalonians 5:28)
- Even in books where all the members of the godhead are named, Jesus is explicitly connected with grace. Look at 2 Corinthians 13:
  - *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* (2 Corinthians 13:14)
- Notice there that of all the things to associate with Jesus, he chooses grace. That doesn't mean that the Father or Spirit aren't gracious, but there is something about Jesus that best corresponds to grace in Paul's thinking.
- All of the members of the godhead have their distinctive roles and responsibilities and there is something distinctive about the Son that makes it fitting to speak of grace as being from and in and through Him.
- I think the reason is because of what we read elsewhere in 2 Corinthians 1:20. Speaking of Jesus, Paul writes:
  - *For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.* (2 Corinthians 1:20)
- Notice those words. All of the promises of God find their Yes in him. I think this points to the doctrine of union with Christ.
- This is one of the most central theological truths that a Christian can understand. In fact, as Robert Reymond says:
  - "Union with Christ is the fountainhead from which flows the Christian's every spiritual blessing..." (Robert Reymond)
- As John Murray writes:
  - "union with Christ is...the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation...It is not simply a phase of the application of redemption; it underlies every aspect of redemption" (John Murray)
- We are blessed in Christ, chosen in Christ, justified in Christ, redeemed in Christ, sanctified in Christ, baptized into Christ, die with Christ, are raised with Christ, believe in Christ, hope in Christ, and so forth.
- That's what it means that all of the promises of God find their yes in Him. Think about in Christ as being like a place. Where are the promises of God? In Christ. So how do we get them? Only in Him.
- As a pastor once said, "God has placed us where His love is most potent...in His Son."
- So that's the grace that Paul blesses us with. Not just any old generic grace, but the real stuff. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- So where do you need grace this morning? Maybe you need grace to endure or forgive the sins of others toward you. If so, then you need to go to Christ.
- Perhaps you need grace in a challenging health crisis? Then go to Christ.
- Maybe you need grace with a difficult family situation. Your marriage is a mess, your child is wayward, your parents have disowned you. Go to Christ.
- Perhaps you need grace in provision of a job or facing a trial at work? Go to Christ.
- Perhaps you need grace in overcoming a pattern of sin? Go to Christ.
- The doctrine of the union of Christ means that there is no grace apart from Christ. If you want grace, you gotta go to Christ.
- But it also means that His grace is sufficient. Nothing is needed that isn't found in Christ.
- There is no grace apart from Christ and nothing is needed that isn't found in Christ.
- So, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.
- Let's pray.