

Privileges

Philippians 1:29-30

We are all used to the idea of privileges. Special privileges. And that is usually a good thing. Privileges are always thought of as helpful and beneficial, a privilege is an advantage that you enjoy. It is something granted to you as a benefit. And that language is used here in our text,
v.29 “For to you it has been granted...”

Paul identifies that which has been granted to the Philippians as a privilege. The word “granted to you” means to give graciously. Coming from God, it means that you are the object of his favor, receiving a gift of his grace, granted by him freely and kindly. We have a lot of such privileges, most especially, the forgiveness of our sins and the restoration of our relationship with God. Reconciliation. Peace with God. An eternal inheritance. The privileges of adoption, sonship. Many, many blessings that can be identified from the Bible.

But Paul’s focus here in our text this afternoon is something a little different. “To you it has been granted,” he writes the Philippians, to suffer for his sake. That’s the focus. And Paul identifies his own suffering freely. And remember the context, with that climactic declaration of,
v.21 “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Paul wishes that Christ would be honored in his body, whether by life or by death. And so, in life, he strives to live his life in a manner worthy of the gospel, not frightened by the opposition or persecution that might come to him. Not frightened by his opponents, his enemies. For he knows that they will be destroyed, even as he is confident of his own salvation.

But, in the meantime, he is in prison! He is suffering greatly, yet the gospel is not hindered. So he rejoices in the midst of it all. And he encourages the Philippians with this idea of the privileges they have received to suffer with him, to suffer for the sake of Christ. That is our focus this afternoon, though let me begin with something of a necessary foundation. Paul mentions it briefly in verse 29. Namely,

I. THE PRIVILEGE OF FAITH.

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So the definition of the privileges which God grants to us as his people begins with the privilege of believing. It is more than, “not only to believe in Him,” but it does begin with that. That you should believe! It has been granted to you that you should believe. The blessing of God has been graciously given to you so that you will believe in Christ.

It is,

A. The gift of faith.

And I want to start with that emphasis today. Faith itself is a gift. Our Confession of Faith puts it this way, “The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts.”

So faith isn’t a work that we perform; it is a gift of God who is at work in us..

Eph. 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”

More descriptively,

1 Cor. 12:3 “Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.”

Faith itself is a gift. Faith itself is a grace, that which is worked in us by the goodness and mercy of God. You and I must exercise faith, of course. You and I do the believing. We are called upon to believe. We are exhorted to believe. We are commanded to believe. And we believe, in obedience to God. We choose to believe that what has said in his word is true. But still, that faith is a gift of God who is at work in us.

We'll see how those two things fit together when we study, Phil. 2:12 "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

Faith is what you do to "work out your own salvation." But still, "it is God who works in you." So what must you do to be saved? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!" That is how the gospel is to be declared. That is what we are to proclaim.

But this is still true, that "no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit." And we read of the effect of the gospel when Paul preached on his first missionary journey.

Acts 13:48 "And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region."

Many believed. Many trusted in Jesus. "And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." Faith is the gift of God, a privilege granted to us by his own sovereign mercy. And, let me be quick to add, all of that is "for the sake of Christ," verse 29. In other words, this privilege of faith, this gift of faith by the working of God in us, is clearly designed for,

B. The glory of Christ.

In other words, even our faith is to be to the praise of his glory.

Eph. 1:4 "...In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved."

Eph. 1:11 "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory."

That's what it is all about. "To the praise of his glory." The greatest good that comes from our faith is not a blessing to us at all, but a cause for praise to the God of grace.

Eph. 1:13 "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

So when you believe, when you respond to the gospel with saving faith, know that you have been granted that privilege so that you might bring honor and glory to the God who saved you, to Jesus himself.

Then, this passage begins to make some sense, that you who believe have also been granted,

II. THE PRIVILEGE OF SUFFERING.

Same context. Same sentence. Same idea. The granting of a privilege. Maybe that's not hard to understand with reference to faith, but what about suffering? How is that a privilege? Look at the words,

v.29

There is much to be said about,

A. Suffering for Christ.

This is not an obscure or minor matter in the Bible, but one that arises over and over again. The privilege of suffering for Christ. A few examples.

Acts 14:21 “When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

Just sort of a matter-of-fact description. “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” And when the Apostles were imprisoned in Jerusalem, only to be released after being beaten and commanded not to speak any further in the name of Jesus, we read this,

Acts 5:41 “Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.”

They rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer! Peter would expound upon that idea later when he wrote,

1 Peter 4:12 “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a

Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.”

That's what it means to suffer for Christ. It is a means of glorifying God, enduring suffering, even with a measure of rejoicing, because “the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.” Paul would even express a desire for such suffering, expressing this desire,

Phil. 3:10 “...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

Beloved, that's the privilege. The privilege of suffering.

B. Suffering as privilege.

The privilege of fellowship! Even the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.

Paul would even go this far in expressing it,

Col. 1:24 “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, 25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, 26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.”

This is the joy, for Paul, that in suffering, he was fulfilling the call of the ministry of the gospel. Suffering, his suffering, would be the means by which the gospel would be made known to the Gentiles. And in that context, he says that he “fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.” Not that Jesus' sufferings were incomplete or inadequate, but that Paul would

continue the ministry of Christ as an apostle, for the sake of the church. He would suffer with Christ and for Christ, as the continuing of the ministry of Christ for the sake of the church of Christ.

In terms of the atonement, in terms of the payment of justice to the wrath of God, paying the penalty for our sins, Jesus' suffering unto death was a once-for-all event. Jesus' suffering was fully and completely sufficient to save us from our sins. But still, in the proclamation of that gospel throughout this age, when we suffer, we, too, can say, "in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church."

That is our privilege! And it is a privilege that will ultimately bring us into glory.

Rom. 8:16 "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

Another personal testimony from Paul, much later in his life, 2 Tim. 2:8 "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, 9 for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! 10 Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. 11 The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him."

People of God, the way to heaven is the path of suffering on earth. To path to eternal glory is charted by those who endure suffering. These are Jesus' own words to his disciples,

Mat. 16:24 "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

More personally,

John 15:18 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

John 16:33 "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Clearly, Jesus is talking about suffering even unto death. Not just as a spiritual symbol of our discipleship and commitment to him, but physically. Literally. And the privilege is in the purpose and the outcome of that suffering. Jesus uses the illustration of a woman in labor.

John 16:20 "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. 21 When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 22 So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."

Here, perhaps, is the best conclusion for all of this, this sense

of privilege and hope regarding the outcome of our suffering.

Rom. 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

So we groan under the weight and burden of suffering. Yet, that is our privilege! Indeed, as we studied in the Bible study Wednesday night,

Mat. 5:10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Blessed are you when you are granted the privilege of sharing in Jesus’ suffering!

1 Peter 3:14 “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. 18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.”

Again, the pastoral conclusion of this matter,

1 Peter 4:12 “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”

v.29 “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.”

There is another privilege that goes along with this, as Paul so clearly identifies in,

v.30

III. THE PRIVILEGE OF FELLOWSHIP.

Notice, however, how Paul defines that fellowship. “...having the same conflict which you saw in me...” The same conflict. It is a conflict, a struggle. A battle. A war.

But Paul is not emphasizing merely the outward form of that war. He is not drawing our attention to something that is merely outward and external in nature. The battle is not against flesh and blood! Rather, it is...

A. A spiritual conflict.

Eph. 6:12 “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic

powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

So the goal is not simply to be a martyr. The goal is not simply to endure hardship as a Stoic, or in some earthly and physical exercise of self-discipline. The whole context of physical suffering is, without question, the realm of spiritual life vitality. Enduring suffering is a deeply spiritual matter, a deeply significant matter of your heart and soul. That’s why the sufferings of your body become so relatively unimportant.

There is war going on throughout this age. And as Christians, we are at war “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

And here is how that cosmic conflict comes face to face with the daily experiences of our own spiritual lives.

1 Peter 4:1 “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.”

God is, indeed, at work in us, in the midst of any suffering we may endure. God is at work, here and now, conforming us to the image of Jesus even as we suffer with Jesus. We groan, to be sure, but we groan knowing that “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” We groan knowing the spiritual realities Paul so well expresses in,

Rom. 5:3 “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope

does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

So this sermon is not a call to merely endure suffering, to grin and bear it. No, it is a call to be engaged in the great spiritual battle of your life, in which God is making you more and more like Jesus. And this is what we know about Jesus,

Heb. 2:10 “For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers.”

Jesus was made perfect through suffering.

Heb. 5:8 “Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. 9 And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.”

Surely it was a spiritual conflict for Jesus, a conflict he won. He was raised from the dead! His suffering was ended, with his own great and final triumph. And the privilege we have is fellowship with him in that spiritual conflict, that we might be raised with him as well.

In that process, we also enjoy the privilege of fellowship in,

B. Suffering together.

So Paul tells the Philippians that they will enjoy fellowship with him! They will be united together in their suffering.

v.30

Suffering is a corporate blessing as well, a cause for unity and fellowship among God’s people. So don’t be surprised. Don’t be unsettled. Don’t be shaken. Don’t be discouraged, even in the

groaning of earthly suffering. That experience is a privilege which has been granted to you for the sake of Christ.

1 Peter 2:21 “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.”

I’ll end with Jesus’ own words,

John 16:33 “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”