

Yours Truly
Philippians 4:14-23

As we come to the end of our study in Philippians this afternoon, it is good to remember what this whole book is about. It is a thank-you letter. The Philippians had sent Paul a gift, a monetary gift. It was delivered personally by Epaphroditus, who got sick and almost died delivering the letter to Paul in prison in Rome. Paul is sending him back to Philippi with this letter of thanksgiving.

Writing thank-you notes is a good habit. There is great value in saying, “Thank you.” That is our subject today.

Paul had a very close relationship with this particular church, having been used by God to see the church begun maybe ten years earlier. He was the first missionary. The Philippians then supported him by sending him money, first as he left Macedonia, and then more than once in Thessalonica.

v.15-16

And, according to his accounts in 2 Corinthians 11, it seems that these same folks supported Paul while he was in Corinth. Evidently, then, they lost contact with Paul for several years, and when they heard he was in a Roman prison, again they took advantage of the opportunity to send him money. That’s what he refers to in,

v.10

Paul has already made reference to this in,
2:25-30

And now, all that is left at the end of the letter, is to say “thank you.” I will start with the very end, and then move backwards, so

if you are following my outline, I’ll skip to the third point first. Paul ends this letter with a benediction. He ends by,

I. GIVING BLESSINGS.

Personal blessings. To individual people.

v.21

This is,

A. The blessing of personal Christian fellowship.

And there is such a need for this today. I don’t think that Paul meant that generically as we most often do when we say things like, “Say hi to everyone for me.” Much more personal intimacy seems to be involved. “Greet EVERY saint.” And he offers the greeting with the definite implication that the others with Paul are writing this letter with him. “The brethren who are with me greet you.”

And Paul is able to specify some, those closest to him, in,
v.22

Then he writes of,

B. The blessings of God’s grace.

v.23

What a marvelous ending to a letter. We just end our letters by saying, “Yours truly.” Paul includes so much more. You ought to try to get in this habit when you write letters, to write, especially in conclusion, your wishes, your prayers, for God’s blessings upon the ones to whom you write.

It is the ending we use to every worship service I conduct--a benediction. A pronouncement of God’s grace upon his people. And I speak those pronouncements with some authority given to

me by the laying on of hands by the elders, the authority to speak for God. And when I am so bold as to claim to do that, you can be sure that I will read Scripture.

You need to understand the benediction in that way, because it is not a prayer. And really, you should bow your head and close your eyes, which might be very appropriate as you pray. But instead, lift your eyes up, to heaven, as it were. And receive the benediction.

That is the reason I raise my hands, not out of tradition, but out of the sense of official proclamation. And you might even wish to raise your hands with palms upward, symbolizing your reception of the great benediction of God's blessing.

Paul writes such a blessing here. And he is also,

II. GIVING THANKS TO GOD'S PEOPLE.

It is such an encouraging report, with no empty flattery but genuine appreciation. His words are deeply affectionate.

v.15 "...no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only."

There is a deep bond forged between brothers in the Lord, for their lives had been joined together. Thus,

A. Paul gives thanks for willing fellowship.

Fellowship means that we share our lives together, in common with one another. And the church must be marked by that sort of thing. Not just coming to meet together on occasion, even every week. There is so much more to this relationship, and there must be so much more to our relationship.

Notice how Paul describes it. "You shared in my distress."

That's really what makes strong bonds of affection between people. And failing to do so, failing to share in someone's distress, almost always brings some form of alienation. I have known of many people, both in churches I pastored and in other churches, who saw fit to transfer churches because of that unwillingness. They went through a particular form of distress, and no one shared it with them.

That is true of pastors, too. And missionaries. Paul was so thankful for that! I am thankful to so many of you for being so willing to share in some of the distresses I have had even in this past year. Lenny's visit to see us in the hospital when Ruth got sick last March comes to mind immediately, though there are many others. It's those sorts of things that establish a bond between people. A bond that produces a thankful spirit.

Simple, compassionate, personal involvement. And practical. At times, times of necessity, that means money!

v.16 "You sent aid once and again for my necessities."

I will never forget the check I received from the deacons' fund of this church, when I was laid off from my temporary job in engineering sales. I didn't ask for it, and I was far from starving, but I had lost my job and the money was very helpful, and appreciated. And the personal connection with this church had just begun, and that was before there was any thought that I would come for six months as interim pastor as stay for another 5 years. That personal connection was of far greater worth than the dollar amount on the check. I incurred a debt of gratitude and love that I am glad to seek to repay.

But Paul brings out something here about giving, that most of you have probably already learned. And that is that the giver as well as the receiver is blessed. And so,

B. Paul gives thanks for the blessings of generosity.

Blessings for the giver.

v.17

The fruit, the profit, is credited to the giver. That is, of course, a distinctly spiritual concept. It is not at all consistent with sound, financial principles offered by the world. Worldly profit is measured only in dollars and sense, but the profit I am speaking about is not related to such ultimately unimportant things.

In other words, generosity with money will earn eternal rewards.

1 Tim. 6:17 "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

Also, speaking about money, Paul teaches this,

2 Cor. 9:6 "But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. 9 As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever." 10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, 11 while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. 12 For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is

abounding through many thanksgivings to God, 13 while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, 14 and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. 15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

That's how it is supposed to work! And Paul is giving thanks to God because, in his circumstances, it is working that way! Therefore, he is,

III. GIVING PRAISE TO GOD FOR HIS PEOPLE.

We aren't supposed to be so self-absorbed and so incur that we give with the motive to gain something for ourselves. We are not to give with strings attached, as if we are giving just to obtain that approval and appreciation from others. The praise is really for God. When you give with generosity, the praise that you seek must be praise directed at God.

Paul offers such praise.

v.20

That doxology is the proper context for this whole text, really this whole book. He is not flattering the Philippians for their good works. He is not exalting them. He is not merely fulfilling a duty, thinking that if he didn't send a thank you note they might not send him any more money.

And, by the way, don't ever catch yourself doing that, giving something with the expectation of an expression of thanks. You should get it, but that is the receiver's responsibility, not the giver's. And a gift with strings attached, is really no GIFT at all. So give simply for the sake of generosity.

And whatever praise might come, let it be directed to God!

I know I've said it before, but that is the best way to receive praise or thanksgiving from others, too. Let the praise deflect back upon God. If someone thanks you for something you've done, accept the complement and give credit to God's mercy and grace in your life.

And if you find yourself on the receiving end of a gift, needing to give thanks, ultimately, let your thanksgiving to people really be a thanksgiving to God for people. Let your thank you note be a doxology!

v.20

Specifically,

A. Paul gives praise that he has abundant provisions.

v.18

And notice how genuinely, how sweetly he directs the praise to God. He calls this gift of money which supplied his needs a "sweet-smelling aroma." He calls the gift "an acceptable sacrifice." He declares it to be "well pleasing to God."

Now those are all very significant phrases, directly taken from the OT regulations regarding animal sacrifices. The sweet-smelling sacrifices were the ones which we can say God enjoyed.

Some of the sacrifices were not sweet-smelling. Do you know which ones? The sin-offerings, for example. And the guilt offerings. The offerings that were made necessary by the wrath and justice of God were not ones in which he took delight or pleasure. His glory demanded them, the perfection of his justice required that the shedding of blood be the only appropriate means for the forgiveness of sins. But there was no delight in it.

No soothing fragrance, no sweet-smelling aroma. And they were offered outside the camp.

But other offerings are received with pleasure, as a sweet-smelling fragrance of incense. Offerings and sacrifices such as the burnt offering, which demonstrated the whole and complete sacrifice and devotion of a person to God. Also the peace offering, and the grain offerings.

And God made such a specific point of defining which sacrifices were "acceptable" and which were not. In simplest terms, what was acceptable to God were sacrifices that represented the very best of what you have to offer.

Lev. 22:17 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 18 "Speak to Aaron and his sons, and to all the children of Israel, and say to them: `Whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers in Israel, who offers his sacrifice for any of his vows or for any of his freewill offerings, which they offer to the LORD as a burnt offering-- 19 `you shall offer of your own free will a male without blemish from the cattle, from the sheep, or from the goats. 20 `Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it shall not be acceptable on your behalf. 21 `And whoever offers a sacrifice of a peace offering to the LORD, to fulfill his vow, or a freewill offering from the cattle or the sheep, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it. 22 `Those that are blind or broken or maimed, or have an ulcer or eczema or scabs, you shall not offer to the LORD, nor make an offering by fire of them on the altar to the LORD. 23 `Either a bull or a lamb that has any limb too long or too short you may offer as a freewill offering, but for a vow it shall not be accepted. 24 `You shall not offer to the LORD what is bruised or crushed, or torn or cut; nor shall you make any offering of them in your land. 25 `Nor from a foreigner's hand shall you offer any of these as the bread of your God, because their

corruption is in them, and defects are in them. They shall not be accepted on your behalf.”

Acceptable sacrifices had to be “without a defect.” It had to be your best. And I should note that that is precisely the measure by which God evaluates your giving. Is it your best? The dollar amount is not what matters in God’s economy, for the widow’s mite we are told, was of far greater value and brought far greater pleasure to God than the much greater amounts of money given from a surplus. Give all that you have. That is what is well-pleasing to God.

That is precisely what brought such glory to God the father in the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus’ death was certainly a sacrifice for sin, and satisfied all the elements of those non-sweet smelling sacrifices necessary in the OT for the atonement for sins. God’s justice and wrath required the shedding of blood.

But Jesus’ sacrifice was also sweet smelling.

Eph. 5:1 “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.”

It is the example which we are exhorted to imitate in the great words of,

Rom. 12:1 “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable [or acceptable] service.”

Let me bring all of that back to Philippians 4. When you give generously, with pure motives, then God is glorified and honored. And he receives the praise.

And if you are the recipients of such gifts, then you ought to express that praise to God.

But Paul does something even more.

B. He gives praise that the people have abundant provisions.

Paul, the recipient who had been in need, praises God for blessing the giver of the gifts he received. With such profound godliness and spiritual-mindedness, Paul gives God praise as he utters what one commentator calls the greatest promise in the entire Bible. That is quite a claim. The promise is found in, v.19

There are a number of popular ways to express that glorious promise. For example, it is true to say that you simply cannot outgive God. But it takes a great measure of faith to believe that, because to find that out, you have to give a lot! To find out that God will supply all your need according to his riches in glory means that you have to put yourself in need. The more you give, therefore, the more need you have. And the more need you have, the more clearly you will see this promised fulfilled.

Let me offer a couple of wise and practical suggestions for your own giving, that will enable you to receive the blessings of these great promises. First, give to God the first fruits. Give to him the first portion, the best portion. The tithe, and I believe that is the minimum baseline standard for generosity, that ten percent must be the first ten percent. Then figure out how to live, and budget your money with the 90% that is left over. And every person I have known who tithed would testify that the 90% which remains after the tithe is given goes much farther and lasts much longer than the full 100% did before they tithed.

Whether you earn minimum wage or on a fixed and limited

income, or whether you are in the prime of your wage earning life and have a very high salary, the principle is the same. Give to the Lord first.

And he will supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

That is true for us as a church, too. I have always been thankful for that commitment here. We don't give to missions and other needs outside of the church after all the other bills are paid. We give first. Right up front in the budget. And that is how it should be. So my job here is only to reinforce that idea, and I will gladly do so! And in that regard, I should say out of great conviction that the visible church ought to be supported by the free and generous giving of her people, not through fund-raising gimmicks and endless activities designed to make money. So we have no church bazaars. And any spaghetti suppers we have will be for fellowship, not budgetary supplements!

God says,

Mal. 3:10 "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it."

Indeed, v.19

So give to the Lord first. And give to the Lord the best. That goes beyond money. How about time and energy. Give to the Lord your best hours, your best efforts, your best. Not what is leftover when all your other responsibilities are met. But give to the Lord and to his work your very best!

With that in mind, I will almost never try to persuade a person to take on a particular job within the church. I might ask or invite, and sometimes, I might ask personally. But I will never begin to coerce. I will never beg. Because if I do, then what you might give won't be your best! And we are better off not getting something done than to have a sacrifice offered that is not acceptable to God.

But I will certainly challenge you to give your best. I will challenge you to give your best time--the FIRST day of the week. The whole day. Along with the first of your money. I will certainly challenge you to make sacrifices, ultimately the living sacrifice of your bodies, the sweet-smelling sacrifice of your whole life.

And when you make those sacrifices, I will praise God for supplying all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.