A “hello” filled with meaning

MONDAY 9.7.20  Philippians 1:1-2

Did You Know?

“Philippi, in northern Greece, was the first place in Europe that heard the news that there was a new king, namely the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth.” *

(We encourage you to read all of Philippians 1 each day this week. As you do today, focus on verses 1-2, printed below)

1 From Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus.
To all those in Philippi who are God's people in Christ Jesus, along with your supervisors [Or overseers, bishops] and servants [Or deacons].
2 May the grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

For the next four weeks, in Pastor Hamilton’s sermons and the GPS we will study the apostle Paul’s letter to the Christian community in Philippi. You can read in Acts 16:12-40 about Paul and his young co-worker Silas starting the Philippian Christian community, with a major prison episode. We often skim over an opening like today’s (“blah, blah, blah”), but in fact the apostle filled these short verses with deep meaning.

• Paul called himself and Timothy (likely his scribe for this letter, as Paul was in prison—Philippians 1:13) “slaves (doulos) of Christ Jesus.” Some English versions use “servant,” but scholar William Barclay was clear: “doulos is more than servant, it is slave. A servant is free to come and go; but a slave is his master’s possession forever….As the Latin tag has it: Illi servire est regnare, to be his slave is to be a king.” * Are you willing to not just come and go in serving Christ, but to be your divine master’s possession forever?

• He greeted his readers as “saints” (hagioi). For Paul, that didn’t mean a few extra-holy people: “All believers are ‘saints’ through their spiritual union with Christ.” ** “Grace and peace” wasn’t hollow church talk. It linked grace (charis), the Greek wish for a lovely life, with peace (eirene, Greek for the Hebrew shalom), the Jewish wish for total well-being, and said only God gives us those great qualities in full.

Even in a pandemic, what most helps you live in God’s grace and peace?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, ambition for the right thing is good. Paul’s words challenge me to be ambitious for the high honor of being your slave. Reshape my heart around that desire, I pray. Amen.

“A prayer full of joy”
TUESDAY 9.8.20  Philippians 1:3-8
(We encourage you to read all of Philippians 1 each day this week. As you do today, focus on verses 3-8, printed below)

3 I thank my God every time I mention you in my prayers. 4 I’m thankful for all of you every time I pray, and it’s always a prayer full of joy. 5 I’m glad because of the way you have been my partners in the ministry of the gospel from the time you first believed it until now. 6 I'm sure about this: the one who started a good work in you will stay with you to complete the job by the day of Christ Jesus. 7 I have good reason to think this way about all of you because I keep you in my heart. You are all my partners in God’s grace, both during my time in prison and in the defense and support of the gospel. 8 God is my witness that I feel affection for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.

The start of Paul’s letter to the Philippians sounds more like a personal letter to a friend than a formal document. Paul did not hold back—he showed great affection for this group of Jesus followers. Paul encouraged, affirmed, and connected with them as he expressed deep gratitude for their support, both prayers and financial offerings. The Philippian Christians were partners in ministry, invested in Paul’s mission, his teachings, and his success in bringing people into relationship with Christ.

- Paul was thankful for the church members in Philippi and he told them why. He recognized, though, that their generosity and support was a result of God’s impact on their lives, so he thanked God as well as the people through whom God worked. When you pray, for whom do you thank God? For what do you thank God?
- When Paul thanked the Philippians for being “partners” in his ministry, we know that he was not manipulating them to give more money so he could buy expensive clothing, prestigious real estate or a yacht to cruise the Mediterranean. But his ministry, like many forms of ministry today, couldn’t happen without financial support. Do you support one or more identifiable ministries in the church or in the world? Would you think of yourself as a partner in the ministry’s work?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to be your partner in ministry, always expressing joy and thanksgiving for the support I experience. Give me opportunities to be grateful and generous with your children. Amen.

A prayer for the fruit that really matters
WEDNESDAY 9.9.20  Philippians 1:9-11
(We encourage you to read all of Philippians 1 each day this week. As you do today, focus on verses 9-11, printed below)

9 This is my prayer: that your love might become even more and more rich with knowledge and all kinds of insight. 10 I pray this so that you will be able to decide what really matters and so you will be sincere and blameless on the day of Christ. 11 I pray that you will then be filled with the fruit of righteousness, which comes from Jesus Christ, in order to give glory and praise to God.

In yesterday’s reading Paul told the Philippians that he prayed for them. In today’s reading he outlined what he prayed for them. He prayed that their love might keep deepening, enriched by growing knowledge and insight into God’s purposes. That, he said, would empower them to discern “what really matters.” And living with that kind of insight-fueled discernment would fill their lives with “the fruit of righteousness” in ways that honored God.

- We don’t always connect “love” with “knowledge” and “insight.” Paul did: “We think of [love] as having to do with emotion and affection, not with knowledge and wisdom. For Paul they are all bound up together:
what we call the 'heart' and what we call the 'head' were not separated." * When have you found learning more about God’s saving mission in the world causing your love for Jesus to grow “even more and more rich”? 

- Paul’s prayer for love led to his prayer for the “fruit of righteousness.” “‘Love’ is an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), enabling all other spiritual virtues to be exercised properly (1Co 13:1–3). Without it no Christian is spiritually complete (Col 3:14).…Paul desires that when his readers stand before Christ, their lives will have been filled with….the spiritual fruit that comes from Jesus Christ, produced in them by the Holy Spirit.” Have you seen Spirit-produced love grow other spiritual fruit in your life and the lives of others you know?

** Prayer: ** Lord Jesus, I want to be spiritually complete. I want a life filled with the spiritual fruit you wish to grow in me. Thank you that ultimately Paul’s prayer was for me as well as for his first-century friends. Amen.


**When Christ is proclaimed, “I’m glad”**

**THURSDAY 9.10.20 Philippians 1:12-18**

(We encourage you to read all of Philippians 1 each day this week. As you do today, focus on verses 12-18, printed below)

12 Brothers and sisters, I want you to know that the things that have happened to me have actually advanced the gospel. 13 The whole Praetorian Guard and everyone else knows that I’m in prison for Christ. 14 Most of the brothers and sisters have had more confidence through the Lord to speak the word boldly and bravely because of my jail time. 15 Some certainly preach Christ with jealous and competitive motives, but others preach with good motives. 16 They are motivated by love, because they know that I’m put here to give a defense of the gospel; 17 the others preach Christ because of their selfish ambition. They are insincere, hoping to cause me more pain while I’m in prison.

18 What do I think about this? Just this: since Christ is proclaimed in every possible way, whether from dishonest or true motives, I’m glad and I’ll continue to be glad.

“Really? Some preached Christ to cause Paul more pain in prison?” (cf. 2 Corinthians 10:10) Scholar William Barclay said, “Others were moved by what Paul calls *eritheia*….which originally simply meant working for pay. But the man who works solely for pay…is out solely to benefit himself….there were those who preached the harder now that Paul was in prison, for his imprisonment seemed to present them with a heaven-sent opportunity to advance their own influence and prestige and lessen his.” *

- Paul said plainly he was in prison (verse 13). We might think a traveling preacher like Paul would say, “I can’t possibly continue my work in prison.” But not him—“the things that have happened to me have actually advanced the gospel”! In effect, “I get to preach to all these Roman soldiers. They might never listen to me otherwise.” Can you, like Paul, find joy and opportunity in events that at first may seem cause only for despair or frustration?

- Then Paul said some people preaching Christ had “jealous and competitive motives.” Surely he’d complain about that, urge the church to stop them? Scholar N. T. Wright said, “Paul’s reaction is to celebrate. That’s fine by me, he says. As long as people are going around saying that Jesus is the world’s true Lord, I shall be happy.” ** Paul was far less worried about his prestige than about God’s mission in the world. How close are you to his attitude? How can you grow toward that?
Prayer: Lord Jesus, I like being looked up to and treated with dignity. That’s not bad, but Paul’s words remind me that how I’m treated is less important than seeing your message shared. Grow that attitude in me. Amen.


No bad outcome, live or die

FRIDAY 9.11.20  Philippians 1:19-26
(We encourage you to read all of Philippians 1 each day this week. As you do today, focus on verses 19-26, printed below)

19 I’m glad because I know that this will result in my release through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. 20 It is my expectation and hope that I won’t be put to shame in anything. Rather, I hope with daring courage that Christ’s greatness will be seen in my body, now as always, whether I live or die. 21 Because for me, living serves Christ and dying is even better. 22 If I continue to live in this world, I get results from my work. 23 But I don’t know what I prefer. I’m torn between the two because I want to leave this life and be with Christ, which is far better. 24 However, it’s more important for me to stay in this world for your sake. 25 I’m sure of this: I will stay alive and remain with all of you to help your progress and the joy of your faith, 26 and to increase your pride in Christ Jesus through my presence when I visit you again.

Paul didn’t spell out the specifics of his imprisonment but made clear that he might be executed. In the Roman Empire, any known Christian faced that threat. Paul clearly was not going to downplay his faith to avoid legal problems (cf. e.g. Acts 26:6-25). Faced with uncertainty, Paul again (remarkably) said, “I’m glad.” In his mind, neither release nor execution had a bad outcome—he either got to keep working for Christ, or he got to be with Christ.

- We need to understand Paul’s phrase “dying is better.” “This isn’t a ‘death-wish’…terminally depressed, and longing to get out of this life….Paul, this letter shows, is full of life and energy and quite ready to get back to work the minute they let him out of prison. But Paul is also a man in love – with the king, the Messiah, the Jesus who, as he says in Galatians 2.20, ‘loved me and gave himself for me’.” * How can you joyfully stay both ready to work for Jesus here, and ready to be with Jesus when that time comes?

- “There is a word-play in the Greek….The word for ["to stay alive"] is menein; and that for ["remain …to help"] is paramenein….menein simply means to remain with; but paramenein (para is the Greek for beside) means to wait beside a person ever ready to help.” ** In short, “Paul chooses to continue living for the good of the Philippians.” *** For which people and purposes do you most choose to continue living as long as possible?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for all that is good in my life today. And thank you for the promise that after this something better—being fully with you—awaits. In you, I cannot lose! Amen.


“Live in a manner worthy of Christ’s gospel”
(We encourage you to read all of Philippians 1 each day this week. As you do today, focus on verses 27-30, printed below)

27 Most important, live together in a manner worthy of Christ’s gospel. Do this, whether I come and see you or I’m absent and hear about you. Do this so that you stand firm, united in one spirit and mind as you struggle together to remain faithful to the gospel. 28 That way, you won’t be afraid of anything your enemies do. Your faithfulness and courage are a sign of their coming destruction and your salvation, which is from God. 29 God has generously granted you the privilege, not only of believing in Christ but also of suffering for Christ’s sake. 30 You are having the same struggle that you saw me face and now hear that I’m still facing.

Paul had said he might live and be freed or die as a criminal in the eyes of Rome. His fate should not alter the Philippians’ way of life as Christ-followers. They needed to “live together in a manner worthy of Christ’s gospel,” to “stand firm, united in one spirit and mind.” Again, the Greek takes us deeper into Paul’s message: “The phrase ‘live together’ is drawn from a noun that means ‘citizen.’ Paul calls them to live as citizens of Christ’s realm rather than as Roman citizens.” * This mattered in Philippi, a Roman colony city in Macedonia, many of whose people proudly upheld their status as Roman citizens even though they were not in Rome. It may have specific value in this heated election year. Many, though not all, GPS readers are United States citizens, but Paul reminded his readers (and us) that our ultimate loyalty is to Christ’s realm, not any earthly kingdom. Whatever comes, we can face life with faithfulness and courage as citizens loyal to Jesus, our true king.

- Spend some moments pondering the call to “live together in a manner worthy of Christ’s gospel.” If someone asked you “What is the gospel?” do you know how you would answer? (If you’d be stumped, take a look at a passage we’ll study in a couple of weeks—Philippians 3:8-11.) What does it mean for you to live in a manner worthy of that life-changing, world-changing message? In what ways is that a bigger challenge than just giving up a few bad habits? How do some of your priorities, choices and activities look different when you think of yourself as a “citizen of Christ’s realm” rather than as a “church goer”? Have you accepted, or are you ready to accept, that challenge?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you gave your all to open the doors of your kingdom for even a struggler like me. I have a lot to learn and grow in, but I want to be a citizen of your kingdom. Count me in! Amen.


**Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer Prayers of peace and comfort for:**
Bob Lauber and family following the death of Brenda Lauber (wife), 12/27/2019
Shannon Coats and family following the death of Rosalie Coats (mother), 8/14/2020
Cathy Lucas and family following the death of Joseph John Borbeck (father), 8/16/2020
Corrine Halsey and family following the death of Alice Mattson (mother), 8/26/2020
Jeff Imlay and family following the death of Sandi Imlay (mother), 8/27/2020
Christine Larsen and family following the death of Ella Larsen (mother), 8/27/2020
Cindy Weston and family following the death of Bob Leeper (father), 8/29/2020
Pamela Fredrickson and family following the death of Catherine Hodges (mother), 8/30/2020
Michelle Jones and family following the death of Rodney "Rod" Jones (husband), 8/30/2020
Mike Summers and family following the death of Cynda Summers (wife), 8/30/2020
Patrick McCarthy and family following the death of Maureen Snell (sister), 8/31/2020