

Philippians 1.1-2 Sermon / COB / 07.24.16

Introduction

- † **[1: river]** Suppose I were to retire. . . you notice I keep bringing that up? Everyone needs a fantasy.
- Suppose I were to retire, to live on the beach while I write my book; and suppose I wrote a letter to one of you from the beach. Think of how it would likely begin. “Dear Jeremy . . . I see it is hot and humid up there! People always say Florida is too hot and humid, but here I sit enjoying ocean breezes. I hope you are getting some fair winds among the corn fields; well, maybe not when it is time for the farmers to spread the manure, but otherwise. I miss watching the different crops mature, but I have to say it is very relaxing to live by the ocean, feel the sand between my toes, and hear the gulls with their cries.”
 - Not much information there, right? Nothing important, anyway. We tend to write social letters, and even if we have some point to make or some encouragement to give, we usually work up to it slowly. Paul had a very different approach. He packed so much important information into his opening greeting, that I made a sermon out of it!
- † **[2: timeline]** Before we begin, let’s remind ourselves of what is going on, as we learned last week.
- On his second big missionary tour, Paul and his team, which included Timothy, founded the church at Philippi, in northeastern Macedonia, in what is now Greece. That was about the year AD50. They revisited the church on Paul’s third big missionary tour, about five years later. Now, another five or seven years later, Paul is in prison in Rome, and he has been in prison, in Caesarea or Rome, for several years. No amount of prayer seems to free him.
 - Meanwhile, the Philippian believers are experiencing some persecution in their town, apparently some violence, social pressure, and maybe imprisonment of their own. Again, the more they pray, the worse things seem to get. All this has them worried: is God angry with them and with Paul? have they done something wrong?
 - **[3: situation]** Into this setting come some ethnic Jews who believe in Jesus as the Messiah – so they call themselves Christians – but they have some wrong ideas about the gospel. People like this have been stirring up trouble in the churches for over a decade, since before the Philippian church even began. Now they are in Philippi, arguing that their fellow Jew, Paul, gave the Philippians the wrong gospel and thus wrong theology, which they say is proven by God’s abandonment of Paul to prison and the Philippians to persecution. They say if the Philippians start to earn their righteousness by following the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament Jewish scriptures, then God will be happy with them and things will improve.
 - **[4: response]** So suppose you are Paul, stuck in jail, and Timothy, his loyal sidekick. What do you do? One thing they will do is send back to the Philippian church one of their spiritual leaders who had come to Rome to help Paul. The authors will count on this man, named Epaphroditus, to help set things straight. With Epaphroditus, Paul and Timothy will send this letter, to encourage the Philippians to stand firm, in unity, for the true gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - Let’s pray and then we will start reading the letter.

Exposition

† **[5: 1.1-2]** We are in Philippians 1.1, if you want to open your Bible. I will be using the New English Translation, which is the same as our pew Bibles. I also will have the verses up here on the screen.

Philippians 1.1-2 NET: From Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

† Sometimes you can tell what an author is emphasizing by what he repeats. What do you see here three times?

- Christ Jesus. The authors use this title to emphasize not only “who” is important – that is, Jesus! – but that they know Jesus as the Christ; in other words, they know Jesus as the Messiah-savior [or Christ-savior] whom God long promised the Jewish prophets would come. This is foundational theology for this letter: Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the savior.
- **[6: slaves/saints]** Also foundational is that Christ Jesus is the one who defines all the rest of us. He defines Paul and Timothy: they are his slaves. He defines all believers, who are “saints” in him. He along with God the Father is the source of grace and peace.
- Don’t ever ignore the openings of the New Testament epistles: they are not fluffy and irrelevant, rather they are packed with theological information.

† What do you see first in this letter? It says, “From Paul and Timothy.” **[7: authors]** It was the custom in Greco-Roman letters to identify the authors right up front, rather than signing the letter at the end. Makes sense, right? This is important information for the readers as they read, they need this up front, not at the end. In fact, if I get a long letter, I first flip to the end to see who signed it, before I read it.

- This letter has two human authors, Paul and Timothy. Most of the letter is written in first person singular, representing Paul as the author, but at the start he identifies Timothy as his coauthor, probably because the readers knew and respected Timothy.
- Paul had met Timothy on his second missionary journey, and asked him to join his team, not long before they founded the church in Philippi. We know from other New Testament books that Paul mentored Timothy, and Timothy remained a loyal partner in Paul’s gospel ministry.

† **[8: slaves]** Do you think it is strange that they would identify themselves as slaves?

- Roman slavery was not as awful as the racial slavery in American history; in a Roman community like Philippi, some slaves were menial, but others had positions of great responsibility. Still, all slaves lacked freedom and were subservient to their masters. This made the position of a slave humiliating. So why would Paul and Timothy call themselves slaves, why would they admit it publicly, why would they do so here, when identifying themselves in this letter?
- We will see later in the letter that they used this term again in a very important way, which will add meaning to this self-identification.
- For now it is enough to know it was important to the authors that their readers would understand that they saw themselves as Christ’s slaves; that they were willing to do anything, to give anything, to give up anything, to suffer anything for Christ and his gospel mission.

- In some letters, Paul identified himself up front as an apostle with authority from Christ, as a missionary appointed by Christ; but in this letter the most important thing he wants to convey is that he is a slave of Christ. That's information to keep in mind.
- † After we learn who the authors are and how they identify themselves as slaves of Christ, what do we next read? **[9: readers]** The next thing you stick in a Greco-Roman letter is to whom you are writing, so we learn who the intended original readers were.
- Paul and Timothy were writing to the believers of Philippi. Not many Jews lived in the city, so the church was mostly Gentile. Most of the people were the families of former Roman soldiers.
 - As I mentioned earlier, Paul and Timothy were well known to the Philippian church, having founded the church there about a decade earlier [Acts 16]. Paul and Timothy were heroes to this church. They led the original church members to saving faith in Christ; they established the doctrine taught in the church; they taught, shepherded, and mentored those who were now teaching, shepherding, and mentoring everyone else; and they had kept in touch through visits, through sending emissaries to help with the ministry, and perhaps by writing other letters.
- † I say the readers were believers, but what word do you see the authors use here to describe their readers? "Saints!" **[10: saints]** The Greek word is ἅγιος, which almost every major English translation renders as "saint."
- Anybody have an NIV or NLT open to our verse? What does it say there? "God's holy people." The Greek term ἅγιος literally means "holy one." The Latin translation of ἅγιος is "sanctus," from which we get the English term "saint." A saint is a holy person.
 - Why would the authors call the people in the Philippian church "holy ones" or "saints"? To be holy is to be pure and separated out for God's purposes. Do you feel 100% pure today?
 - Ah, but you have been separated out for God's purposes if you are a believer. Part of salvation is what we call positional sanctification: when God saves you, he separates you out from the rest of the world, to set you aside for his purposes, to be one of his people.
 - Simultaneously, when you accept Jesus as your savior, God justifies you, which means he declares you to be righteous in his sight; he does this by imputing/accounting to you the righteousness of Christ. So you are pure in God's sight and you are separated out for God's purposes, which by definition makes you holy, which makes you a saint!
- † **[11: holy]** Now remember, Paul never wastes words. He and Timothy are reminding the Philippians of what they taught them about the gospel when they were there: that the Philippians are holy ones, they are justified and positionally sanctified by grace from God the Father through their faith in Christ as their savior. That is another foundational theological truth for this letter.
- As I said earlier, the Philippians were being confused by adversaries who were sharing a different gospel, one based on earning righteousness by obeying the Mosaic Law. Paul and Timothy here subtly remind the Philippians that they were given righteousness by grace when they put their faith in Christ.
 - And, as we know from the gospel Paul and the other apostles handed down to us, not only do you not have to earn righteousness in God's sight, you cannot earn righteousness in God's sight: you are corrupted in nature, you have committed sins against God by straying from his will and character, and you are judged guilty along with the rest of the human race. So if you want

righteousness, you need to receive it as a gift from God through Christ, because you cannot earn it or deserve it.

- † Paul and Timothy were writing to the saints in Philippi, is that correct? But they said something more about their readers, didn't they? They were saints in Philippi but also in... Christ Jesus.
- **[12: in Christ Jesus]** ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ or “in Christ Jesus” is a descriptive phrase with theological meaning. It suggests an identification with Christ: by accepting the gospel of Christ and accepting Christ as their savior, they chose to identify with Christ. This phrase also suggests a close personal relationship with Christ, with Christ as the controlling influence [BDAG].
 - So those who believe in Christ through his gospel are “in Christ,” in that they are holy ones because by grace through faith they have identified themselves with Christ and enjoy a close personal relationship with Christ which is defined by Christ's leadership.
 - That being the case, if even the new believer is “in Christ” in this sense of identification, relationship, and Christ's leadership, it makes sense that as we grow to be more spiritually mature, as we grow to be more like Paul and Timothy in character, then we would more and more come to consider ourselves to be Christ's slaves, as they did.
- † **[13: slave/saint]** Paul chose his titles carefully when he addressed his letters, to reflect the themes of the letter. He is a slave of Christ; they are saints in Christ.
- Both of those thoughts speak to the issue at hand: the writers are focused on serving Christ and his gospel mission regardless of what their circumstances are; and the Philippians can have assurance that they are beloved by God and righteous before God regardless of what their circumstances are.
 - Can you see how even as the authors identify themselves and their readers, they are making important theological statements? Even in the first sentence, they are reinforcing the true gospel and Christian theology to counter the arguments of the antagonists.
- † **[14: overseers]** This is the only letter in the New Testament specifically addressed in part to overseers and deacons. Nobody knows for sure why that is, but we can speculate a little.
- “Overseers” were the elders of the church. They are mentioned perhaps because they had positions of authority in the church and were responsible for the doctrine the church would teach. The original definition of the Greek word ἐπίσκοπος was “guardian,” and in Christian circles this came to mean guarding the apostolic teaching and thereby guarding the flock. Paul and Timothy would want these guardians to protect the sound doctrine and true gospel they gave to the church originally.
 - “Deacons” were the lay ministry leaders, the servant leaders who supported the overseers. They are mentioned perhaps because they were influential in the church and exemplified the qualities Paul would exhort the church to have. And maybe because some of the doubt about continuing to align with Paul and his gospel was coming from this level of leadership.
 - Unity in the church regarding both belief and practice is an important theme in the letter. So the authors stressed they were writing to the whole church, with its ordained leadership. These believers are the church because they are with the ordained leaders, the overseers and the deacons; and there should be unity in the church, unity among the body, unity among the leaders, and unity of the body with the leaders.

- † **[15: greeting]** So, all that just from the formal part of identifying the authors and readers! Then we get to the actual greeting. *χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη* is Paul’s favorite greeting. Word for word it reads “grace to you, and peace.”
- Ethnic Jews would say [שלום] as a greeting, which meant peace in a holistic way: peace with God, peace with each other, health, wholeness, wellbeing. In Greek letters, an author would send “greetings.” Paul’s formula as a Christian leader was to say, “grace and peace to you.”
 - Paul always used literary conventions to his theological purposes. In this letter he reminds the Philippians and us that God the Father and Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, are the true source of the grace and peace which we covet.
 - Grace is unmerited favor. This is another important reminder about salvation: you cannot be righteous enough to deserve salvation, you cannot earn righteousness or salvation, you cannot obtain either, nor buy them. Righteousness and salvation come only as an unmerited gift from God through Christ. And thus, God the Father and the Son of God [who is the Christ-savior] together are the only source for grace and peace.
- † It took us almost twenty minutes to sort through the implications of Paul and Timothy’s opening greeting, the first two sentences of the letter. The letter is not always this theologically dense: next week we will cover six whole verses, instead of just two!
- † **[16: savior]** Let’s talk a little about the important themes from these two verses. First, Jesus is the Messiah-savior, the Christ. Grace, forgiveness, and thus peace come through him.
- If you do not know Jesus as your savior, if you have not entered into that personal relationship, please be praying to ask God – assuming he is real – to show you the truth. And please come talk to me about your doubts or questions, so we can help you find the certainty you need.
- † **[17: ID]** Second, the believer’s identity is found in Jesus. God saves us by choosing to forgive us because he has accounted to us the righteousness of Christ. We call this imputed righteousness and we call the process justification. God saves us by accounting to us the righteousness of Christ. This is an act of grace, unmerited favor. So it is Jesus who defines who we are as saints in him.
- If you do know Jesus, could you get up here right now and share the gospel, could you explain how we know what the correct gospel is, could you defend that gospel against those offered by the cults of today?
 - If you still are iffy on this most important doctrine, the very belief that defines your faith as a Christian, what should you do to fix that problem, so you can serve Christ in the gospel mission and be sure of your own saving faith? Think it over and take that step! If you would be able to explain only one Christian doctrine, let it be the gospel!
- † **[18: saints]** Third, knowing the process of salvation, we can be secure in our position as saints in God’s people and in his love, no matter what our circumstances. That’s because God chose to justify us, to save us, to sanctify us by separating us out of the world for his purposes, even though we did not deserve it. It is all based on God’s grace and the righteousness of Jesus, not on our own efforts. God the Father and the Son of God are the source of grace and peace and thus righteousness, not us. So our salvation, our righteousness, is secure, no matter what is happening to us in life.

- That's reassuring! Do you think you could get up here now and explain the details of the salvation process: things like imputed righteousness, justification, positional sanctification, redemption, adoption, indwelling, propitiation, regeneration, and reconciliation? These are churchy, big-theology words; they are not in fashion in churches these days, and neither is knowing the deeper truths of theology.
 - But what could be more important for you to understand than God's extreme love, the thoroughness of God's forgiveness, your new spiritual life and your new spiritual position, how everything that plagues you from sin is mitigated in the grace and faithfulness of Christ? Can you see how this set of truths, if fully understood and accepted, could change your perspective about yourself and your life, could provide you with greater assurance, peace, joy, contentment, and thankfulness?
 - In Paul's mind, this was the basic theology which everyone should know. It is not beyond your reach. The Philippians understood it, so can you. In September, we will be starting a new Sunday school class about the foundational truths of the Bible. I hope you will come!
- † **[19: slaves]** A fourth thing we have learned today is that the believer's saving relationship with Christ has an implied leadership aspect. So as we spiritually grow to be more like Christ in character, we commit more and more to be his slaves, serving him and his gospel mission, no matter what our circumstances. This is how you can tell who is a true spiritual leader in the church, by how sold out they are for Christ, that is, by how they show they are slaves for Christ.
- How is your relationship with Christ lately? Would you call it intimate? Are you intimate friends or just acquainted? Is he your intimate older brother or just your Santa or magic genie? Do you spend lots of time with him, building your faith-based relationship and coming to truly know him or is he just one of many competing voices in your head?
 - Does your relationship with Christ reflect his leadership role? He is the savior, he is the Son of God, he is God the Father's chosen head of the church and king of the world. Do you know what he wants from you? Are you following him? Are you trying to have his character, his ethics, his priorities, his mission?
 - These questions are for everybody, but especially for those who are spiritual leaders in the church, our ministry team leaders, teachers, small group leaders and mentors, and pastor-elders. If you are not following Christ well, then you cannot lead others for Christ well.
- † **[20: unity]** A fifth truth is that as a church comprised of believers, each having received the same grace and righteousness, each being in this same position and this same relationship, we should experience unity, as we stand firm, believing and defending the true gospel of Christ and correct apostolic doctrine. There are three parts to this: belief, action, and unity.
- With regard to belief, I think our overall understanding of basic theological doctrine in this church is inadequate. No offense, but again I would encourage you to make the upcoming Sunday school class a priority for your life this autumn. We cannot stand in unity, nor can we stand to represent Christ to the world, nor can we stand firm to protect ourselves and our church, if we do not know, understand, believe in God's theological truth.
 - With regard to action, how well have you integrated evangelism into your daily life? Are you teaching and mentoring in the church, or at least getting taught and mentored so you can do these things a year or two from now? We are all called to pursue the gospel mission through

ministries of multiplying discipleship. That means we all need to integrate evangelism into our way of life and we all need to grow into teachers and mentors in the church.

- With regard to unity, are you making others here a priority over your own desires? Are you gentle and patient and kind, even when someone else is stepping on your toes? Are you involved in a small group and on one or more of our service teams, such as cleaning, mowing, maintenance, audio-visual, or worship? Every person in this church should be involved in a small group and on a monthly or weekly ministry service team.
- † Let's talk about small groups for a moment. Our church cultural perception is that these groups are like a class, so we can attend or not as we choose, based on only our own desire for the subject or how busy we are that day.
- But small groups are different than classes; the focus is on building relationships, on building a small fellowship or community, in which we serve each other and relate to each other as guided by scripture, the goal being that we all experience the one-another aspects of church life that the Bible says we need to be healthy and spiritually growing.
 - So I think we all ought to be in a small group, and we ought to commit to that group and make participation in that group a priority each week, not only for ourselves, but because God calls us to minister to the other people, to put them first, to serve them so as to show them the grace and forgiveness and love we have received from him.
- † One last thought about our relationship with God. Like the Philippians, we eagerly go to God and ask for help with our circumstances, and we are quick to doubt when God does not deliver what we ask. On the other hand, I am sure God is disappointed when he considers how little the church or the gospel mission seems to mean to many of us.
- God has given us everything we need in our spiritual rebirth, the Holy Spirit's empowerment, and his revelation in scripture. By his grace, we are saved, spiritually reborn, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, with Bible in hand and a relationship with Christ.
 - We should be encouraged by this to change, so we grow to be relationally intimate with God and learn to live as he guides us, instead of stepping away from God relationally by making bottom line, fleshly, choices. The message of these two verses is overwhelmingly encouraging! If we need to change our ways to benefit from these truths, then let's do so!
 - In any case, let us dwell on these truths this week, using the devotion to help us, so that we can own these truths as our own, so that we can be strengthened in faith and understanding, and thus strengthen our relationship with Christ and our service for him. Let's pray...