

I invite you to open your Bibles to this morning's scripture text, which can be found in the book of Philippians, Chapter 1 verses 1-10. This can be found on page 830 in your pew Bibles. We begin a new series today "The Joy of Unity." Scripture reveals the **Joy** that is **unity** in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Fathers Word

Phil 1:1-11

Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thankfulness and Prayer

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

The Word of God for the people of God

Today we begin “The Joy of Unity,” a new series exploring the nature of Christian joy found in our life united with Christ. The book in scripture we will be learning from, is one that is among the few that gives us an intimate, close and personal look into the very mind and heart of the author. Due to the form of literature this book is written in, a letter -- the most personal of forms -- we are able to experience the character and personality of author, Apostle Paul. Contained within the letters of Paul, is found his letter to the first Christian Church in Europe, the church in Philippi.

It is because he left us so many letters that we feel we know Paul so well. In each letter, as in his letter to the Philippians, he opened his mind and heart to people he loved so much; and in them, to this day, we can see his great mind grappling with the problems of the early church, and feel that great heart throbbing with love for people, even when they were misguided, and mistaken.

When we read Paul’s letters, we are not reading things which were meant to be academic exercises or theological treatises, but human documents written by a friend to his friends. It’s because Paul’s letters were written to meet a threatening danger that they still throb with life today. It’s because human need, and the human situation has not changed, that God speaks to *us, through* them today.

For many of us Philippians is the loveliest letter Paul ever wrote. It has been called by two titles. It has been called *The Epistle of Excellent Things* – and so it truly is; and it has been called *The Epistle of Joy*. Again, and again the words *joy* and *rejoice* recur. “Rejoice,” writes Paul, “again I will say rejoice,” even in prison directing the hearts of his friends – and ours – “again I will say rejoice, to the **joy** that no man can take from us.”

The key reason Christians can rejoice is that the Son of God was willing to come to earth as a Man – and a Bondservant at that! Not stopping at the healing and teaching, He went all the way to death – even death on a cross.

Like Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, Philippians was written *from prison*. Paul was literally in chains, held in captivity in Rome, when he wrote this epistle, this beautiful letter to his dear friends at the church in Philippi. Paul was writing from prison, and he was *there* because his teaching about **Christ** conflicted with the teaching of the day. This wasn't the first time they put him in jail for creating a public disturbance in Jesus Christ's name.

The love, and the Joy from Christ *living in his heart* was still flowing like a river of life into the lives of so many people, even while he was incarcerated. His witness for Christ was so powerful, his very jailers cried out on one occasion, "Sir, what must I do to be saved?" The memorable answer came back, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." Paul's joy stemmed from the *blessed and the privileged duty* that all Christians serve, to *share* the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So as Paul once found himself ten years previously in Philippi, in prison, he is in prison again. The Philippians had heard that Paul was in prison, so they sent a gift of money to him. Epaphroditus had been commissioned to carry this gift to Paul. After delivering it, he decided to stay there awhile and help the apostle in his troubles. Epaphroditus himself became ill in carrying out these duties; in fact, he nearly died. But God had mercy on him and raised him back to health once again. Now, he is ready to go back to Philippi, to his home assembly, and so the apostle is sending back this letter of acknowledgement with him.

Philippians is one of the most personal and affectionate of Paul's Epistles. It reveals clearly that this congregation held a very special place of esteem in his affection. As we read it, we detect the very tender bond that existed between the great apostle, and this church which he founded.

Of all his Churches, the Church at Philippi was the one to which Paul was closest; and he writes not as an apostle to members of his Church, but as a friend to his friends. The opening sentence sets the tone of the whole letter. Here, he claims a different title than his usual opening claim of apostleship. Here, he lays claim to the title of *bondservant* to Christ. The word he uses in Greek is *doulos*, which is more than servant, it is *slave*.

Paul spoke of himself as a "servant," a word sometimes rendered as "bondservant" but frequently also as "slave" (Ro 1:1; Tit 1:1). Christians, especially ministers, are not hired servants but slaves committed to service to Jesus. A slave does not manage his own life. The person who calls himself a slave of Christ acknowledges that the Savior has power over him.

A servant is free to come and go; but a slave is the possession of his master forever. When Paul calls himself the slave of Jesus Christ, he is laying it down that he is the absolute possession of Christ. Christ has loved him and bought him with a price and he can never belong to anyone else. *1 Co 6:20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

He lays it down that he owes an *absolute obedience* to Christ. The slave has no will of his own; his master's will must be his. So Paul has no will but Christ's, and no obedience to anyone other than to his Savior and Lord.

In the Old Testament the regular title of the prophets is *the servants of God*. That is the title that is given to Moses, to Joshua, and to David. In fact, the highest of all titles of honor is *servant of God*; and when Paul takes this title, he humbly places himself in the succession of the prophets and of the great ones of God.

Paul addresses the *letter to the Philippians* to *all the saints in Christ Jesus*. The word saint translated, *hagios*, and its Hebrew equivalent *kadosh*, are usually translated *holy*; so the word saint is a misleading translation. To our modern world, “saint” gives us the impression of an almost unworldly piety. In Hebrew thought, if something is described as holy, the basic idea is that it is *different* from other things; it is in some sense *set apart*.

The word holy was specially used of the Jewish nation itself. The Jews were a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). They were holy unto the Lord; God had severed them from other nations that they might be his; of all the nations on the face of the earth, God had specially known them. The Jews were *different* from all other nations, for they had a special place in the purpose of God.

But they refused to play the part which God meant them to play; when His Son came into the world, they failed to recognize Him, and rejected and crucified Him. The privileges and the responsibilities the nation of Israel should have had were taken away and given to the Church, which became the new Israel, the real people of God.

Therefore, just as the Jews had once been *hagios*, holy, different, so now the Christians must be *hagios*; the Christians are the holy ones, the different ones, the saints. To say that the Christians are the saints means, therefore, that the Christians are *different* from other people. But where does that difference lie?

This *difference* is in essence the very thing that gives all Christians unity. The joy of unity is found through life lived *in* Christ Jesus. Paul addresses his people as saints *in* Christ Jesus. No one can read his letters without seeing how often these phrases occur; *in Christ, in Christ Jesus, in the Lord* . *In Christ Jesus* occurs 48 times, *in Christ* 34 times, and *in the Lord* 50 times. Clearly this was for Paul the very essence of Christianity. Life lived **IN** Christ Jesus, the unity that brings true joy. But what did he mean, to live *in*?

It has been said that when Paul spoke of the Christian being *in Christ*, he meant that the Christian lives *in Christ* as a bird in the air, a fish in the water, the roots of a tree in the soil. What makes the Christian *different* is that he is always and everywhere conscious of the encircling presence of Jesus Christ.

When Paul speaks of the saints in Christ Jesus, he means those who are *different* from other people, and, who are *consecrated to God* because of their special relationship to Jesus Christ – and that is where every Christian should be.

Paul was doing something very wonderful when he gave his all-inclusive greeting to his friends, he said, “Grace be to you and peace, from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ. *Grace*, and *Peace*. Two great words, each with their own flavor, when he combined them, each deepened by the new meaning Christianity poured into it. He was taking the two normal greeting phrases of two great nations and molding them into one. *Grace*, is the greeting which Greek letters always began, and *peace*, is the greeting which Jews met each other.

Charis, the word Grace translated from, is a very lovely word; the basic ideas in it are joy and pleasure, brightness and beauty; it is, in fact, connected with the English word *charm*.

But with Jesus Christ, there comes a new beauty to add to the beauty that was there. And that beauty is born of a new relationship to God. With Christ, life becomes lovely, because man is no longer the victim of God's law, but the child of his love.

The word translated to peace, *Eirene*, is a very comprehensive word. It never means a negative peace, never simply the absence of trouble. It means total well-being, everything that makes for a man's highest good. Its associated with another Greek word *Eirein*, which means *to join, to weave together*. This peace always has to do with personal relationships, a man's relationship to himself, to his fellow man, and to God. This is the peace that is born of reconciliation. This is the peace of God that comes through prayer, and thanksgiving.

So, when Paul prays for grace and peace on his people he is praying that they should have the joy of knowing God as Father and the peace of being reconciled to God, to men, and themselves – and that peace can only come through Jesus Christ.

It's such a lovely thing when *remembrance* and *gratitude* are bound up together. In our personal relationships it is a great thing to have nothing but happy memories; and that was how Paul was with the Christians at Philippi. To remember brought no regrets, only true joy.

In today's scripture, Paul has revealed marks of a Christian life. One such mark is Christian Joy, true joy. It is with true joy that Paul prays for his friends. The Letter to the Philippians, has been called *The Epistle of Joy*. So we will be taking a journey through Paul's joy filled mind and heart in this new series The Joy of Unity. Let's take a quick look today at the picture of Christian joy, which this letter paints.

In verse 4 we find the joy of Christian prayer, that is to say, the joy of bringing those we love to the mercy seat of God. The joy of meeting people where they are, and leading them to Christ through prayer. To pray for their conversion, to pray for their salvation!

In every prayer, Paul made supplication for the Philippians with joy. To him, it was a sheer delight to pray for them – not dull drudgery. From this and many similar passages in Paul's writing, we learn that he is a man of prayer. We really don't need to search any further to see why Paul was so wonderfully used by God. The joy from a healthy prayer life.

In the book *No Common Task*, author George Reindrop tells how a nurse once taught a man to pray, and in doing so, changed his whole life. A once dull, disgruntled and dispirited creature, he became a man of true joy through his new prayer life.

Much of the nurse's work was done with her hands, and so, she used her hands as a scheme of prayer. Each finger stood for someone. Her thumb was nearest to her, and it reminded her to pray for those who were closest to her. The second finger was used for pointing, and it stood for her teachers in school, and in the hospital. The third finger was the tallest and it stood for the V.I.P.'s, the leaders in every area of life. The fourth finger was the weakest, as every piano player knows, and it stood for those who were in trouble or in pain. The little pinky finger was the smallest and the least important, and to the nurse, it stood for herself.

There must always be that true joy and peace in bringing our loved ones and others to God in prayer. Pray in your inner room. Pray at work. Pray in your car. Pray wherever you are. Take it to the Lord in Prayer and experience Christian Joy!

It was Paul's prayer for his people that their love would grow greater every day. (verse 9 and 10) That love, which was not merely a sentimental thing, was to grow in knowledge and in *sensitive perception* so that they would be more and more able to distinguish right from wrong. Love is always the way to knowledge. If we love any subject, we want to learn more about it. If we love any person we want to learn more about them. If we love Jesus we want to learn more and more about Him and His truth.

Love is always sensitive to the mind and the heart of the one it loves. If it blindly and blunderingly hurts the feelings of the one it claims to love, it isn't love at all. If we really love Jesus, we will be sensitive to his will and his desires; the more we love him, the more we will instinctively shrink away from evil things in our life and desire what is right. Real love is not blind. It will enable us always to see the difference between the false and the true.

Within that picture of Christian Joy we also see the joy of *fellowship* where the Gospel of Jesus Christ *is* preached, shared, or furthered. When we enjoy a great blessing, shouldn't our first instinct be to share it with everyone we meet?

I don't know about you, but it brings me a lot of joy in knowing that the Gospel is being preached all over the world. Doesn't it bring you joy to know that another, and another, and another is brought within the love of Christ?

Paul sets down the Christian aim. This is to live such a life that the glory and the praise are given to God. Christian Joy, and goodness, is not meant to win a credit for us, its meant to win praise for God. As Christians, we know and witness, that we are what we are, not by our own unaided efforts, but only by the grace of God.

Contained in that picture of Christian Joy, which we will be experiencing together through this series, will be joy upon joy upon joy. The Joy of Faith, the joy of Christian fellowship, the joy of suffering for Christ, the joy of Christian hospitality, and several others.

When we experience Christian joy, true joy, the joy of being united in Christ, we will be changed forever.

Heavenly Father,

We love you and bless you Father,

We thank you for the wonderful joy in our hearts and lives,

We thank you for the source of that Joy, Christ living in us.

As we seek to spread the Gospel of Jesus, as your bondservants,

let the joy, the love, and the peace in our lives be our witness to the world,

So that all praise and all glory are given to you Lord.

By your grace, make our love to abound more and more

In knowledge and discernment, keeping us from evil in life,

So that we will be filled with the fruits of righteousness

which are by Jesus Christ, the unity of all your children.

AMEN