

Good News From a Dark Place Philippians 1:1-6

Wednesday January 9th, 2019 – Jeff Lyle

As we read the words of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Christians in Philippi, it is difficult to picture him writing from a Roman prison. Paul, incarcerated for the crime of being an unapologetic missionary, is reaching out to the first church he established on the continent of Europe. From his opening words, we are able to sense flowing from the Apostle's heart, the strong love, confident hope and earnest desire to minister to these believers. We can learn much about the relationship between leaders and followers from Paul's opening words. Overshadowing Paul's dark circumstances in prison are his powerful words meant to convey faith-building expectations over the entire group of believers in Philippi. Let us all be encouraged because Paul's words to them have become God's words to us today.

I. Paul's Introduction to the Philippians (1)

A. Paul lived humbly (1a) - "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus..."

Though he was a mighty Apostle, Paul remained aware that he was also a servant. Along with his younger disciple, Timothy, Paul reached out to the Christians at Philippi and began his communication to them with the humble declaration that he intentionally retained his position of servant to his King. Power, position and mighty results in ministry never took Paul away from the anchor that he was brought into the Kingdom, not be served by others, but to serve them.

B. Paul loved liberally (1b) - "...to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi..."

An additional commendation of Paul's leadership is the reality that he chose not to play favorites. Every Kingdom leader knows that some in the flock are easier and more pleasant to lead than others. Yet, when Paul opened his letter to the Philippians, he included ALL of them: mature & immature, easy going & difficult, wise & not-yet wise, Gentile & Jew, young & old...Paul greeted them all as one. He had learned to love without prejudice. The reason for his approach is very clear - all of these believers were **in Christ Jesus**. The way Paul (and we) treated Christians was a reflection of his views on the Bride of Christ. Paul chose to love all whom Jesus loves.

C. Paul led strategically (1c) - "...with the overseers and deacons."

Good News From a Dark Place Philippians 1:1-6

Wednesday January 9th, 2019 – Jeff Lyle

Nobody believed in the supernatural ways of the Holy Spirit more than Paul. He knew how to cast out demons, raise the dead, heal the sick, prophesy, speak in tongues, and operate in words of knowledge. He had been caught up to the third heaven in an ecstatic vision that he could not define in human terms (2 Cor. 12:2-4). Yet, with all of these deeply supernatural experiences, Paul was also a structured and organized leader. He saw to it that every church he planted was organized with approved, qualified leadership and ministry teams. Paul disciplined himself and trained others to do the same. Contrary to much popular thinking, to operate in the Holy Spirit is not in conflict with intentionally pursuing efficiency, organization and structure. The overseers and deacons were approved and appointed leaders/servants who would approach the ministry in Philippi with excellence and organization. Kingdom leaders must avoid the two ditches of no-structure & over-structure.

II. Paul's Benediction over the Philippians (2)

A. The people could exhale (2a) - “Grace to you...”

Once understood and embraced, the truths of God's grace are, perhaps, the most reassuring and calming components of all Christian theology. God's grace is the context of the entire relationship that redeemed sinners enjoy with Holy God. We are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:24). To know that grace abounds above our sin (Romans 5:20) takes away the fear of being rejected by God when we stumble. We can rest in knowing who God has made us because of His grace (1 Cor. 15:10). We are given our purpose and Kingdom ministry according to grace (Galatians 1:15; Eph. 3:7). We are always able to be strengthened by grace (2 Tim. 2:1; Heb. 4:16). **Grace is the atmosphere of God's Kingdom** and it allows to exhale, refuse striving and fear, and let the heavy lifting in our lives be accomplished by the God of all grace.

B. The people could rejoice (2b) - “...and peace from God our Father...”

Few things should cause us to rejoice more than knowing with a certainty that there is no longer any war or hostility between God and His redeemed children. Though God does not always approve of the things we do, and though there will be discipline for us when we choose to disobey the Father, the Christian need never fear that God views him or her as an enemy. Jesus took all of the punishment for sin in His body. The wrath of God was poured out upon Jesus.

Good News From a Dark Place Philippians 1:1-6

Wednesday January 9th, 2019 – Jeff Lyle

Heaven's peace treaty with humanity is written in the blood of the Lamb! We sign our own names to it by faith. When we believe in Jesus, we are made a part of God's family and He never declares war upon His own. When Paul pronounced the blessing of peace upon the Christians at Philippi, he was stirring up the source of their joy.

C. The people could hope (2c) - "...and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Not only was there a peace granted to them in their pasts and a grace offered them in their present moments, the Philippians also possessed **a hope for their future**. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead and conquered sin, Satan and the grave empowers all believers to look out on the endless horizon and have confidence that all is well with their soul. Jesus took the most powerful weapon that Satan possessed, death, and turned around to use it to defeat Satan. When Jesus rose from the grave, He destroyed Satan's arsenal. We have received the same victorious, eternal life within us as believers in Jesus Christ. Physical death will find each of us, but it cannot have the final word. Resurrection wins in the end. Satan will die eternally, but Christians will live and reign with the Lord Jesus Christ forever. We have an everlasting hope!

III. Paul's Affirmation of the Philippians (3-6)

A. As a spiritual father, Paul treasured the people (3-4) - "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy ..."

What a beautiful two-way street between the Apostle and the believers at Philippi. He prayed for them regularly and, when he did so, he was able to thank God for them. They lived lives that provoked their leader, Paul, to gratitude. It was a 2-way street of valuing one another. They knew the Apostle was interceding for them while he was incarcerated, and he knew that they were living lives that brought glory to their King. It is good to remember in our selfish generation that church leaders are to minister to those whom they lead via the ministry of prayer. Sheep need protection, provision, assistance and correction. Leaders gain the heart of the Good Shepherd through regularly praying for those whom they lead. For followers, it is important to remember that Scripture actually commands them to follow in such a way that allows the leader to minister to them joyfully (Hebrews 13:17). Paul and the Philippian Christians honored each other in their leader/follower relationship.

Good News From a Dark Place Philippians 1:1-6

Wednesday January 9th, 2019 – Jeff Lyle

B. As a leader, Paul appreciated the people (5) - “...because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”

In the Church, God commissions leaders and then assigns those leaders to the flock(s) of His own choosing. God will impart vision, direction and strategy to those leaders. The leaders then pour into the followers so that the followers actually accomplish the work assigned to that group of believers (see Ephesians 4:11-14). Paul did not use for selfish purposes the people entrusted to him by God. He was grateful for their support and partnership in the ministry assigned to him. They were not there to make Paul's vision happen. They were there to be invested in by Paul so that, together, all of them could complete the mission assigned to them by God. Paul did not lose track of this reality and was able to express gratitude for their willing partnership in the Gospel.

C. As a prophet, Paul built up the people (6) - “And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

The foundational component of prophetic ministry is to speak forth words that build up the body of Christ. In Philippians 1:6 above, Paul does this. While the words he shares are not specifically predictive in nature, Paul releases a prophetic word of blessing that is pregnant with confidence concerning the Philippians future. Here is how Paul explained prophecy in another place:

1 Corinthians 14:1-4 - “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. 2 For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. 3 On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. 4 The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.”

Though a true Apostle, Paul also functioned as a prophet. He exhorted with clearly understandable communication the words of verse 6 that would inspire the Philippians to continue on in the direction to which they had formerly committed themselves. How emboldening it would be for them to read that the Apostle Paul was certain that God would be faithful to complete His work in them until the day of Jesus' appearing. Let us all remember that the gift of

Good News From a Dark Place Philippians 1:1-6 ***Wednesday January 9th, 2019 – Jeff Lyle***

prophecy need not be mysterious to be helpful. It also does not have to be precisely predictive in order to qualify as a genuine prophetic word. When Paul sensed the confidence of God's faithfulness to the Christians in Philippi, he released that word for their edification.