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God Isn't Finished With Us Yet!
Philippians 1

Our epistle lesson today is from Philippians 1,
and I want you to just ***listen*** to this reading,
not follow along in your Bible.

This was a ***letter from Paul***, written to his friends,
the church he founded in Philippi.
It would have been read to the whole congregation at once,
so today we are going to ***hear*** the first chapter together.

Listen to the word of God for you today:

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who
are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 I thank my God every time I remember you,

4 constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you,

5 because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.

6 I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will
bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

7 It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in
your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my
imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

8 For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of
Christ Jesus.

9 And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with
knowledge and full insight

10 to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may
be pure and blameless,

11 having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus
Christ for the glory and praise of God.

12 I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually
helped to spread the gospel,

13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to
everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ;

14 and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.

15 Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.

16 These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel;

17 the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment.

18 What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,

19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.

20 It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death.

21 For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.

22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer.

23 I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better;

24 but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.

25 Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith,

26 so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

27 Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel,

28 and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing.

29 For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—

30 since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Let us pray..

The **handwritten letter** is kind of a lost art today,
in our age of email and text, isn't it?
I still love to send and receive them.

Letters convey a sense of **personal connection** that you just can't get from a brief email or text, right?
People don't compose emails or texts with great thought for the form and content—it's all about brevity!

But for Paul, his **only way** of communicating with this congregation was through a handwritten letter—
so we can assume that **every single word** was thought out, and meaningful, which is how we should hear it today.

The **beginning** is important because it identifies Paul as the sender, it identifies the congregation, and it conveys the **spiritual tone** of the whole letter.

When Paul says **bishops and deacons**, he may not be referring to official church titles like we think of today. Bishop and deacon were common terms for overseers in civic organizations, so Paul might be using common terminology to address the leadership of this church. (Stanley P. Saunders, Interpretation: Philippians and Galatians, Westminster John Knox: Louisville, 2001, pg. 8)

This letter would have likely been written and sent from Paul to the church in Philippi between 55 and 65 A.D. That church was probably an early '**house**' church, meeting in someone's home where they would have worship, teaching and fellowship.

The **city of Philippi** where this church was located, was a Roman military colony, an administrative center of the Roman Empire, and a center of commercial traffic and Roman culture. Christians living there would have been surrounded by the symbols of Roman culture, their military, and their gods. These were likely Gentile Christians who had converted to Christianity through Paul's visit to them with Timothy and Silas on his second missionary journey. (Fred Craddock, Interpretation: Philippians, John Knox: Atlanta, 1985, pg. 112)

Acts 16:11-40 talks about how Paul and Timothy and Silas came to Philippi to share the gospel, and there they found a young slave girl with magical powers, who was using her magic to make money for her master.

Paul and Silas drove a demon out of her in the name of Jesus Christ, and as a result they were imprisoned and beaten.

They were hated for their Jewish heritage, and condemned for civil disobedience.

Acts 20 says that Paul made two subsequent visits to Philippi, but the political and social climate was still hostile to him.

So, Paul started the church in Philippi, and it was a beloved congregation to him.

When Paul writes this letter, we gather from the little phrases about imperial powers, that Paul is in **prison** in an **imperial city like Rome, Ephesus or Caesarea**.

Scholars aren't sure which of these cities Paul was imprisoned in, but we know that he is imprisoned under the Roman government.

Prison then meant you were **waiting for a trial**, not that you had been convicted.

Consequences for conviction were often lethal, so we assume that Paul is in a cell of some kind, awaiting trial, and a possible death sentence.

This makes sense when you hear him talk about the end of his life, and the coming life with Christ.

Which bring us to a question out of this chapter one:

how would we feel if this was our leader and friend,

who was writing to us from prison?

Wouldn't we take these words really seriously,

really to heart if this was someone we knew writing to us?

Someone with whom we had shared fellowship, worship, and communion?

How **would** you feel?

And do you notice an overall theme of **joy, grace and thanksgiving?**

He uses terms for joy 16 times in this letter,

and he often speaks of grace and his gratefulness.

Paul says he is deeply **thankful** for this congregation,

in fact many scholars believe that the Philippian church was a favorite of his.

He is thankful for their *faith in Christ*,
and the opportunity they have to *share faith*,
for the life *they all share in the body* of Christ,
and the *coming eternal life* with Christ.

When Paul says *grace and peace*,
that early congregation under Roman rule would have heard something
different than we hear today.

They would have heard Paul talking about the difference between life in Christ
and life in Rome.

Grace was a common Greco-Roman literary greeting,
and *Peace* was what Rome called it's empire—the Pax Romana.

What makes Paul's grace and peace different
is that they are *found in Jesus Christ*—not Rome.

Grace comes from Christ,

and *peace* is something deeper than Roman rule.

Paul is calling to mind the Jewish word for peace, *shalom*—

which means a wholeness of body, mind, and spirit. (Stanley P. Saunders,
Interpretation: Philippians and Galatians, Westminster John Knox: Louisville, 2001, pg. 9)

Paul also uses the word *share* a lot, like in verses 5 and 7.

It's the Greek word *koinonia*, a term we think of as referring to fellowship.

But what *kind* of fellowship is Paul talking about?

He is talking about them sharing in the gospel, in grace,
and in his imprisonment!

But isn't that the kind of fellowship that has *real power* in any Christian
community?

Isn't this the *kind of 'sharing' we should be doing?*

A church where we share *everything*, the *good and the bad*,
even one another's *suffering*!

In 1 Corinthians 12:26 Paul says *when one member rejoices, we all rejoice,*
when one suffers, we all suffer.

Is *that how we react* to joy and suffering in our family of faith?

If not, *how can we* do that?

Paul talks a lot about *sharing, and partnership*
between himself and this church.

In fact, we'd be reading this *wrong* if we thought he was just talking to *individuals*.

This is for the *whole body* of Christ.

Paul *can't imagine a Christian separate* from the body.

It makes me wonder,

Do we hear the words of the Bible as words for us as individuals?

Or do we see the power it has for us as a *community* of faith?

Do we see our faith as being *able to exist apart* from a church body?

So many people do—what do we miss when we think that?

And what *kind of sharing and partnership* do we have in this church?

I think of all the *projects and missions and ministries* here,

that require 'all hands on deck', and I think that this church excels in that area.

People in this church are eager and willing to help when needed—

we do not have a shortage of servants!

But how can we *do even better* as people who share and partner in the gospel?

You know, when we think of passages like Philippians 1,

I hope that we think about how this helps us *live faithfully today*.

I hope that we think about how it *relates to our everyday lives*,

not just our Sunday mornings!

After all, you *spend most hours of the week*, at your job, or at home, caring for kids, spouses, parents, or friends.

You volunteer here and elsewhere in our community.

You belong to social groups, and circles of friends.

You spend time online, and time alone.

And hopefully you spend some time relaxing and resting!

We all have *full lives*—the question is,

how do we make what we hear and learn on Sunday mornings,

apply to our full life during the week?

I encourage you to go home and re-read Phil 1 out loud, and ask yourself if something stands out to you.

Like, do you hear Paul's sense of **hope**, even in the darkness?

In verse 6 he says that

the one who began a good work in us, will bring it to completion!

Is that **hopeful to you?**

To know that **God isn't finished with you yet?**

I know that brings hope to me for sure,
to know that God's still working on me,
and God won't stop until it's done!

What about how he tells us to **stand firm in our suffering** and trials?

He says in verse 21, that *living is Christ and dying is gain.*

In other words, there is no real life apart from Jesus Christ, and death is never the end of our story!

What are we living for?

Is it our faith in Christ? Or something else?

How can we live for Jesus Christ?

Do Paul's words bring us **hope and encouragement?**

He is writing **from a prison** cell, and possible death sentence,
and yet he is able to worship God and give thanks to God!

Wow.

It makes me wonder, **how can we look at life the way Paul does?**

Can we take our eyes off of our difficult circumstances—
and see the **hope and peace of Jesus Christ?**

Kind of like **Peter?**

We can look at the wind and waves, and sink, or keep our eyes on Jesus, and walk on water!

Kind of like **Daniel** in the lion's den?

We can look at the hungry lions, or turn our attention to the God who can and will save us!

And when we are able to find meaning and hope in our own suffering,
how do we help others to do the same?

Isn't that part of our calling as the body of Christ?

To invite others to find their hope and meaning in Christ?

We all have those '**prison moments**' of life, right?

How do we face them with **hope**?

How do we **encourage others** who find themselves in their own 'prisons'?

Paul seems to see his **suffering as an opportunity**—

He says in verses 12-14 that his imprisonment has **helped him and others** to spread the gospel!

I wonder--do we feel this way about our own suffering?

It's certainly easier to see suffering as suffering,
not something meaningful and redemptive, right?

I was reading my favorite devotional, ***Streams in the Desert***, this week.

It always has something about growth through trials and suffering,
and the September 8th reading was no different.

The verse was Psalm 4:1: *you have enlarged me when I was in distress.*

George Matheson writes: *This verse is one of the greatest testimonies ever written regarding the effectiveness of God's work on our behalf during times of crisis.*

*It is a statement of thanksgiving for having been set free not **from** suffering, but rather **through** suffering...*

the sorrows of life have themselves been the source of life's enlargement...

.it is in the shadows of life that you will find the actual fulfillment of your dreams..So do not complain about the shadows of darkness,

in reality they are better than your dreams could ever be. (L.B.Cowman, Streams in the Desert, September 8th)

Wow. Those are some powerful words.

Could this be what Paul meant,

when he says in verse 27, to live lives **worthy of the gospel**?

Could it be that we are meant to live through the suffering of life,
knowing that God is somehow **using it for good**?

I don't think we can always see the good in our suffering—
finding that good is sometimes a process, isn't it?

And we shouldn't force people to see the good in their suffering.

What we're called to do is **stand beside** them, **walk** with them,
and **be the body of Christ** for them.

It is often in that action on our part, that people do find hope and meaning.

Just think about all the **stories after Hurricane Harvey and during Irma**, of people being helped and rescued and relieved by the people around them. I saw a woman hugging a man who gave up the last generator at a Florida Home Depot to her, because her husband needed it for medical equipment. She said that man was an angel.

I saw a story about a woman rescued from the floodwaters in Houston after hours and hours of clinging to the top of her car. The rescuers were her angels.

We are **called to be God's angels** for people in need, This is what it means to be the **hands and feet of Christ** in the world. When we do that, we **enable others to see the light** of Christ in and through us, and to see some **hope**—even in the midst of tragedy. This is what it means to live a **life worthy** of the gospel, isn't it? This is God working in us, and not being finished with us yet!

It's **not just about us finding hope** in our suffering— it's about us **being hope** for someone else as they struggle.

Paul was hope for the Philippians, and they gave hope to him. How **will we be the hope** that someone else needs?

Friends, hear the **Good News of the Gospel** today: We are called to live lives **worthy** of the gospel. And thankfully, **God isn't finished** with us yet! The one who began a good work in us will bring it to completion!

As we go into our full and busy week, may we all **live worthy** lives, and **rely upon** our Savior to keep up the good work He began in us! Amen.