



I Have You in My Heart

Series: Philippians – To Live Is Christ

Philippians 1:3-8

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The initial section of this letter that we are looking at today is a window into the heart of Paul toward the Philippians, a window into the special bond, the special love and affection that he had for them, this church that he had founded through the conversions of a businesswoman, a formerly demonically oppressed slave, and a jailer and his household. Getting a glimpse into the heart of Paul for this church, there are several emotions that come to the foreground – gratitude, joy, confidence, and love. In these few verses Paul shows us the kind of heart, the kind of emotions that ought to burn brightly in the body of Christ. In Paul we see modeled for us gratitude to God for the Philippian believers and for the work of grace in their lives; joy as the overwhelming emotion whenever he prays for them, confidence that their salvation is true and real and that God will fully accomplish it, and real love – intense, deeply felt, affection like that of Jesus Christ for his saints; this is what Paul felt for these brothers and sisters. Paul's heart comes through in the letter, and that is the point.

This is a pastoral letter – not that there are not significant doctrinal themes, rich doctrinal truths that Paul communicates to the Philippians – but this is chiefly a letter filled with encouragement, exhortation, commendation and love. It is as nourishing and satisfying to my soul to read as it was to Paul's soul to write. This heart of Paul's on display – well, it's the kind of heart that I have toward you and that I want to have more and more and tis the kind of heart that I want for us to have toward one another. So let's look at these opening verses, beloved, and I pray this word will dwell richly in my heart and in yours. I want us first to look at

Paul's Joyful Gratitude (3-5) Keep in mind as we look at these words that what Paul's says here is not hyperbole; they are not swelling words minus substance; they are not insincere, nor are they theatrical or put-on. Paul was not given to those kinds of displays. What we hear from Paul are the true feelings of his heart, feelings that are the product of God's grace in his soul. Just look with me at what he says.

Paul starts by saying: “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,” (Philippians 1:3, ESV) Paul is saying, “You know, when I think about, whenever my mind is drawn to thoughts about you and I consider you guys, I give thanks to God. I am thankful to God for you.” Now at first blush, we might think to ourselves, “How could that be?” We know the Philippian church wasn’t perfect. Like we saw last week, this was a church that was facing the opposition of the unbelieving world, the encroachment of false doctrine, a church that faced factions and divisions in the body – two women who had labored with Paul in the gospel, Euodia and Syntyche, had to be entreated to agree in the Lord. They were struggling with anxiety about the sufficiency of the gospel to sustain them, joy was giving way to discouragement, distrust, and disagreement and to self-interest, self-seeking and selfishness. They were being tempted to give up. And yet, Paul can say with all sincerity, when I think about you all, I thank God for you.

Not only was this exactly the kind of encouragement that this church desperately needed to hear, it was also the truth. Paul had in his heart great thankfulness for the Philippians. How can that be? Well, let me illustrate this from my own life and I think we can see it pretty clearly. Gretchen and I have been married going on 24 years now and we’ve been through a great deal as husband and wife. We’ve had our share of fights. I have disappointed her more times than I can count and she has disappointed me a couple of times, maybe. We haven’t always seen eye-to-eye on how we should discipline our kids, or on the right course of action when faced with a decision. There have been times that we both shook our heads in disbelief at one another. We don’t always have the same taste in everything – I’m a guy and she’s not, praise God. Our marriage has sometimes been like Beauty and the Beast. But I can tell you truthfully that when I think about my wife, I thank my God. I am grateful to God for the woman that he has given to me. I thank God for her and I’m pretty sure that most days she thanks God for me. And why is that? It’s because when I think about my wife, I don’t spend time reflecting on her imperfections or our differences or the disagreements. Instead, my mind is filled with all the ways in which she has enriched my life, all the evidences of grace that she displays, everything that we share in common – our communion, our fellowship. That is what fills my heart with gratitude. It’s true with my wife and it’s true with everyone I love. And that was the reason behind Paul’s gratitude for the church at Philippi as we will see in moment, but before we get there, we need to see what this gratitude in Paul’s heart led him to do.

Paul says, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,” (Philippians 1:3–4, ESV) Paul’s thinking about the

Philippians did not lead him to idle reverie, just thinking on the good times. No, instead it motivated him to earnest prayer, to beseeching the throne of grace on their behalf, to praying with joy and with expectancy for their spiritual growth, their inner strength, their growth in love and grace. He says, “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:9–11, ESV) That is an excellent prayer and we will look at it more next week, but the point I want us to see is that Paul’s gratitude to God for the Philippians motivated him to prayer. His gratitude to God for this church moved Paul to do something to spiritually enrich them, to pray for every one of them with sincerity and intensity.

So then, why the gratitude and joy in Paul’s heart for this church? What’s the reason? Well, it’s what I alluded to earlier. It’s because when Paul thought about them, when he prayed for them, his focus was not on issues and problems, but instead it was on their communion, their fellowship and the work of God’s grace in their hearts.

Paul says: “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, -- why?-- because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.” (Philippians 1:3–5, ESV) When Paul thinks about the Philippian church, what fills his heart with gratitude, what moves him to joyfully pray for them is their partnership, their fellowship, and their “koinonia” which they shared together in the gospel. That is such a special word, such a rich word but it is often misunderstood. It’s more than getting coffee together or sharing a meal, more than greeting somebody or being in the same place on a Sunday morning. These are good things, I’m not saying they are not. But, we have the tendency in church to reduce the strength and power of this word by applying it to everything, but the way that this word is used in the Scriptures is to describe sharing something in common, participating in something divine and eternal, being part of something far greater than we could ever be or do by ourselves. It’s a word that speaks of being taken up into a communion, a fellowship which God created and sustains. A fellowship with God and with His people that is unique.

Let’s talk about that for a moment. True Christian fellowship consists of genuine, deep, sustained, forgiving, spiritually challenging, mutually supportive, and honest relationships -- relationships that deliberately point one another to Christ and spur one another on to greater

godliness and devotion to the Lord, and that labor together to make the gospel of Jesus Christ known to lost sinners in this world. It is gospel driven, gospel fueled, gospel centered, and gospel celebrating. Anything else, honestly, is a cheap and tawdry substitute. Real fellowship is life-giving, soul-enriching, love-nourishing, and joy-producing. And fellowship comes only through giving of yourself. Speaking of the Macedonians, of whom the Philippians were the foremost church, Paul makes this clear saying of them: “they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.” (2 Corinthians 8:5, ESV)

True fellowship among the people of God is deliberately unselfish. Unselfish not only with our money or goods but also with our time, our love, our influence, our care, our availability to other people and in our service for the spread of the gospel. It’s the way God intends us to live. It’s the way we grow together in relationship with the Father, the Son, and with each other. Fellowship creates a family, a family that can grow.

These Philippians and Paul, they had a fellowship in the gospel. They had a fellowship in the gospel first in the sense that each of them had experienced the grace of God in Christ. Each of them had had their eyes opened to their desperate need for a Savior, had seen the depth of their sin, their helplessness to do anything to fix their estrangement with God that was the result of their own rebellion against God. They had each experienced the life-giving, faith-creating grace of regeneration. They had each experienced the forgiveness that comes with faith in Christ. They each had embraced the joy of being placed into the family of God, together. And they had fellowship in the gospel in that they partnered together to see the gospel reach the ends of the earth, beginning right across the street.

The Apostle Paul had been united in heart to the Philippians because they both had received grace from the living God, divine saving grace in Jesus Christ, which made them brothers and sisters and gave them a common purpose and mission in life to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth and to glorify God in all of life.

When he thought of them, Paul thought about the evidences of grace that he saw all throughout the Philippian congregation, evidences of grace and partnership in the gospel that he saw from the very beginning and he saw even now. When Lydia was saved by the grace of God, she immediately opened her home to Paul and it served as Paul’s base of operations.

When the Philippian jailer was saved, immediately he took Paul and Silas to his home, washed their wounds, gave them food and ministered to him. When Paul left Philippi, they didn't forget him. They gladly gave for his ministerial support and for the relief effort for the Jerusalem church. They partnered with him in spreading the gospel. When he was imprisoned in Rome, they sent practical and financial relief to him, gifts he needed, through Epaphroditus. So when Paul thought of the church in Philippi, it wasn't the shortcomings that filled his vision, but their partnership in the gospel. This is what Paul thought about. He thought about their partnership in the gospel, and the evidences of grace in their lives.

Beloved, can I tell you that the secret to gratitude for your brothers and sisters, to valuing this fellowship in this church, to real joy in your brothers and sisters and to pouring yourself out to spiritually enrich them is to view one another through the eyes of grace. Eddie talked about this on Wednesday night. Look, any of us, if we think long enough, can find reasons to think negatively of one another, to only be concerned with ourselves and no one else, can justify in our minds using people for our own gain, to isolate ourselves from other people, to complain against another and erect barriers to fellowship with one another – all we have to do is just let our flesh run unchecked by the Spirit of God. But beloved, true joy and communion, real fellowship in the gospel grows in the soil of grace. It grows by viewing each other through the eyes of grace, by searching for and seeing evidences of grace in each other, reasons to rejoice and thank God. Paul looked for those things. It is so heart-freeing. Paul understood this fact well.

A Heart-Freeing Fact of Grace (6) Paul says in verse 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.” (Philippians 1:6, ESV) When Paul looked at the church in Philippi, he was confident that what God began in them and through them, He would bring to complete fruition on the day of Christ's return. This conviction echoes what Paul wrote in Romans 8, saying, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” (Romans 8:29–30, ESV)

Paul was convinced that God was both the initiator and the finisher of the work of redemption and salvation in both the church at Philippi, as well as in the gospel work to which they were called. In other words, Paul was convinced that God would complete the salvation of his Philippian brothers and sisters, by His grace, and that He would also bring His redemptive plan

among the nations to completion as well. That was an amazingly freeing truth for Paul, and it should be for all of us.

Although Paul had been the instrument that God used to establish the church in Philippi, it was God who had chosen them before the foundation of the world. It was Christ who took on flesh, who obeyed everything that the Law of God requires, and who gave Himself as the Lamb of God to atone for their sins and died the death that gave them life. It was Christ who rose from the dead. It was the Holy Spirit who made a dead spirit to live and gave to them faith to believe and to receive “the word of God (and to accept it) it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.” (Cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:13, ESV) God was at work in their salvation before they were formed in their mother’s wombs and God was at work now growing them up into maturity in grace and empowering them as vessels for the spread of the gospel and the glory of Christ throughout the world. Salvation from beginning to end, from start to finish, is the work of the sovereign grace of God and it is He that is at work growing you up in Christ, at work to present you faultless and blameless before the throne, to bring you to the joy and the glory of heaven, and to serve Him here as we await the return of the King. God is doing this. He was at work in the Philippians for their salvation and for their maturity and service in Christ and He is at work among us.

Praise God that he is. I have a confession to make. When I was a kid, I was the king of half finished models. The snap together ones, that you could make in like 10 minutes, I would finish every time. But when I graduate with my big brothers to the glue together kind that actually took skill, I would start and get about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through—you know, to where to had to trim stuff and do the delicate skill work and I would just give up. I had a pie of half-finished planes, tanks, and personnel carriers – all that stuff. It was bad. My mom told me she wouldn’t buy any more models for me until I finished the ones I had, so I did. I gathered them all up, set up a really cool looking (to an 11 or 12 year old) war scene with little green army men with one of my pals out behind his garage, soaked the models with charcoal lighter fluid, and burned them all up like it was a battle without managing to burn down his garage in the process. Thankfully that’s not how God works with us. He is at work completing what He started. And, as I said, it was a freeing truth for Paul and it should be for us.

Just like Paul, we can trust God to work in the lives of our brothers and sisters, to work through the church for the spread of the gospel and His glory. God began the work of salvation and He will complete it. In a church, we won’t all always be on the same page. We may not see eye-to-

eye on every issue, may not always agree on some doctrine (I'm not talking about gospel truths) or may not have the same convictions about things. That's ok. It is not our job to change other people. That's the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is my responsibility to speak God's truth and live God's truth and do it in love. If a brother or sister does not understand God's truth, or if they are sinful or immature in the way they are living, I must speak the truth in love, call them to faith, call them to obedience, call them to repentance, encourage them in righteousness, encourage them in proper understanding, encourage them in godliness and obedience, to pray and intercede for them, right? If it is serious sin or outright heresy that he or she is engaged in, I may eventually need to separate from them. But at the same time, I can trust that if God has truly saved him, God will finish the job. That is a freeing truth. I can accept my brother or my sister where he or she is with the Lord, encourage him or her in areas of weakness, and look for the evidences of grace in his or her life and love them. God will finish His work in His people. He will grow and shape and mold His people; He will sanctify His people, He will test and discipline, change our desires and longings, mature and fashion His people into the image of His Son. So, Paul could graciously forbear with the Philippians because he trusted in the work of God in them. He trusted in God's grace at work in them.

Paul's attitude toward the Philippians was just a practical outworking of the description of love that Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 13, where he writes: "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, ESV) It is with love that Paul views the Philippians. Fellowship in the gospel demands this kind of love. That doesn't mean that love condones sin. Scripture is clear that love often confronts sin. Church discipline, which is sometimes necessary as an expression of love, exposes rather than covers sin. But we do it all in grace and in the confident hope that God will complete the work that He began in each of His people.

The more we grow in Christ, the more we ought to remember how much grace we needed to get saved and how much grace we daily need in order to grow in Christ and live to His glory. And the more we should view our fellow saints as fellow sinners who not only need grace from God, but also grace from me, as we labor together for Christ. Paul's heart toward the Philippians was one of love, one of grace, one of joy because he trusted in the work of God in

them and he believed in the shared fellowship that he had with them in the gospel. Paul loved them, and it was a love that flowed both ways.

A Love that Flows Both Ways (7-8) Look at what he says in verse 7, “It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.” (Philippians 1:7, ESV) This attitude of grace, this gospel forbearance, this thankfulness, this joy in communion with the Philippian saints, was right Paul says, it was fitting and it was proper. It was absolutely appropriate because, he says, “I hold you in my heart.” That is an expression of deep love and devotion. Do you see it? That is the kind of thing that you write in a love letter, right? Or a love text or email or tweet or whatever it is you guys do these days. This is deep feeling.

Paul was no stoic, no mere academician, and no ivory tower theologian. He felt deeply about this church. You know, there is such thing as a feeling-less kind of love. Let me explain. Every so often, I’ll talk to a brother or sister in Christ who describes growing up with a father who maybe worked 3 jobs to put food on the table, who made sure they had everything they needed, but who never hugged them, never kissed them, never told them that he loved him. I suppose there are things to be said for a man who provides for his family like that, but that is a feeling-less kind of love. Real love demands emotion, it demands expression, it demands feeling and sentiment. Real love is emotional. Jesus felt deeply and so should we. But on the flipside, there is also such a thing as action-less love. Love that is all talk. There must be both action and emotional warmth in real love. That’s the point.

Jerry Bridges says: We can sometimes give the impression that love doesn’t involve any emotion – that it is entirely an act of the will, of one’s duty, regardless of how one feels. We can even promote the “I can love him but I can’t like him” type of attitude. The Bible does not support such an unbalanced concept of love...fervently, fondly, and affectionately (are used in the Bible) to describe the love Christians ought to have for one another... Obviously such a fervency of spirit cannot substitute for loving actions, but surely it should accompany them. We dare not settle for less. Is it dangerous to love like that? Might we get hurt if we love like that? Sure, but what is the alternative – isolationism, stoicism, self-protectionism. Prudence? Those are just acceptable words for a shriveled heart. Paul was not embarrassed to love emotionally and extravagantly and neither should we if “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (Romans 5:5, ESV)

Paul's emotional love for the church in Philippi was stirred and stoked by their loving faithfulness to him. Paul knew what it was to have people depart from him when the going got tough. He knew what it was like to see people that he loved and poured his life out for depart from him and depart from the faith. He felt the betrayal of being left holding the gospel bag. Even as he wrote this letter, there were people in Rome who were preaching Christ just to make his imprisonment worse. Not so the Philippians.

They love Paul, loved the gospel, and were faithful to both. They stuck with him. That's what Paul means when he says: "you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel." Paul was passionate in his defense of the gospel. Look through the book of Acts and you see example after example of Paul passionately defending the gospel of Christ, passionately defending Christ as Lord, the power of the cross, the reality of the resurrection. You see him passionately defending the righteousness that comes by faith in Christ, in his letters passionately defending the characteristics of the life of holiness and righteousness, decrying sin and calling people to repentance. Paul was a faithful defender of the gospel and it got him into trouble. It made him a man beloved by some but hated by most. But as Jesus said: "'If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.'" (John 15:18–20, ESV)

The Philippians loved Paul. They provided for his ministry. They followed his teaching. They did not pull away in shame or criticism when reproach fell upon him for preaching the gospel and Paul was thrown into prison, but stood fast with him. They confirmed the power of the gospel to transform people by loving Christ and serving Him, loving others and serving them, seeking to live faithfully, and they loved Paul by serving him and encouraging him in the midst of the fight.

I can testify to the kind of emotion that kind of support stirs within a pastor's heart for his flock. The notes of encouragement, the growth in grace, the sacrificial service of one another, the heart for the lost, the pursuit of holiness, the hunger for biblical truth, the desire to live at

peace with one another and encourage and edify one another and apply the word of God, the active participation in the life of the church, being a giver and not just a taker – those things unite my heart to you in a way that defies explanation and it was that way with Paul.

When you read books about military history, especially military history on the small scale, at the platoon or company level, there are certain commonalities that occur with each of them. Here is this group of men who had very little in common, from different parts of the country, some were college graduates and others barely finished high school, some religious, others pretty crude. But in the crucible of war they found a fellowship because of participation in what was desperately important to all of them – staying alive and winning the fight. They loved one another. They had a deep concern for one another. When they were in battle, they weren't fighting to take a city, or to take a hill; they were fighting for the guy next to them, for their brother, for the guy they loved. The experience of war is a powerful thing to share. But the gospel, the shared life as the people of God, and the mission of making the gospel of Christ known in this world, the hardships and trials that come with being the people of God is a greater and far more powerful thing – a more pure and holy thing. This shared life and fellowship, this partnership in the gospel and grace of God, like Paul describes here, produces the experience of the only perfect love in this world: Christ's love surging through human hearts for Christ and for one another. It did it in the heart of Paul. This section comes to a climax in the words of Paul when he says:

“For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:8, ESV) Do you see this? Paul is so filled with love for them, so affectionate in his soul, so moved by his very real love for them that he can say without any embarrassment, without any sense of overstatement, “I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ.” It is a beautiful thing to say and still more beautiful to feel. Later in this letter, Paul will write, “Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.” (Philippians 4:1, ESV) This was the love of Paul for the church on Philippi and the love of the church for Paul.

And beloved, that's how I feel about you; how I love you and want to love you even more and better. You are my joy and crown and that is why I long so much for us to be fully united and committed to Christ and to one another. Paul's words resonate with my heart and I hope that they do with you. This is how we ought to be our heart for the whole family of God but particularly this family with which we do life. This kind of love ought to be our pursuit and it ought to overflow to the world in which we live. Christ loves His people with a steadfast,

enduring, sacrificial, unchanging, unrelenting, sanctifying love. Let's love each other like that!
And Christ loves sinners with a pursuing, saving, sacrificial, transforming love. Let's love the lost like that!

Let our hearts be filled with gratitude to God for one another and for the work of grace in our lives; with joy as the overwhelming emotion when we pray for one another, certain confidence that our salvation is true and real and that God will fully accomplish it, and real love – intense, deeply felt, affection like that of Jesus Christ for His saints; what Paul felt for these brothers and sisters – a mutual love and a mutual joy that Paul shared with this church. May these things mark our fellowship and may we be committed to making it so.

Some of you here may be strangers to this kind of love, this kind of fellowship, strangers to this kind of joy – and it is because you are alienated from God and estranged from His people by your unforgiven sin...

But all of us who are in Christ, we need to be continually pulling down the barriers to the full enjoyment of Christ and of each other...

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