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:: philippians 1.1-2 ::

Foxe's *Book Of Martyrs*, chronicling the Fourth Persecution says:

...The Christians again came under persecution, this time from Marcus Aurelius, in AD 161. One of those who suffered this time was Polycarp, the venerable bishop of Smyrna. Three days before he was captured, Polycarp dreamed that a pillow under his head caught fire, and when he awoke, he told those around him that he would burn alive for Christ's sake. Hearing his capturers had arrived one evening, Polycarp left his bed to welcome them, ordered a meal prepared for them, and then asked for an hour alone to pray. The soldiers were so impressed by Polycarp's advanced age and composure that they began to wonder why they had been sent to take him; but as soon as he had finished his prayers, they put him on a [donkey] and brought him to the city. As he entered the stadium with his guards, a voice from heaven was heard to say, "Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man." No one nearby saw anyone speaking, but many people heard the voice. Brought before the tribunal and the crowd, Polycarp refused to deny Christ, although the proconsul begged him: "Consider yourself and have pity on your great age. Reproach Christ and I will release you." Polycarp replied, "Eighty-six years I have served Him, and He never once wronged me. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

In our introduction to this series we discovered that Paul, like Polycarp, was near to entering into eternity. Imprisoned in Rome, awaiting his sentence from Caesar Nero, the apostle wrote this letter to the Church and us as well. His point: to remind us that Christ is everything and life is meant for nothing but service to Him. The closer he came to physical death, the more central he placed the Savior, and his hope for his friends and fellow believers in Philippi was that they would be full of Christ and dead to self. Line by line he explains to them and to countless thousands throughout the Church age that fullness and completion that is available to those who are willing to take up the Cross of Christ and lay down the things of earth.

This morning, Paul begins by filling our focus with Jesus Christ. The foundation, the central gauge of our thoughts and activity and future should be *ONLY* the Savior, letting all other things fall away. There is no other starting point that can lead us to a place of completion or fullness.

Beginning in verse 1, we read:

Philippians 1.1-2 - 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.

Paul's introduction is somewhat routine, but in it we can find a wealth of understanding and application.

First, see the centrality of Christ in these verses. It's just a few words, but see how often the Lord is mentioned. **Of Christ, in Christ, from Christ.** Immediately this letter should focus us on the One who has won life for us. Seeing these verses should indicate to us that who I am is found in Christ. What I do is found in Christ. What my future holds is all in Christ. He and He alone is the foundation that can be filled.

Outside of Jesus is failure and emptiness. The purpose of these studies is to discover the fullness that God wants for our lives, but the directions to that destination are specific and confined to the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

John 14.6 - Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

We cannot have spiritual life without Jesus. We cannot have fullness if we only engage or invest partially in Him.

Paul, first and foremost, gets it out on the table that there is nothing worthwhile apart from the Son of God.

But he also acknowledges the recipients of this letter, specifically the saints in Philippi. Because of the inspiration of Scripture, the message of this epistle is extended to *all* saints. So, if you are a Christian, you are qualified to receive the message that Paul is delivering in Philippians. And as recipients of this letter, you are entitled to the grace and peace of God, because we are heirs with Christ.

That means peace in your decision-making. Peace in your struggles. Grace to endure hardship or temptation. Grace to deal with difficult people. Peace in the face of martyrdom or market decline. Whatever is in store for our future we can hurdle over as we approach eternity, where we have inherited the Kingdom and life eternal by the Son of God.

We're prone to ask God for things in our lives, and that's not bad. The Lord tells us to ask things in His name. But this week I would challenge each of us to ask for grace in our lives, because it is perhaps the most important provision that God has made for us.

Charles Spurgeon said:

*I hope that none of you think that you have more grace than you need, because you have not. You may, possibly, have as much grace as will last you through today; but you will need as much as that tomorrow morning, if not more.
Grace does not make us unearthly, though it makes us unworldly.
{ CH Spurgeon }*

In these opening verses I am stirred by Paul that my life be filled by the grace of Christ, which produces the rest of those things which I seek after in my relationship with Him.

But not only do we find that our lives are filled with grace and, therefore, peace, we also find that we have a fullness of responsibility in the Lord.

The letter is directed not only to the *saints*, but also to the *bishops* and the *deacons* of the church.

Deacon we generally recognize, but *bishop* isn't a word we use very often. Simply put, a bishop is an overseer, a deacon is a servant. Very simple.

Part of Godly fullness is becoming men who measure up to the Biblical model of maturity. We studied those passages in 1 Timothy and Titus where we saw *what* a man of God is and *how* we conform our lives to that standard.

Though not all of us are called to teach or to be a pastor, and not all of us are currently serving in the office of a deacon, every believing man has the call of **oversight** and **service** placed on his life.

Here's what I mean...

If you're married or have children, you are called to oversee your family, acting as the spiritual head of your household. We are responsible to lead them Biblically and actively. In contrast to our cultural mindset, our primary undertaking is the home, followed after by other areas. Home isn't the place where we relax our standards or lessen our effort, quite the opposite in fact. God comes to us and is concerned with how we are leading our families and marriages, much more so than whatever empire we're trying to build or how successful we become on earth.

We're also called to oversee the discipleship of younger Christian men. We learned that as well in the *Measure Of A Man* series from Titus and Timothy.

We each have different gifting and ability, but all of us are to help and encourage and train up younger Christians in the ways of the Lord. Paul had Timothy. He was literally living out this precept as he wrote to the Philippians. He had taken this young believer under his wing and was encouraging him, training him, helping him draw nearer to God and to learn the business, if you will, of being a Christian. We call that discipling someone.

The question is: do I have a Paul *OR* a Timothy? Is there any discipleship going on in my life?

This spiritual discipleship is something we all need. We all need to be discipled by someone who can Biblically build us up. And, if you've been a Christian for a while, you need to be discipling others. We need to partner together in that way because that's what the Lord asks us to do.

Some people will be more formal or thorough in their discipleship than others. Some people are going to be called into special relationships like Paul and Timothy or Barnabas and Mark. But each of us can invest into the lives of other believers and sharpen each other using all these precepts and examples we see in the Scriptures. It's not that we lord over younger Christians, but we look over them, helping them come along without falling by the wayside. That is a calling we can remember as we see this word *bishop*, even if we are not called to become a pastor or teacher of the Word.

And then all of us are called to service to the Lord and service to others as deacons. That's all a deacon is: A spiritual errand boy. A table-server. A volunteer. Someone who is willing to wash feet and build up others. To do what Jesus did.

None of us are free from that calling. We may, from time to time, try to escape that calling, we may ignore it or disdain it, but personal service is the bedrock of ministry and all of us should be able to find service in our lives if we evaluate ourselves. If I look within and I can't find any foot washing or table serving, then I need to humble myself and take on the heart of a servant for my Lord.

This is where Paul begins in this amazing book, by laying the foundation of Jesus Christ. By showing us that life is not about just adding Christ in, but it is about relinquishing everything but Jesus. I don't just add faith to the rest of my character or my life or my plans.

Instead, we find that Christianity, discipleship, Biblical fullness means abandoning all to follow God and then finding all the things we receive when we're willing to do so, then we go and share that understanding with people who God has brought to us.

Do you want to have a full life? Do you want to have peace and contentment? Do you want to have the kind of life that makes people stop and marvel at the power of God? I do. If you want it, here's what you do: Center your life on Christ. Invest into the lives of other believers. Serve God. Not just mentally or theoretically. Physically, actively serve God. Wait tables in the Church. Lead your family with the Biblical directives that the Lord has given you. Allow more mature Christians to encourage and train you and do the same for those who you're ahead of. Fill of your mind with God and you will find that you've filled up your time with God. And when your time is full of God, the result is abundance.