

[shareholder greeting]

:: philippians 1.3-7 ::

Our nation and much of the world has been fixed upon the BP oil disaster which occurred on April 20, claiming almost a dozen lives and causing incalculable damage to the Gulf of Mexico.

Shareholders of that oil empire have had to watch somewhat helplessly as their investments plummeted over the last weeks, shares being valued at only half what they once were. Their financial partnership is of little effect as the company attempts to end the stream of oil into the sea.

As Christians, we are heirs with Jesus Christ of all the fullness of God and His eternal life. Not only that, but God has constructed a situation by which we can invest and partner in His Kingdom. After the 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ, once we have been glorified through either the Rapture of the Church or the Resurrection of the Dead in Christ, we will literally partner with Him in ruling and reigning for 1,000 years.

But that partnership in God's Kingdom doesn't have to wait until we enter into eternity. As disciples, we have received a calling for **this** life, on this earth, not to rule and reign, but to reach and represent.

That makes us active partners. Not just shareholders, but co-laborers, co-developers, co-heirs in God's work on the earth right now.

As recipients of God's grace, you and I have fullness allotted to us. Our lives are meant to be powerful and meaningful and purposeful as we engage in this path that God has placed us on.

This morning, Paul will point out 3 specific areas of fullness and opportunity for us. They are immensely practical and immensely important. In these 5 verses we find that our lives should be full of:

- >> Prayer To God
- >> Partnership In The Gospel
- >> Partaking Of Grace

So let's take a look at our text and then see what we find.

Philippians 1.3-7 - I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 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. 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.

The key verse of this chapter and perhaps the whole book is verse 6.

Philippians 1.6 - 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.

Our lives are in progress. However, we can stall that progress through sin, carnality or inaction. We can stop the production of fruit, we can harden our hearts, we can stumble and fall.

Now, our salvation is secure, but, as the Bible says, some will be saved as through fire on the day they enter into eternity. If we want to be saved *completely* or if we want to be saved *barely* is up to us. For the disciple who submits to God and receives the plan of heaven, the end result is completion and fullness and satisfaction.

So, if you want to be a partner with God whose life is effective, a partner who doesn't just sit back but engages and takes part in the plan of God, there are 3 things to evaluate and aim toward in this text.

First, our ***prayers to God***.

Paul said,

Philippians 1.3-4 - I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy.

Prayer is mysteriously meaningful to the Christian. Whether our thoughts or pursuits are mundane or monumental, they must be discovered and developed by prayer. If speaking to God is not the thread of our daily action, then we have little chance to accomplish the work of our Savior either in our own lives or in the world around us.

Paul was a man of prayer. His conversation with God had 3 basic parts in our text: *remembering others, thanking God, and being full of joy*.

I find that most often my prayer life to be the opposite. Instead of remember others, I find that I am thinking of myself in my prayers. Instead of thanking God, I find myself **asking** God. And instead of being full of joy, often I find that my prayers are full of anxiety or discontent.

Our prayer lives are always going to be changing depending on what is going on at that time and how we are maturing in the Lord, but Paul's style of prayer here is a good thing to emulate. Because if we understand who we are in Christ, then we will be full of heavenly joy. And if we understand what it is Christ desires to do in our lives, then we will be overflowing with thankfulness. And if we understand how needy the people around us are for God's love and grace, then we will be mindful of them that we might intercede on their behalf.

Because if I really get it, if I get the fact that I am now a citizen of heaven, where Jesus Christ is preparing me a place, if I really understand that God has a path and a plan for my life which He has prepared that I might be His agent and representative here on the earth, if I truly comprehend that the Third Person of the Trinity lives within my heart and empowers me to do what Jesus did, then my prayer life will be full of this heavenly mindset where I'm overjoyed and thanking God and asking things *for others* rather than constantly for myself. And, of course, we understand that the more we biblically pray, the more we will hear the heart of God and the more we will adopt the *mind* of God and then we will be able to see the people around us the way God sees them.

Paul saw the Philippians this way. He remembered them and, since he lived with a full, heavenly mindset, he was able to think of them the way God thinks of them. He saw them as people on their way to completion.

If I am not actively making time to pray for others or to thank God or to simply receive the joy of the Lord in my conversation with Him, then I am missing out of the fullness that God is offering me in this area.

Here's our first point of application for us from this text: Today, on your lunch break, before you go to bed, during your staff meeting, whenever, do these 3 simple things:

First, take time to simply talk to God about how He has saved you. Experience the joy of knowing you are free from your sins, you are forgiven, you belong to a loving God.

Second, thank the Lord for what He has given you. Not just for food on the table, but for your life and your family and all the things He's done for you.

Third, pick a person in our church and pray for them. Maybe a friend, maybe a stranger. Just pick someone and pray for them, that God would help them and use them and revive them in every way.

These are steps toward a prayer life that is full and powerful.

So, first we see the fullness of our *prayers to God*. Second, Paul spoke of their *partnership in the Gospel*.

Philippians 1.5 - ...because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

The Philippians had received Jesus and then took up the call to not just believe, but to be used as disciples to further the Good News of Jesus Christ and make *other* disciples. Paul was thankful that they had actively, personally partnered with him and with the rest of the Church in the Gospel.

We must be committed to **furthering** the Gospel by whatever means we can. That doesn't mean we all have to become Johnny Appleseed style evangelists who just walk around shouting out Bible verses. However, it's easy for us to say, "Oh yeah, I'm committed to the Gospel. I believe all the right things." And then leave it at that. What we need to grab onto is the idea that belief must be met with action.

The Bible says faith without works is dead. It also commands us to go and **make** disciples, not just **be** believers of doctrines. Belief is important. We must hold to the true Gospel and not divert from it. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul said, "Hey, if anyone tries to give you a different Gospel, they should be accursed." So, the things we believe are keenly important. However, the Christian life is an active life which involves believing **and** doing. And from the first day when we were born again, new creations in Christ Jesus, from that day until now we have the opportunity to partner in furthering the Gospel.

There are countless ways of partnering in the work of the Gospel. Especially in this day and age. Sharing the Gospel has always been witnessing to your family and personally evangelizing individuals you come into contact with, but now, because of globalism and technology and all that

kind of stuff, now we can further the Gospel from one continent to another instantaneously and pretty easily!

Real life example. You, today, can further the Gospel by praying for a coworker or giving them a Bible verse. On your lunch break, you can spread the Gospel with a complete stranger by handing them an invite to Church that has an evangelistic message on the back. Then tonight, when you come to Ignite, you can drop a dollar or a nickel into the Cafe tip jar which goes to the Bridge of Hope program so that kids in India can receive shelter and food and an education in the Gospel. Those are 3 small things each of us can do today that can impact people all over our community and across the globe in a nation most of us have never been to. Talk about the land of opportunity!

But these opportunities are only that...opportunities. We can choose to engage in them, or we can choose to let them pass. We can choose not to share that Bible verse. We can choose not to hand out that invite or that tract. We can choose not to drop the nickel into the jar.

Partnering in the Gospel is about our choices with our time and our words and our resources. We can keep those things or we can invest those things into the Kingdom.

The application for us on this second point is to simply evaluate how we are working to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. Are we partnering in the Gospel or are we just shareholders, allowing others to take up our part of the work? That's our option, but if our goal is to reach the destination of completion and fullness, then we're never going to get there if we refuse to walk. If we're only always sitting and waiting and watching others partner in the Lord's work, then we will be hard pressed to make progress in our own lives.

The Philippians had day-by-day taken up the call to engage in God's plan for the world. They determined starting on day one that they wanted to be *partners in the Gospel*. That was the 2nd highlight of these verses.

The third was that they were *partakers of grace*.

Philippians 1.7 - 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.

3 specifics given to us on this partaking of God's grace.

First, they were partakers of grace **in Paul's imprisonment**.

The Philippians had not forgotten about Paul, though in that era it was very difficult to travel or send correspondence. When they heard that he was being held prisoner in Rome, they sent a gift of love and support to the Apostle, that his needs might be supported and that his heart may be encouraged.

We can partake in the imprisonment of others by sending aid for their suffering. We can partake in God's grace by not forgetting the needs of others.

While a person's eternal need is the most important thing, physical needs and sufferings are also on the heart of God. When those around us either at home or abroad are suffering, we should seek God

on how we might reach out to them with aid and support and encouragement and the grace of God. Whether it is clothing the naked or feeding the hungry or visiting those in prison or rebuilding a home that was destroyed or sending a box of toys to a child in the third world, those sort of actions are ways which we can partake in grace.

Second, they were partakers in grace by **defending the Gospel**.

Though we're talking a lot about action and helping those that are suffering, we must understand that those temporal issues are not above the eternal issues. What we believe and what we teach **does** matter. The Gospel is not simply social. It is eternal. Therefore, we must know what it is we believe, and we must defend it both in our own minds and also when people would come into the Church or from outside the Church and try to attack the original teachings we have received from God.

The Bible does *not* teach that truth is relative. The Bible does *not* teach that you can speak wealth into your life. The Bible does *not* teach that Jesus and Lucifer were brothers and that a new revelation would come through an American prophet who found some mysterious golden tablets.

We need to defend the Gospel from those who would dilute it, pervert it or redesign it.

Third, the Philippians were partakers in grace **in the confirmation of the Gospel**.

Their lives confirmed that the message of Christ was true. That men need salvation from sin, but that in Jesus there is life everlasting and abundant. Their lives confirmed that Christianity was *GOOD* news and that it made a difference in the hearts of people. Their lives confirmed that the Gospel transforms from captive to free, from darkness to light, from death to life. Their lives were a confirmation, a pointable testimony, that proved that Jesus was Lord and that His power is effective for those who believe.

A person could look at them and see Jesus' message and love lived out. Their lives were a validation, a case study, of who God is and what He does in the hearts of His people.

The application for this point is a bit more involved than for our prayers to God or our participation in the Gospel. Because this point is all about the heart and surrendering our lives to God's grace and to His plan.

So today, as you think about your God and as you think about your life, try to look within and evaluate whether your life is a case study for grace, or if your life testifies of something else. And if you desire to partake in the grace of God, then follow in the example and footsteps of Jesus, who loved and served and drew near to God day by day, moment by moment.

This is your life. You are a shareholder in the Kingdom of God. But you also have the opportunity to be a partner. Get on the field, put your back to the work, take up more of the fullness of God as you go out today.