

PHILIPPIANS

JOY ON THE JOURNEY

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Philippians 4.10-23
November 24th & 25th, 2012

Prepared by Rev. Curtis Bronzan, ThM
curtis@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x115

I. Connecting With One Another

This past week many of us celebrated Thanksgiving with family and friends. Doing so provided us with an opportunity to reflect on all the many things we have to be thankful for. What tops your list?

II. Introduction to this Study

In this, our final week of studying Paul's letter to the Philippians, we encounter a rather interesting passage: Paul's desire to say "Thank You" to his friends and partners in ministry in Philippi. While it has seemed he was concluding his letter at least twice before (in 3.1 and 4.8: note the word "finally"), some scholars have wondered whether these final verses were the sole purpose for the letter in the first place! While that is probably an overestimation, they should certainly not be glossed over either.

In these final verses, Paul states that as a result of God's goodness he is "content whatever the circumstances" and, furthermore, that he "rejoices greatly" with the Philippians' ongoing generosity. Interestingly, we never see the Apostle to the Gentiles explicitly say "Thank You," due in a large part to how that would have been heard by the original audience, as we will see below. While that may initially seem strange to us - or even rude - maybe our culture isn't so different from the Philippians!

III. Study the Text

- a. In this final week, it may be meaningful for you to read through the whole of Paul's letter again, recalling what we have studied this fall. Whether you have a chance to read through the entire letter or not, let's begin by comparing some of the first verses with the last, where Paul expresses his affection and concern for the church he helped begin.

Begin by reading 4.10-16. Then turn back to 1.3-11. What similarities do you see in between these pairs of passages? Due to translation from Greek, some linguistic connections are not as obvious in English - just look for overall similarities in theme (check the bottom of the page for hints)

- a) 1.3 & 4.10:
- b) 1.5 & 4.15:
- c) 1.6 & 4.13:
- d) 1.7 & 4.14:
- e) 1.7 & 4.10:

Why would Paul return to similar concepts and themes already alluded to at the outset of his letter?

- b. Notice, as alluded to above, that Paul does not specifically say "Thank You." While some scholars have wondered whether this pointed to some level of discord between Paul and the Philippians, further research into the social conventions of first century Greco-Roman culture have revealed otherwise. To put it simply, Paul saying "Thanks," would imply that, firstly, he was still in need and, as such, would welcome more gifts, and secondly, that he was in their debt and would somehow repay them.

a) Paul thanks God for the Philippians, b) Paul and the Philippians' partnership together (see also 2.16-18), c) God's continued care for the Philippians and God's continued care for Paul, d) Paul and the Philippians' sharing in difficulty, e) Paul's commitment to think, feel and act a certain way toward the Philippians and their commitment to think, feel and act that way toward him.

As such, Paul uses terminology that reflects not thanks for a financial gift, but rather language that would imply thanks for a letter. Then, he goes on invoking language of friendship and partnership, instead of patronage. Lastly, Paul invites the Philippians to see their giving not as gifts to him personally, but rather as gifts to the Lord.

Why do you think Paul would do these things? Have you ever sensed this kind of "mandatory reciprocal giving" (where you receive something and feel that, in turn, you must give something back)? Why do you think Paul would feel the need to halt such giving?

- c. Some Christian athletes, who see God as their "strength" during competition, have alluded to Philippians 4.13. Of course, they are right to do so, though if we read verses 12-13 together, we may get a different sense from the context.

Is that what Paul is seeking to communicate here? If you were asked to summarize these two verses in your own words, how would you put it? See if you can fit it all on this line:

- d. Read verses 14-19. We see, again, Paul's desire to distance himself as the sole recipient from the Philippians' gift as well as to declare that their generosity has been seen and accepted by the Lord: "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God."

What do you think Paul means by verse 19? Is this a reference to material blessings or spiritual blessings? Or both? How does Paul's conviction in verse 19 relate to his present perspective in verse 13?

- e. Since Paul is trying to deflect himself as the recipient of the Philippians gifts, what do you think he means by verse 17? Clearly, "account" is meant metaphorically. But who is the account with? And how can more be credited to their account?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Recall that the Roman authorities offered Paul nothing to eat during his imprisonment. As such, both the Philippians' care for him and Epaphroditus' willingness to travel a great distance to offer their gifts was something to be greatly thankful for (or, as Paul puts it, to "rejoice in").

Who in your life has served you in such ways? Parents? Friends? Spiritual Leaders? To be sure, their gifts were unto the Lord. Still, have you shown your appreciation to them? To God for them?

- b. How has God been your strength in the midst of difficulty? How - if at all - could you more fully rely upon His strength in times of difficulty?

Reflect upon Isaiah 40.28-31, the basis of a song we'll be singing in two of our gatherings this weekend.

- c. In what ways have you responded to God's grace by offering gifts which are "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God"? Have you seen, as St. Francis of Assisi prayed, that "it is in giving that we receive"?

V. Pray

Spend some time in prayer:

- a. For Good Shepherd, as we seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ of all ages, who connect with God, grow in faith and serve in love;
- b. That as we move into the Advent season, we would respond to God's gift in Jesus by giving generously to things that extend His Kingdom;
- c. For our worldwide missionaries to be amply supplied, that they might continue their gospel proclaiming work without hindrance;
- d. For the pastors, staff, elders, deacons and all those in leadership at Good Shepherd.