

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## A Look at Philippians: The Life of Christ - Philippians 1:1-30

Christianity has been a powerful influence on Western culture for centuries. It is hard to think of a period when the Christian faith was not in evidence in Europe. We have to read Acts 16 to find out how Europe began to be evangelised. "Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days" Acts 16:6-12.

So began God's work in Europe. It started in a small way. First the Lord opens the heart of a woman called Lydia (Acts 16:11-15). Then he sets free a young slave girl who was demon possessed (Acts 16:16-24). Finally the hardened Philippian jailor believes in Christ and is transformed into the gentlest of men (Acts 16:25-40). What is so powerful about the work at Philippi is that it began with the Holy Spirit's direction (Acts 16:6) and prayer preceded each of these remarkable demonstrations of God's grace and power. They prayed by the riverside (Acts 16:13). Paul and Silas prayed together each day (Acts 16:16) and even when they found themselves in prison they continued to pray and praise God (Acts 16:25). As we shall see, this prayerful approach to Christian service characterised the spiritual development of the Philippian church. It was to this church, some years later, that Paul writes his great letter of encouragement.

Our short study of Paul's letter to the Philippians will cover four themes:

<b>The Life of Christ</b> (Philippians 1:21)	"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."
<b>The Mind of Christ</b> (Philippians 2:5)	"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."
<b>The Knowledge of Christ</b> (Philippians 3:10)	"That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."
<b>The Strength of Christ</b> (Philippians 4:13)	"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Each of these themes teaches us about Christ as the source of all the Christian's blessings and power.

This morning we begin with the life of Christ expressed in the Christian; "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21) This life is presented throughout the letter but especially in Philippians 1.

It is widely accepted that Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians during his imprisonment in Rome. He begins his letter, "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:1) It is extraordinary that Paul writes as a prisoner in Rome to the Philippian assembly which, in part, grew out of his imprisonment there (Acts 16:25-40). What Paul proved was that his life in Christ was constantly expressed as a victory over the most trying circumstances. Whether he was in prison in Philippi or Rome made no difference. His life in Christ shone through such sufferings. He writes of himself and Timothy not as prisoners of Rome but as bondservants of Christ. Paul saw his imprisonment in Rome as the means to further the Gospel of Christ (Philippians 1:12), and the first characteristic of the life of Christ which Paul demonstrates is submission to his Saviour and a willingness to view every circumstance as an opportunity to serve.

I said earlier that the work in Philippi had much to do with prayer. Paul writes in Philippians 1:3-4, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy." The life of Christ is expressed by the Apostle's constant intercession for the Philippian believers. I have the feeling that Paul spent so much time in prayer because he had so many people to pray for. So often we pray and then stop. Paul prayed and continued to pray. He also recognised the need he himself had for the prayers of the people of God. There is a story told of a missionary who returned home after a very disappointing time on the mission field. He was late getting to his local prayer meeting and quietly sat at the back of the room. He listened carefully to the many prayers which were said but by the end of the meeting he was saddened that no one had prayed for him. How many of the people of God

need our continued prayer.

The life of Christ is also demonstrated through fellowship. Fellowship is a further theme running thorough this letter.

- In Philippians 1:5, we have, “your fellowship in the gospel.”
- In Philippians 2:1, the “fellowship of the Spirit.”
- In Philippians 3:10, “the fellowship of His sufferings.”
- In Philippians 4:15, “no church shared [or had fellowship] with me concerning giving and receiving but you only.”

When Lydia trusted in Christ in Acts 16 the first thing she did was to express fellowship, “And when she and her household were baptised, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us,” Act 16:15.

When the Philippian jailer trusted in Christ, the first thing he did was to express fellowship, “And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptised. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household,” Acts 16:33-34.

This wonderful expression of fellowship and sharing was something which characterised the Philippian assembly and one of the main reasons for Paul’s letter to the church was that they had expressed this fellowship by sending him a gift. The life of Christ is expressed by fellowship between the people of God.

In Philippians 1:6 Paul writes, “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” This verse emphasises two important aspects of the life of Christ in the believer. First, it is God’s work, which begins with conversion. Second, it is also God who completes that work. The day of Jesus Christ looks forward to Christ’s return when the work of God in every Christian will be completed. We, of course, have the responsibility: “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:15) but this can only be done by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God.

One cannot escape the genuine affection which existed between Paul and the Philippian church, “just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ,” Philippians 1:7- 8. The Bible records how much Paul valued these fellow Christians who demonstrated in such practical ways their care for him. One can imagine how much this meant to the imprisoned Apostle. He had such good memories of their kindness and the assurance of their prayers. The practical expression of love towards one another is the clearest indications of the life of Christ in a Christian. Paul recognises this love and prays that it may develop even more. Philippians 1:9, “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment.”

In John 15:2-8 the Lord Jesus teaches His disciples about fruitfulness in terms of bearing fruit (John 15:2), bearing more fruit, (John 15:2) and finally by bearing much fruit, John 15:5 John 15:8. Paul describes fellowship in service and its spiritual results in 1 Corinthians 3:5-7, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase ...” Paul sought the same progress in the lives of the Philippians when he writes, in Philippians 1:10-11, “that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

Paul also demonstrates the life of Christ by explaining to the Philippians how he was once again using his adverse circumstances, as he had in Philippi, to share the gospel and lead people to Christ. Philippians 1:12-13, “But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ.”

The greatest example of this principle is how the death of Christ resulted in the salvation of so many. John 12:24, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.”

Paul’s testimony (and imprisonment) resulted in other brethren preaching with growing confidence, Philippians 1:14, “and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” Witnessing is also evidence of the life of Christ. Seeing others expanding the work of the Gospel was the great result of Paul’s courage.

However, Paul also recognises there were those who preached the gospel for selfish gain and in opposition to the

Apostle. It is a dreadful thing to take up the gospel for personal gain and to profit from it. In Revelation 18:13 we read of those who traded "in the souls of men". The Gospel should always be preached from knowledge of the love of Christ and a desire for others to know that same love.

Paul goes on, "Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defence of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice", Philippians 15-18. This short section shows how Paul rejoiced that the gospel was preached and, that even when people with mixed motives preached it, he believed God would still bless the gospel. This is another interesting feature of the life of Christ, faith to trust God to use every circumstance for good.

So we come to the central passage of the Philippians 1 which gives us the theme, **the Life of Christ**. "For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labour; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better," Philippians 1:19-23.

Paul sought to live out the life he possessed in Christ. If he was in prison that was good. If he was delivered and enjoyed freedom again that was good. If he lived he would live for Christ. If he died he sought to glorify Christ in death. He clearly sums up his life. He explains that if he lived he would live out his life in Christ and if he died it would be his gain (Philippians 1:21). In fact, he had got to that stage in life, a life of considerable suffering, where he longed to be with Christ yet, as a true servant, he was willing to remain to serve the people of God (Philippians 1:23). The life of Christ is to be expressed on earth and ultimately to be fully enjoyed in heaven.

Paul was always keenly aware of the spiritual needs of the church of God and of the ministry God had given him to serve the children of God. He writes, "Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again" Philippians 1:24-26. Paul does not see his imprisonment as a barrier to serving the saints of God. Indeed, the writings of Paul, many of which were written in prison, have under the guidance and power of the Spirit of God served to teach the people of God down the centuries and given them a deeper understanding of the love and grace of God. Paul's writings show that the life he had in Christ was a life filled with hope and faith. He had the hope he might see the Philippians again and faith to believe God could release him from prison if it was His will.

If Paul shows us what it is to express the life we have in Christ he was also anxious that the same life might be expressed in his fellow believers. He encourages them to live lives worthy of the Saviour; he seeks news of their progress in the things of God and evidence of their unity. Philippians 1:27: "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."

The Lord Jesus prays in John 17:20-21, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." This is a very important verse because it teaches us that the unity of the people of God is a means by which people are convinced that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14). The church today is so divided that there is little wonder few seem to be convinced that God sent His Son as the Saviour of the world. This is a great challenge to how Christians behave towards one another. Do we focus on what divides or do we focus on what demonstrates the shared life we have in Christ?

Paul also encourages the Philippians not to be afraid of the world they lived in. In fact he adds that their courage in persecution was a proof of the reality of their faith and the message of the Gospel. Philippians 1:28, "and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God." This verse is best explained by Paul and Silas' experience in the Philippian jail many years earlier (Acts 16:25-40). Beaten and bleeding they prayed and sang praises to God (Acts 16:25). The result was two earthquakes. One physical earthquake in the jail (Acts 16:26) and the other, a kind of spiritual earthquake which took place in the heart of the Philippian jailer which made him realise his need to be saved (Acts 16:30-31). The life of Christ in these two great men of God did not simply overcome adverse circumstances; it transformed those circumstances from places of bitterness into places of blessing.

Paul conveys this important principle of the life of Christ by explaining, in Philippians 1:29-30, "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear in me." In Acts 9:15-16, we learn that Paul was especially chosen by Christ to live an

extraordinary life for Christ, "But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.'"

Although his own life was special, the principles under which he expressed the life he had in Christ are common to all Christians. To all of us it is given in the varied circumstances of our own lives to express the life we have in Christ.

A little while ago a friend told me about the witness of a fellow Christian who had a business. A sales representative used to visit his business. The man said he was an atheist. The man would always ask how the business was going and Christian would always say, "Very well, I've got a great MD." One day the man said to the Christian, "I thought you owned the business? Who is your MD?" The Christian explained his MD was Jesus Christ and also explained how he tried express his life in Christ in everything he did. Over time the friendship of the two men grew. The man even asked the Christian to take a dedication service for his first child. Then one day the man told his Christian friend about his boss who was dying of cancer. He added that he had told his boss about the Christian's faith in Christ and his boss wanted to meet him. Shortly afterwards the Christian visited the man's home. The man's wife explained that her husband was very weak and only had a short time to live. She explained he was only strong enough a very short visit. The Christian spent a little time with the dying man and gently explained what it meant to trust in Christ. The man asked to pray with the Christian and accept the Saviour. Just then the door opened and the wife of the man appeared. The Christian thought the moment had gone. Then the lady asked if she could pray the same prayer with her husband and together they trusted in Christ.

This happened because one Christian had the courage to introduce the Gospel into an ordinary conversation and to express the life he had in Christ. May the Lord give us the same courage to express the life that we also have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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