



God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,
day after day, and that the people of God
were filled with joy!

Produced by Ottawa RPC to help family worship.

Fri – Please read Philippians 1:27-30

Citizens of Heaven

Some of our English Bibles have translated verse 27: "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ..." Another way of saying it is: "Only behave as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ..." The people who lived in the city of Philippi were very proud to be able to say they were Roman citizens. The other towns and cities nearby were Greek: they spoke Greek and had Greek beliefs. Philippi was a Roman city in a Greek world. Whilst they had no problem with their Greek neighbours, the Philippians were proud to be Roman. But Paul is writing to the church in Philippi. He wants them to think of themselves not just as Roman citizens, but as citizens of heaven. He tells them about two traits that citizens of heaven should have.

Firstly, heavenly citizens stand firm together (verse 27). Soldiers on a battlefield are strongest when they stand side by side. Paul is warning the Philippians that they will not survive the temptations of Satan and the pressures of the world as individuals; they need one another. Christians today are no different. God has given us the church, where we encourage each other, pray for each other and support each other. This is one of the reasons we should commit ourselves to weekly worship and fellowship - so we can help one another to stand firm. Secondly, heavenly citizens suffer for their Saviour's sake (verse 29). Paul tells us not to be frightened by those who oppose us (verse 28). We should not be at all surprised when people disagree with us or even hate us for our Christian faith (see John 15:18-25). In fact, Paul actually describes this kind of suffering as a gift from God - this is what the word "granted" means in verse 29. It is when we suffer for the sake of Christ that we appreciate a little more the tremendous sacrifice he made for us, through his far greater suffering on the cross. Whether we lose a friend, a reputation, or even a job, suffering for Christ draws us closer to our glorious, suffering Saviour.

Questions

What does it mean to be a citizen?

Where are believers in the Lord Jesus citizens?

What can citizens of heaven expect to experience in this life?

*The notes in this series written by Rev. Philip Dunwoody (RPC).
They have been slightly modified.*

Thurs – Please read Philippians 1:19-26

A Life Worth Living.

In this passage Paul tells us three important things about himself. Firstly, he says he is eager - eager to honour Christ each and every day (verse 20). This is far from easy - notice Paul says he desires to do this; he doesn't say that he always does it perfectly. To "honour" Christ is to live in obedience to him, a life of holiness (see verses 1&2). For the young person this could mean rejecting the interests of a potential husband or wife because that person is not a believer; it could mean refusing to lower standards of effort in the workplace despite what others may be doing; it means honouring the Lord's Day each week in a world that doesn't. Paul is eager to honour Christ each day - even while he spends time in prison.

In verses 21-23, Paul tells us that he has a personal preference: he wants to "depart and be with Christ". Paul would love nothing more than to go to heaven and see his Saviour face to face! What could be better! Paul isn't saying he just wants to escape all his problems, but he is saying that to be with Jesus would be better than anything else. Are we excited for heaven? Are we looking forward to seeing Jesus face to face? One writer has said: "We should never think of heaven without thinking of Jesus Christ". Jesus is what makes heaven, heaven. To be with him will be better than anything we ever experience on earth.

Finally, Paul tells us that although his preference is to be with Jesus, he is content to be on earth (verse 24). Paul knows that, as long as he's alive, he can help the church - people like the Philippians. For this reason, he is content to wait a little longer to see Jesus.

As long as we are alive, we have an opportunity to serve Jesus and his church. Whether this is through preaching or cleaning toilets, organising events or praying in our homes, how might we use our lives to serve our King?

Questions

What is the first thing that Paul tells us about himself in this passage?

What is the second thing that Paul tells us about himself in this passage?

What is the third thing that Paul tells us about himself in this passage?

Mon – Please Read Philippians 1:1-6

1-2: A Joyful Greeting

Receiving a letter probably doesn't seem very exciting for us today. But imagine you were one of the young Canadian soldiers sent off to fight in the First World War in 1914. You have no WhatsApp or FaceTime or Skype - not even a landline telephone. Your only way of hearing from your loved ones would be by letter. Think how encouraging it would be to hear from them, huddled in your trench, while the war rages around you.

The people to whom Paul wrote this letter lived in the city of Philippi (in modern-day Greece). They weren't fighting a war with guns, but they were in a spiritual warzone, surrounded by people who had entirely different beliefs from them. And yet Paul begins his letter with great joy.

First, he describes himself and his young friend, Timothy: servants of Jesus Christ (verse 1). This word could also be "slaves". In Paul's world a slave's life was entirely directed by their master: he told them when to get up, what to wear, how to manage his house. The slave didn't make any decisions for themselves. Paul says he and Timothy are slaves of Jesus - but Paul was delighted about it, even though he was writing to the Philippians from prison. Secondly, Paul describes the Philippians: saints (verse 2). Most people today think that hardly anyone is a saint. Paintings of "saints" usually show someone very old, holding a Bible, who looks far more important than us. But in the New Testament, this is a description of all Christians. It means we are different, set apart, holy. It's not that we're any better than other people by nature; it simply means that we belong to Jesus, and live in obedience to God's Word. The Philippians lived in a city that was proud of its identity. Philippi was like a mini version of the great city of Rome - everything from its architecture to its fashion designs. But Paul reminds his readers that they are saints: holy people, different from the Romans and everyone else; servants of the greatest Master of all. If you are a Christian, this is who you are as well: a slave, and a saint, of Jesus Christ.

Questions:

Who is writing the letter, and to whom is he writing it?

What words does Paul use to describe himself and then the Christians in Philippi?

What or who is a saint?

Tues – Please Read Philippians 1:3-11

Joyful Prayer.

How encouraging it is when we know someone is praying for us! Notice, first of all, Paul prayed regularly for all the Philippians (verses 3 & 4). He says he prays for "all" of them "always". In verses 7&8 he describes the affection he has for them, how he "yearns" for them all. As their founding pastor, Paul knew the Philippians by name and need - and he loved them deeply. Even when he was away from them, he kept praying for them. It's good for us to keep prayer lists or journals, and to remember to pray for those we love, whether friends, family or neighbours. Paul prayed with thankfulness for the Philippians (verse 3). He calls them his "partners in the gospel". The Philippians hadn't abandoned their belief in Jesus, even after Paul had had to leave them and even though they were a small group. We don't have to be preachers or missionaries to be "gospel partners"; we just have to be faithful and courageous in holding to the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. Paul also prayed with confidence in Jesus' return (verse 6). He encouraged the Philippians that when Jesus returns, they will be rewarded for their faith. What an encouragement that is for us when we are ignored, mocked, or even persecuted - one day, Jesus will reward us for honouring him!

Finally, Paul prayed for the Philippians' growth as Christians. When a baby is born, his parents want to him grow bigger and stronger. Paul wanted the Philippians to grow spiritually, in their love (verse 9) - most likely love for each other and for Christ - knowledge and holiness (verses 10-11). Notice that Paul prays for both love and knowledge: Christians need compassion for each other, love for their Lord and an increasing knowledge of God's Word. Here is a model for all our prayers: regular, thankful, confident, praying that God would grow us and others in our Christian faith.

Questions:

Who does Paul pray for and how often?

What is a 'gospel partner'?

What does Paul pray for the believers in Philippi?

Wed – Please read Philippians 1:12-18

Advance of the Gospel

By the end of the First World War, after three years of being stuck in the mud of the trenches, a remarkable new weapon was enabling the British Army and her allies to make advances on the battlefield. It was called the tank. With this new weapon, the Allies were able to advance. This military word means "to blaze a trail". In Philippians 1:12, Paul says that he has seen the "advance" of the gospel. He was writing these words while under house arrest in Rome, yet he is delighted to report that the gospel is spreading. How?

Firstly, through unexpected opportunities. The last few chapters of Acts give us the details (see Acts chapters 21-28), but Paul had arrived in the city of Rome as a prisoner. He probably wrote the letter of Philippians whilst chained to a soldier, who guarded him day and night. He wasn't free to go where he wanted or see the people he loved. But Paul hadn't huffed or complained. Instead, he says in verse 13 that all the soldiers who guarded him - and even some of the servants of Caesar - knew that he was a Christian. He spent his time telling whoever he met about Jesus! And so, the gospel advanced. We tend to avoid anything the least bit unpleasant. But when we do suffer, whether it's sickness, unemployment, loneliness, or even imprisonment, we can use it as an opportunity to be witnesses for Jesus.

Secondly, Paul says the gospel advanced through bold believers (verse 14). Other Christians in Rome became braver about sharing their faith when they saw Paul's example. In fact, he says some of these people share the gospel for rather selfish reasons (verse 17). But Paul isn't worried about that. In verse 18, he says he rejoices in the advance of the gospel; however, it happens. When we read the stories of Christian missionaries or preachers from the past, or of our brothers and sisters around the world today facing persecution, it should make us bold, brave, to play our part in the advance of the gospel.

Questions

How was Paul able to say that the gospel was advancing through his imprisonment?

What effect was the spread of the gospel having on the Christians in Philippi?