

Paul's Prison Prayer
Philippians 1:7-11
Pastor John Miller

One of the reasons God saved us, not only to forgive us of our sins and redeem us unto Himself from sin, but He also saved us to sanctify us to bear fruit for His glory. God didn't just save you to keep you out of hell and take you to Heaven, He saved you so that right now your life would bear fruit for His glory. One of the worst things that can happen to a believer is to have a saved soul yet a wasted life. I want you to remember that statement, "saved soul, wasted life"—you go to Heaven when you die, but you didn't bear fruit for the glory of God when you lived down here on earth. You've heard the expression, "There's only one life and it will soon be past, and only what's done for Christ will last." We not only want to get to Heaven when we die, but we want to live heaven now on earth while we're alive. We want God to be glorified as Jesus said in John 15:8, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit."

The church at Philippi was very near and dear to the heart of Paul. He loved them intensely, and in his love for them, he prayed for them. We're going to look at that prayer tonight.

I want to back up to verse 6, what we looked at last week, just that one verse, and get a running start by one verse into verse 7, read down to verse 11, and go back and unpack it phrase by phrase. Paul says, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you," referring to the Philippians, "will perform it," or complete it, "until the day of Jesus Christ. 7 Even as it is meet," right, "for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace. 8 For God is my record," or God is my witness, "how greatly I long after you all," and my King James Bible has, "in the bowels of Jesus Christ," it would actually be tender mercy and compassion of Jesus Christ. Verse 9, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; 10 That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; 11 Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."

Paul had a very deep and abiding love for the believers in Philippi. First, he thanked God for them, verse 3; in verse 4, a few weeks ago, we saw that he was actually praying for them, and tonight we get the actual prayer; and we see in verse 6 that he was confident about them. We looked at verse 6 in depth last Wednesday night. Paul was confident that the very God which began a good work in them, ten years earlier when Paul on his second missionary journey came to Philippi, God began a work in their hearts, and the very God who began that work, which is a good work, he says, God's work is always good and in us, is able and will complete it; and the date of completion, "...the day of Jesus Christ." We see that same phrase when we get to verse 10, he says, "...till the day of Christ."

Paul was always looking and living in anticipation of the day that Christ would come, and my feeling is (I can't be dogmatic) that is a reference to the rapture of the church but also could and

would include the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Any way you slice it, for the believers it's the coming in the rapture; seven years later, it's the coming of Christ, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS," when He sets up His Kingdom on the earth for a thousand years when Christ will complete that good work that He began in them.

Let me repeat this. In verse 3, Paul thanked God for them; verse 4, he prayed for them, we'll see that tonight; in verse 6, he was confident about them; and tonight, verse 7, he says, "I have you in my heart;" verse 8, "...how greatly I long after you." In verses 7-8, which are transitional from verse 6 to where he prays in verse 9, is actually a Scripture which transitions us into the prayer beginning in verse 9. In verse 7, "...I have you in my heart," and in verse 8, "...how greatly I long after you."

Go back with me to verses 7-8. Paul says, "Even as it is meet," right, "for me to think this of you all," this is going back to verse 6, "...that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," and we talked about the security of the believer and what God begins, God ends; what starts with grace, ends in glory; when God starts a work in your life, God completes that work and finishes that work; so he says in verse 7, "Even as it is meet," right or fitting or proper, "for me to think this of you all," Paul's thoughts were about them, not himself, even though he's in prison. He'll mention bonds in this text. He says, "I'm thinking about you," so "I'm thinking about you, I'm praying for you, I'm longing for you." This fellowship that Paul had with the Philippians was very, very marvelous, and it was a role model for what kind of fellowship we should have as believers as well.

When we're thinking about them, and then he says, verse 7, "...because I have you in my heart," so Paul was absent from them. At this time Paul was under house arrest in Rome awaiting trial before Caesar Nero, and they were concerned about him. It's possible that before he wrote to the Philippians, he'd already had some preliminary trials and stood before Nero. At this trial that he was going through right then, he would be released, had a short time of freedom, and then would be arrested a second time. This time he was thrown into a dungeon in Rome called the Mamertine Prison. He would be brought before Nero a second time, found guilty of insurrection against Rome, taken outside the city of Rome, and his head was severed from his body. Just before this, Paul wrote 2 Timothy where he said, "I have finished the race. I've finished the course God has laid out for me," and he says, "There's a crown of righteousness laid up for me, and not for me only but all those who love his appearing."

That phrase, "a crown of righteousness," I think about Paul losing his head, but the moment his head was severed from his body, he was in Heaven wearing a victor's crown. What a marvelous truth—"...to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." You don't need to fear death. Death, for the believer, is a friend not a foe. Isn't that a glorious truth? It's your graduation. It's your coronation. Paul says, "I think about you, I long for you," verse 7, "I'm praying for you," we see in verse 9. This is true Christian fellowship. Paul cared about other individuals.

Now, Paul said, verse 7, "...to think this of you all," so "I have you in my thoughts," and, "I have

you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds,” as I said, Paul was in chains. At this time he was under what’s called “house arrest.” He rented a house. They didn’t have an ankle bracelet on him which had an electronic device, he was actually chained to a Roman soldier and could have people visit him in his own house because he was a Roman citizen. He says, “I have you...in my bonds,” and Paul was coming before Caesar Nero, so he refers to using this for “... the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.” Every one of these phrases is just pregnant with some really blessed thoughts, “I think about you, you’re in my heart, you’re in my bonds,” in other words, “I’m here in prison, but you’re bound with me.” When we think about Christians that are imprisoned, we should be with them in spirit praying for them, lifting them up before the Lord. Paul says, “You’re with me, even in my bonds,” and then, “When I’m in the courtroom, and even in prison, I’m still preaching the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.” He’s defending it before Nero, notice the word “defense.”

We have used here the Greek word apologia, where we get our word apologetics from. That’s the Christian area of theology where we defend the faith. Then, Paul says, “I’m also in the “... confirmation of the gospel,” or “I’m confirming the truth of the gospel by the life that I live.” I love that closing statement, “...ye all are partakers of my grace,” which means sharers with. It’s not the word koinonia, but it conveys the same concept which is translated fellowship. The Greek word for “partakers” literally means communion with or sharers with. Paul is referring to the fact that we are together, the apostle and the believers in Philippi, all saved by grace.

Did you know that the ground at the foot of the cross is all level? Rich, poor, bond, free, male, female, black, white, whatever color of skin you have, we all stand as sinners before a Holy God and we all are saved by God’s grace. No one is saved with some special avenue or way, we’re all saved by God’s grace. The ground is level at the foot of the cross, and what Paul is saying is that you’re partakers of my grace—the same grace of God that saved me is the grace of God that saved you. That’s something that we should keep in mind, when we’re thinking of other brothers and sisters and believers in the body of Christ, is that we’re all saved by grace. It’s not because you’re special or because you’re intelligent or good-looking—sorry about that—not because you’re so talented God wanted you on His team, but because of God’s grace.

I love John Newton’s song “Amazing Grace.” I think that’s the greatest hymn ever penned in the English language. Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me. A lot of churches don’t like that phrase “a wretch like me.” I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind but now I see. We all need to realize that we’re saved by God’s amazing grace; not only that, we’re “...partakers of my grace,” in that we’re also sustained by the same grace that saves us. I love this concept!

This week I met with dear friends of mine from my former church. They have four lovely sons, and last Wednesday night at ten o’clock, after our service there in San Bernardino, their 19-year-old son Josh was killed in a tragic automobile accident. Nineteen years ago I stood on a Sunday morning in my former church and held him as a baby dedicating and consecrating him to God. I went to see them Monday morning. We wept and prayed together and tried to encourage one another in the Lord, but I was thankful, their response when their hearts were

broken, their lives are devastated, that they're being sustained by God's grace. They've not only been saved, his mom and dad, keep them in your prayers, were saved under my ministry, their son was dedicated under my ministry, and now he's in Heaven by the grace of God, but God is sustaining and strengthening them.

John Newton also wrote, Through many dangers, toils and snares, We have already come, 'Twas Grace that brought us safe thus far, And Grace will lead us home. Amen? We're saved by grace, we're beared up, sustained, and strengthened by God's grace through the trials and the hardships of life, so Paul in his bonds was saying, "I thank God that you're partakers, sharers of my grace."

Verse 8, "For God is my record," the word "record" is usually translated witness. It's the Greek word *martyr* where we get the word martyr from. It's one who lays down their life as a witness, so he says, "God is my witness," and I love this, "...how greatly I long after you all," he could have just said, "I long after you all," but instead he just said, "...greatly I long after you all." How intense is the love of the family of God. How much love we can have for one another, brothers and sisters in Christ, because we share a common grace, because we're sustained by a common grace, because we worship the same Lord, we have the same Holy Spirit; so he said, "I want you to know how greatly abundantly I long after you all," then uses this expression "...the bowels of Jesus Christ."

In a modern translation it would actually have in the compassion, the mercies, the tender love and compassion or mercies of Jesus Christ. The reason the King James Bible uses the word "bowels" is because the word is actually quite closely connected with your internal organs, the very Greek word that's used. You know when you're really emotional, you feel something really heavily, sometimes you feel sick to your stomach or your stomach is in knots or your heart feels broken? That's the concept there. Paul's whole being, his inner life, was just so engaged in this love that he had for these believers there in Philippi—the tender mercies and compassions. We might render that today in our English language, "my heart," or "the heart of Jesus Christ."

This leads us to verses 9-11. I won't tarry, because we are going to break bread together tonight, but the prayer runs from verses 9-11. It's really his love, his thoughts, his care for them, his emotional attachment to them leads them to pray. If we are believers, we should do the same. If you actually go back to verse 4, he was praying for them; verse 6, he was confident about them; verse 7, he remembers to share God's grace with them; and in verse 8, he's longing for them in the bowels or heart of Jesus Christ. If we have that same connection with believers in the body of Christ, then we should also pray for them. The next step is a logical transition from loving them, longing for them, thinking of them, to praying for them. If you're thinking of other believers, you should be thankful for them and prayerful for them.

Many, many times God puts people on our minds and on our hearts, and the two go together, so that we'll get on our knees and from our lips will pray to God for them. When someone comes to mind, you should pray for them. I know that if I ever come to your mind, pray for me because I need all the prayers that I can get, and I thank God for your prayers.

What I want to point out is five things that Paul prayed for the believers in Philippi. Technically, and I have to admit this, being faithful to the text, there are only three petitions and we see that with the key word, “that,” verse 9, “...that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment,” the second petition, verse 10, “That ye may approve things that are excellent;” and the third petition, verse 10, “that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.” Faithful to the text, there are really three petitions, but I’m going to break them into five—yes, you heard me right—because there are some subpoints that come after them that build on the petitions that he gives, so the three petitions have subpoints.

If you’re taking notes, there are five things that we can pray. Have you ever prayed for somebody and you don’t know what to pray for? You think, What do I ask for? What do I pray for? “Lord, bless them, in Jesus name. Amen.” Oh, that’s a deep prayer. Here are five concrete things you can pray for yourself, for your pastor and pastors, for your husband or for your wife, for your friends, or for your brothers and sisters in Christ. The first is an abounding love, verse 9. Pray that their love will grow and overflow. Pray for others to have an abounding love. Look at it, verse 9, “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge,” I want your love not to be just sloppy agape, I want it to be a knowledgeable and discerning love, “in all judgment.”

I want you to note what’s on the top of Paul’s prayer list—not healing, not for money, not for prosperity—those things are fine, those things are okay. He didn’t say, “I pray God gives you a new donkey, a four-wheel drive donkey.” No. Now, that’s fine. If you need a new donkey, pray for a new donkey. “I pray that God will give you a new house.” If you need a house, God will give you a house. “I pray that you’ll be healed,” and God heals. I believe in divine healing, and I pray for people to be healed and have seen people healed. More important than those petitions are spiritual life, so put the priority where Paul puts it, that you would have overflowing love. Why would he start with love? Because love is the mark of the true child of God. Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, “And now abideth faith, hope, charity,” love, “...but the greatest of these is charity,” love.

The word “love,” by the way, is actually agape, so it’s the divine, spiritual, fervent love. Paul isn’t praying for them to just love, look at the text, Paul prays, “...that your love may abound,” or overflow. That phrase “may abound” or overflow is in the present tense which means keep abounding, keep overflowing. He uses a word picture here that you might not see in your Bible, but it’s definitely a word picture. The word was used of a river that was actually overflowing its banks. Usually when we think of a river that overflows its banks, we think of disaster, bad things are happening, and we don’t want a river to overflow its banks. But Paul is using it as an analogy of our love, as a Christian, is that they should overflow, that we should have an overflowing love, and that it should keep overflowing and gushing out—not just a little love, but an abundance of love. If you want to be blessed sometime, take that theme as a cross-reference, “increasing in love,” and run it through a Concordance. You’ll find over and over in many of the Pauline epistles, Paul prayed this for the believers, that you have an overflowing, abounding kind of love, that your love overflows.

Let me give you one example, 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10. Paul says, "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. 10 And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more." Again, the "abound" means an overflowing river of love. The word love is agape. You find it defined in 1 Corinthians 13. How does your life overflow with agape? You have to be filled with the Spirit, Romans 5:5, that when you've been justified that you have this overflowing love in your hearts. Galatians 5:22 is the fruit of the Spirit.

Secondly, the Word of God because notice, verse 9, Paul says, "...yet more and more in knowledge," so not only should your love overflow, but it should be "in knowledge and in all judgment." That means you need to be discerning that you love the things that God loves and hate the things that God hates. There is this misconception today that if you're a true Christian, you just love everybody and everything's okay. We can love everybody, but we also need to hate sin and unrighteousness. We need to be discerning that we don't confuse love and approval. You can love somebody even though you don't approve of them, but it's a very, very delicate fine line to walk that you want to make sure that you don't communicate your approval for their sinful behavior. That's a challenging thing. Jesus was, obviously, love incarnate, but He made a whip, went into the temple, and overthrew the moneychanger's tables. He drove them out with the whip and said, "You have turned My Father's house into a den of thieves."

There are some Christians that then would have said, "Jesus, that's not very nice. You're supposed to be the Messiah. Jesus, what're You doing? That's unloving." He saw that He had a righteous indignation which was consistent with His love because of God's holiness. Notice that their love, as based on true discernment from Scripture, is to be knowledgeable; so we grow in love by feeding on God's Word. The words "...in all judgment," means discernment, being discerning who you love, how you love them, and knowing good from evil.

Here's the second thing that you can pray for brothers and sisters in Christ, discerning approval. The end of verse 9 flows right into the beginning of verse 10, "That ye may approve things that are excellent." The phrase, "may approve," means used for testing metals and money to find out its value. They had real gold, real silver, and would test it to make sure it was authentic. They would be put to the test. If you are mining gold, you take it to the assayer's office and they test it to make sure it's genuine and for its value. That word "approve" means to test and find its worth.

The word "excellent" means the things which differ. He's not talking about things between the good and the bad, it's between the primary and the secondary, between the temporal and the eternal values. Paul's not praying for discernment between right and wrong or good and evil, but good and better or good and best. Again, this is what we call prioritizing. As believers, we need to prioritize. Am I using my time, my talents, my treasures for the best usage that God has entrusted them to me? Am I maximizing what God has entrusted to me—my time, talent, and treasures—for His glory so that when you pray you'd have discernment to use these gifts for His best use.

The NIV actually translates that discern what is best. The J.B. Phillips translation has recognize the highest and the best. Even as Christians, it's easy to spend our time and our attention on things that are secondary of value, not eternally of value.

I love that in 1 Corinthians 15, when Paul comes to the end of the section on the resurrection and the rapture of the church, he says "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." Paul says, at the end of that section, "Therefore we labor for the things that are eternal, not the things that are temporal." We need to be discerning about how we use what God has entrusted to us, so pray for a discerning approval.

The third petition in the first part of verse 10 is that he's praying for a blameless character. Notice verse 10, "That ye may approve things that are excellent," stop right there. It concerns the believers in Philippi, "that ye may be sincere and without offence," and they do it, "till the day of Christ." The first part of verse 10, "That ye may approve things that are excellent," the second part is our focus, "that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ."

The word "sincere" simply means without alloy, without mixture, unadulterated. It comes from the Latin word that literally means without wax. In those days, pottery was one of the main industries. By the way, pottery is one of the oldest—if not the oldest—industry of mankind. They didn't have Tupperware, glass, or metal bowls, they had clay pots. Everyone was a potter, everything was in pots. When they would throw a pot or a vase, they would have the fine vases and the daily pots and would sell them in the marketplace.

When you'd go into the marketplace, the items that had no cracks filled with wax to patch up the mistakes had a tag on them that would actually say "sincere," which meant without wax. If it had a crack or a blemish, they would mix wax and powder from the clay and mix it in to match the color and actually fill in the cracks with the wax. It was like putty or a fill in. It's interesting, too, because the only way you could know for sure that it was "sincere," and not just the tag, you would actually have to go outside the marketplace, hold it up to the light, and in the light of the sun you could see whether or not that pot had a crack or blemish in it. If it was "sincere," it had no cracks or blemish, it had no wax filler, and it was sound. It was a good piece. He's praying for us as believers that we will be sincere and won't have any hypocrisy or duplicity in our lives, that we will practice integrity.

It's interesting, too, 2 Corinthians 4 teaches us that we are clay pots. It actually teaches that we are cracked clay pots, believers are crackpots, so that the glory of the treasure in us is what shines forth, not the pot. We're just clay pots, but the glory is in the treasure—Christ in us. That's the hope of glory. It concerns others. It concerns themselves, "...that ye may be sincere," it concerns others, "and without offence," that phrase "without offense" means that in your relationship to people around you that you don't stumble them. The word is skandalon. The word was used of a trigger on a fowler's trap.

When I was a little boy (some of you folks did the same), I got a cardboard box, a stick, a

string. I set the cardboard box up in the backyard, propped up the box on the stick, put some bread underneath the box, tied a string to the stick, and backed up behind the house. One time I backed up behind the incinerator and sat down on an ant hill. Whenever I'm telling this story, I think of my pants full of ants that day. We used to have so much fun, shame on us boys. A crow or bird would actually come and get the bread, and we'd pop the stick, down comes the box, and we got a bird. Remember, again, when I was a little guy, when I caught my first bird, I was all excited but didn't know what to do—I can't take it home, I can't take it to school, I don't have a cage for it, I can't feed it—so we'd just catch and then release them. We caught a big, black crow under that box, but that little stick would actually be called a skandalon, a trap, a trick stick.

Paul says, "You don't want to trip anyone." It came to be used for stumbling or offending someone. If you're sincere in yourself, you don't want to stumble anyone else in your relationship to them. He's talking about their blameless character.

Thirdly, it concerns Christ, "...till the day of Christ," so we're to live in sincerity without offense until Jesus Christ comes again. Again, all petitions you can pray for one another.

Here's the fourth petition, verse 11, one of my favorites, spiritual fruit. Again, this grows out of the last petition at the end of verse 10. He says, "Being filled," there's really no break. You shouldn't really have a verse 11; verse 11 should be part of verse 10. He says, "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." Because we have been given righteousness of Christ and positionally we stand before Him righteous, we can practice righteousness before men.

Every believer has two relationships: our standing in Christ, which is perfect, immutable, and doesn't change, Christ's righteousness is imputed to us; and then our practice. It also coincides with justification, my position; sanctification, my practice—how you live your Christian life before others. This is done by the power of Jesus Christ. There could be no righteous fruit in anyone's life apart from a relationship with and a dependence on the Person of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. You must be in Christ, Christ must be in you, and you must live to the glory of God. How important that is. You need to be born again, filled with the Spirit, walking in the Holy Spirit's power, so the Bible says, His life will be lived through us. That's what it means to be fruitful spiritually—you bear fruit for His glory.

Last, but not least, this is what I said by I've added points, that we should pray that others might bring glory and praise to God, which are by Jesus Christ—they're produced by Him, through Him, and in Him—and they're all "...unto the glory and praise of God." Paul prayed for an abounding love, a discerning approval, blameless character, spiritual fruit, and that their lives, and our lives, would bring glory to God.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Again, if you put it all together—that they overflow with the love of God, they be devoted to the things of God, that they be sincere without

offense until the day of Christ and bear the righteous fruit of Christ and God, and that all the glory and all the praise and all the honor be to God. Amen? Let's pray.