

ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK & BRAY - 6TH SEPTEMBER 2020

PHILIPPIANS: PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL (PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11)

Welcome

Hello and welcome to this transcript from our service on the 6th September. This is the first sermon in a series looking at the New Testament letter to the Philippians. This is a wonderful little letter and I think it can teach us so much at this time about how we can move forward in the faith and shine even brighter as a followers of Jesus. - Rev. Andrew Gill

Call to Worship - Psalm 149:1-5 (NLT)

Praise the Lord!

Sing to the Lord a new song.

Sing his praises in the assembly of the faithful.

O Israel, rejoice in your Maker.

O people of Jerusalem, exult in your King.

Praise his name with dancing,

accompanied by tambourine and harp.

For the Lord delights in his people;

he crowns the humble with victory.

Let the faithful rejoice that he honours them.

Let them sing for joy as they lie on their beds.

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
you have loved us with an everlasting love,
and redeemed us by the perfect sacrifice of Christ;
so we lift our hearts to you this morning
in praise and thanksgiving.

By your grace we come to the gateway of a new term and season;
grant that we may enter it with humble and grateful hearts.

Refresh our desire to walk more closely with you,
to live and love by the teaching and example
of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Forgive us the errors and offences of the past,
and set us free from the sin that clings to us,
so that with renewed purity we might discover
your purpose for us in the months ahead.

May the light of your presence scatter
our fears and worries for the future
and fill our hearts with vivid hope.
Send us your Spirit today to guide us
as we travel on the path set before us
to the perfection of your Heavenly Kingdom

Reading - Philippians 1:1-11 (NRSV)

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

*To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers
and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord
Jesus Christ.*

*I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy
in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the
gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who
began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus
Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold
me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my
imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. For God is*

my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Sermon - 'Moving Forward'

Jesus once told a story about a rich man who went on a journey (Matthew 25:14-30). Before he left, he gathered his servants and gave each of them a portion of his wealth according to their ability. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag. Then he went on his journey. The servant who received five bags of gold immediately put it to work and earned five more bags. The same with the servant who received two bags, he gained two more bags. But the servant with one bag was afraid, so he went into the back garden, dug a hole, and buried the money.

When the rich man returned, he was delighted with the first two servants and rewarded them even further. But when he heard the report from the servant who buried his gold, he was furious. He said, “you are wicked, lazy, and worthless” and fired him on the spot!

I think that Jesus told this story so we would ask ourselves, “what am I going to do with what God has given me?” It would be very easy, with life the way it is at the moment, for us as a small church to fearfully seek just to protect what we already have. To bury ourselves in the ground until all this is over. But our Lord Jesus, by this parable, warns us against that kind of an attitude.

I believe that God has given us everything we need to not only survive this pandemic, but to thrive in it! My desire and prayer is not just that we persevere through these difficult times, but that we prosper in them! This autumn term is not about pausing but about progressing. To help us do that we are going to look at the New Testament letter of Philippians.

Of all the churches that the Apostle Paul planted, the Philippian church was probably doing the best; they were loving, kind, and sticking to the truth. But Paul writes to encourage them to keep moving forward. All through this letter he is telling his friends to progress in their love, in their service, in their generosity, in their purity, in their knowledge, and in their joy. This is a wonderful little letter, and I think it can teach us so much at this time about how we can move forward in the faith and shine even brighter as a church. (I have included a copy of our Philippians reading plan, and I encourage you to join us and read through the letter over the next few weeks)

This morning we are going to look briefly at the opening few verses and focus on Paul’s prayer. Before we look at *what* Paul prays for his friends, I want us to see *how* he prays for them.

Firstly, notice that he prays with gratitude. Verse 3, *“I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy”*. The first step in moving forward is always to be thankful for how far you have already come. Paul is thankful because of the Phillipian’s *‘partnership in the gospel’* (v.5). The word gospel means ‘good news’ and here it refers to the life changing story of Jesus. The Philippians are partners because they have heard, believed and are living according to that good news of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. But more than that, they are practically supporting Paul in his mission by giving and caring for his needs. As a community with Paul they are working together for the advancement of the gospel.

Paul prays with gratitude and he prays with confidence. I love verse 6 where he writes, *“being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”* This year the Blackrock congregation celebrates its 125th anniversary. The exact age of the Bray congregation has been a little more difficult to verify, but is at least 175 years old. This verse means that if God is at work in our churches, which I believe he is, then we not only have a great past but we have spectacular future. God does not leave projects unfinished. What he starts he will complete, and he is not done with us yet. Today we can be thankful for what God has done in the past, and confident about what he will do in the future.

How does Paul pray? He prays with gratitude and confidence. If we look at verse 9-11 we see what he prays for, *“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.”*

This is a gospel prayer about moving forward and progressing in the faith, and it is a great model to use in our own prayers. Paul prays that their love for God and for others would overflow, and that it would grow exponentially. You can never have too much love, it is a wonderful thing to pray for your friends and your family. But for love to be effective at making a difference in our world it needs to be accompanied by the knowledge and wisdom of God. So Paul prays that this too will grow in this church that he loves. He then prays that this abundant love will result in good decisions and godly choices, so his friends will live lives marked with integrity and obedience, filled with the fruit of righteousness, to the glory of God.

In essence this is a prayer to be like Jesus, for Jesus. All these qualities that Paul prays for here, we see in their fullness in Christ. He had perfect love and supreme wisdom, he lived a pure and blameless life, and made the best decision of all, which was to glorify God by laying down his life for us so that through him we could be made righteous and have hope for his return.

So at the start of this month as we begin this new term and season, let this be our prayer for ourselves, for our family, and for our church.

Prayer

*Father God, This is our prayer,
that our love may overflow more and more
with knowledge and full insight
to help us to determine what is best
so that on the day of Christ
we may be pure and blameless,
having produced the harvest of righteousness
that comes through Jesus Christ
for your glory and praise. Amen*