

Grace from God, Grace for Each Other

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[0 : 00] This is a sermon from King's Church West. Today we are indeed starting a new series on Philippians.

And I think it is helpful, as we get into this, over this term really, this next seven, eight, nine weeks, I think it's helpful just to start by giving you a little bit of background on what is Philippians, what's it all about.

Well, Philippians is a New Testament letter written from the Apostle Paul to the church in Philippi. So the first thing you need to know about the book, it's called a book in the New Testament, but it's actually a letter that was written from one person to a group of people.

So that's important to know, because I think the letters of the New Testament, particularly the ones of Paul, I think within them, and the Philippians would be no different in this sense, they're full of some really well-known bits of Scripture.

[1 : 02] Bits that people really like. The bits that you might find on people's fridge magnets. So you'll often find, and up to a point there's nothing wrong with that.

But I think one of the things that we need to remember as we look at this particular book, is that the book of Philippians, like all of Scripture, was written for us, so we can gain good things from it by dwelling on it, meditating on it, reading it, but it wasn't written to us.

Okay? It was written for us, but it wasn't written to us. So there's things in there that inevitably you won't understand. If you were to receive a letter from somebody, maybe a close personal friend or a relationship, I know people don't really send letters these days, but let's just assume for a moment that they still did.

There'll be lots of things in that letter. If somebody else were to read it, they would say to you, what does that mean? What is that all about? And let me give you just an example to illustrate this.

I pulled this off my bookshelf this morning. Great letters that have been written to the times. You might think, who on earth would have a book like this on this bookshelf?

[2 : 11] Well, you're looking at it. Okay? So, now, I won't really go into any of the letters themselves. You're welcome to have a gander at this after I'm finished. But on many of the...

As you can imagine, people are writing to a newspaper. They're writing about a particular subject that they've obviously got an opinion on. And at the bottom of virtually all of these letters, there's a little bit of explanation about what was the particular thing that was going on that we, in 2025, at this juncture, we wouldn't know about.

Any letter is the same in that sense. There's stuff going on that we don't always know about. So, we have to put together the pieces a little bit to try and understand.

So, I would encourage you, as this series takes place over these next few weeks, I would really encourage you to read the letter of Philippians for yourselves, for one thing.

Think about it. Dwell on it. Read it a few times. If you're able to, and if you like reading, you know, maybe read a book on it, something like that. If you like podcasts, maybe listen to a podcast, what people have said about it.

[3 : 13] But dwell on it. Think about what it might have been about. Just remember that it is a letter. That being said, I am going to now give a little bit of background on what was going on.

So, the Apostle Paul, as you know, went around from city to city, after Jesus' death and resurrection, planting churches. And one of the cities that he went to was a city of Philippi.

Now, Philippi was what we call a Roman colony. Okay? So, Paul went all around the Roman Empire. But there were certain cities that we'd call colonies.

And what that means is that they would, in order to sort of extend their superpower status into the local region, they would set up certain cities and they would make an exact model of what Rome

was like.

Physically, they would put up grand buildings and temples and things like that, such as you would find in Rome. But also, the laws that would be established would be exactly like the laws you'd find in Rome. And even the people, because what they would do is they would populate it with retired Roman soldiers.

[4 : 18] And basically, they would run the show. Okay? So, it's kind of like just a declaration by Rome that this city is a city that is a little symbol of the Roman Empire where you are.

Okay? Is that what's going on? Now, you might have noticed, if you ever read the book of Acts, you might have noticed that wherever Paul seems to go, trouble always follows. Riots, imprisonment, earthquakes sometimes, as we'll find out today.

And you think, well, why is that? Why did Paul cause so much trouble? Well, this is the reason why. It's because Paul's message that he preached everywhere he went was this.

Jesus is Kyrios. Jesus is Lord. Okay? Jesus is the Lord, not just of his household, not just of the Jewish people from which he came, but over all creation.

Jesus is Kyrios even over Philippi, even over Rome, even over Caesar himself. Now, this was a message which did get Paul into trouble.

[5 : 33] Because, of course, the message of the Roman Empire was a little bit different. It wasn't Jesus is Kyrios. Jesus is Lord. It was Caesar is Lord. And so, when Paul went into places like Philippi, which were set up to specifically give the message that Caesar is Lord, and he went around saying, no, no, no, Jesus is Lord, that's what got him into trouble.

And so, when Paul landed in Philippi, he went around preaching his message and he made a couple of converts. A lady called Lydia, it says the Lord opened her heart to believe Paul's message.

Now, Lydia was a wealthy merchant. It says that she dealt in purple. Okay? Purple? So what? What's so good about purple? Well, purple in that time would have been something that only royal people would wear.

It was a royal color. So, Lydia, if she didn't have herself access to the highest levels of power, she had access to people who had the highest access of power. She would deal in this purple cloth and that itself would be taken to Caesar and his household.

So, she was a wealthy, influential woman, but she believed Paul's message. There was another convert, a slave girl, right at the other end of the social spectrum. And she was demon-possessed and Paul drove out that demon from her and she became a convert.

[6 : 56] So, as I mentioned, Paul's preaching got him into trouble. And guess what? He ended up in prison. But guess what? Again, God sent an earthquake and busted him out of there. But Paul, being gracious, he didn't actually leave.

Instead, he hung around to convince the jailer that he, too, should start following Jesus. So, the jailer and his household were all converted as well.

So, there's really three converts that we know about at this point. There's Lydia. There's the jailer. And there's the formerly demon-possessed, formerly slave girl.

A bit of a ragtag group of individuals, I think you can probably agree. And do you know who they kind of remind me of? They kind of remind me of us. You know, within the grace of God and within King's Church, West Lothian, there's all sorts of different people amongst us.

And the wonderful truth is, there's not even that much that we have in common with each other, apart from the fact that Jesus has come into our lives and brought us closer to him.

[8 : 06] Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that wonderful news that we have that amazing connection? So, at some point then, Paul moves on as he does, and he keeps moving around the Mediterranean basin. And eventually, one of his many visits to jail, he ends up in jail in Rome this time, waiting to receive his trial before Caesar himself.

And while he's there, he receives a visit from a man called Epaphroditos. And Epaphroditos greets him and gives him some concerning news.

He tells him that there are divisions in the church in Philippi. And so, Paul writes this letter to the church in Philippi that we're going to read over the next few weeks.

And it's amazing what Paul does, because I do believe that that is the reason why he wrote this letter.

But the funny thing is, he doesn't open with, oh, you Philippians, you really should get on better, or something like that. It's just right at the end of the book, in the bit that most people maybe would even skip over, after Paul has gone through lots of wonderful things.

[9 : 23] This is what he says. He says, oh, just as a closing thing, I plead with lodia, I don't know who lodia is, and I plead with Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord.

Yes, I ask you, my true companion, help these women, since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, whose names are written in the book of life. So just tucked in at the end, that's the reason he wrote the letter.

But preceding that, Paul gives some of the most wonderful theology that you will find in the Bible, about reasons to be unified.

And what are those reasons? The reasons are that Jesus himself came and humbled himself so that we might walk with him and be united together in him for all eternity.

So, without further ado, we're going to get into the message itself. So we're going to read just the first section of the book, or the letter, I should say. Philippians 1, verse 1 through to 11.

[10 : 33] So, yep, wonderful. Thank you. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you and all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Be in confidence of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you since I have you in my heart. And whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. 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 with Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

So Paul kicks off by giving some really good reasons why we should be unified. And first of all, by showing us that we should be humble.

[11 : 52] Nothing helps unity by having a good perspective of yourself, by realizing that we as individuals are not that special, but if we humble ourselves, it's so much easier to be unified.

So what's the first reason? It's because the first reason is this, anything that is good in us is because of God's work. Verse six, he who began a good work in you will carry on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

He who began a good work in you. The amazing truth is that if you are in Christ, he has begun a good work in you.

No matter what picture or image you might have of yourself, he has begun a good work in you. Now, I spend, through my work, I spend a lot of time with kind of business type people, business leaders, I guess, and often, and I'm kind of interested, so I often maybe listen to interviews with them, that kind of thing, and, you know, often people will say, you know, what do you, what do you put your success down to?

Because often these people are very successful, made lots of money. And, now, most of them won't say something like, well, the reason why I'm so successful is because I'm just really talented and intelligent.

[13 : 20] They might think that, but they don't usually say that. Usually what they say is something like this. They usually say, well, do you know, I worked really, really hard. And when other people were maybe going out, I was working on my business.

When other people put themselves into, into family life and doing all that sort of stuff, I was working on my business. And that's why that hard work has, has made me, the person I am today has made me so successful.

Now, no doubt, hard work is of a lot of benefit. But that isn't the kind of work that Paul is talking about here. Here's what it says in Romans chapter four.

It says, the one who does not work for righteousness, but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, faith is credited to him as righteousness.

So the one who does not work for righteousness, but who trusts God, who justifies the ungodly, faith is credited as righteousness. The kind of work that he's talking about is a work that God has

done in you that he's given you faith, which is credited to you as righteousness.

[14 : 30] It's the righteousness you receive. It isn't because of your hard work, it isn't because of something you've done, but it's because of something God has done in you. And the word that's used is this. He says, he began a good work in you.

Now, I'm sure that lots of you will remember the day, those of you following Jesus, will remember the day that you became a Christian. no doubt. Now, some of you might have been a glorious experience, some of you might have been quite a mundane everyday experience.

Some of you might not remember it at all. The word that's used here is usually translated into English, inaugurated. He who inaugurated a good work in you.

Now, the only time I can think of that we regularly use the word inaugurate is when they swear in presence. And I don't know if you've ever witnessed the swearing in, the inauguration of the US president.

But it is quite a sober affair. The sovereign will of the people is being put on this one man to lead, and it is only men so far in history, maybe one day there will be women, but not this time, to lead this nation to the next four years.

[15 : 37] It's a sober, almost sacred event for the American people. In the same way, this sacred event has happened between God and you.

If you have begun to follow Jesus, at the beginning of that, there was an inauguration, whether you knew about it or not, there was an inauguration that started for you, which he will continue until the day of Christ Jesus.

And I think there's two ways, two particular people that we need to, this should really speak to.

Some of you are successful people. Whatever you turn your hand to, you seem to do pretty well.

And that's fine. But this won't make you righteous before God. We need to be humble before God, even if we are good at stuff, even if you're a successful person.

It is the good work that's in you has been started by God, not through the good things that you can do. The other kind of people that we need to speak to are those who have a low view of themselves.

[16 : 43] Maybe there's a little tape that's always played in your mind. You're no good. You're rubbish. You're stupid. Well, the good news is this. God has inaugurated a good work in you.

If you ever think like that, if you've ever been told that by anybody, the good news is that God doesn't think that. God has started something good in you, which he will complete into eternity. Okay. Last couple of points. Quick, I'll go through. I know we're kind of short on time. Verse 7 through to 8.

Whether I'm in chains, says Paul, or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. That sounds like one of those fridge magnet quotes, doesn't it?

That sounds quite nice. All of you share in God's grace with me. But remember what Paul's life was like. Remember where he is writing from.

[17 : 44] He is writing from a dungeon. He is writing from a prison. And he is saying all of you share in God's grace with me. Now the grace that he's talking about here is, I believe, not the grace that saved us, that made us righteous with God.

It's the grace that allows us to do good things for God. It says in Ephesians chapter 2, we are Christ's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he prepared in advance for us to do.

God has prepared each of us to do good works for him. And he has given us grace to do it. Now I don't know about you, but I think if I were to ever meet Paul face to face, I think my overriding emotion that I would feel would probably be embarrassment.

to look at his life compared to mine, I would, I would, I'd be forced to admit that my life is embarrassingly easy.

Here's some of the things that Paul went through serving Jesus. Here's what he went through.

[18 : 58] He said, five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. I was once pelted with stones. Three times I was shipwrecked.

I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I've been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea, in danger from false believers.

I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep. I have known hunger and thirst and often gone without food. I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressures of my concern for all the churches.

Poor Paul. And he says to us, this grace that I've received, I share with you. Now, the thing is that I'm not saying that all of you should immediately jump on a ship and be shipwrecked three times or make sure that somebody lashes you with rods or whatever it was.

The truth is that God gives different people grace for what they're going through at the time. God gave Paul the grace to suffer, to serve him, to really, really suffer.

[20 : 09] But different ones of us receive different amounts of grace different times, different seasons. So, for those of you who are new mums, the grace that God has given you might just be just to get through the day.

not to worry about what so-and-so is doing or what you used to do or one day plan to do. The grace you receive might just be just to get through the day today. Others of you might have dysfunctional families or toxic workplaces that you have to be in day after day.

God has given you grace to be in those places. if you're struggling with it, it's an invitation to draw closer in to God and the gift of grace that he's given you to get through these things.

I'm going to read you another fridge magnet quote from Philippians just a little bit further down. It says, Do everything without grumbling or arguing so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.

Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. God is saying that he's given us the grace that we need and as we hold on to him that we will shine in the world that he has put us.

[21 : 36] Paul isn't writing these things from an ivory tower. He is writing them from a stinking dungeon. Whatever you or me or indeed the people of Philippi are going through Paul is going through as much and yet he says we share this grace together.

Isn't that encouraging? We're one body. We are one body. We are together in him. Okay, one last quick point just from the last bit of that section that I read.

Verse 11. Excuse me, verse 10. That you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

Pure and blameless for the day of Christ. What is this day of Christ? The Bible teaches again and again that one day Jesus, the risen ascended Jesus will return.

on that day he will draw us to himself. On that day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

[22 : 56] It is an invitation for us to be humble because on that day it will not be about you. It won't be about me. It won't really be about any of us.

It will be about Jesus. Paul is encouraging the people of Philippi to put aside their petty squabbles and focus on him. Now as far as I know in this group there are no major divisions that need like lodia and Sintakeha that need to be addressed but inevitably amongst any group of human beings there will be disagreements maybe even squabbles and fights.

If that's you if you have a problem with somebody the invitation at Paul is giving you is to fix your eyes on Jesus. Remember that he is coming back and if you're in him you are invited to confess his name to bow the knee and confess that he is Lord.

Okay I'm going to just finish in prayer. Thank you Lord Jesus that we are indeed your workmanship. that you have created us in Christ Jesus to do good work prepared in advance for us to do. I thank you Lord that that we share together the good grace that you have given us in order to get up every day and shine like stars in the place that you have put us.

[24 : 35] and I thank you that one day we know and trust and believe that you are coming back and on that day any problems any petty disputes any issues that we've gone through together or apart they will dissolve like snow and we'll fix our eyes on you and confess that you are indeed Lord and we will bow the knee.

thank you Lord Jesus for all that you do in us all the ways you bless us. Hallelujah.