

Partners in Ministry

Text: Phil. 1:1-11

Focus: Ministry is done in partnership with Christ and with each other

Function: To encourage my hearers to embrace ministry in the context of partnership with Christ and with their fellow brothers and sisters.

Introduction

There was no need for Paul to introduce himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ to the church at Philippi, they knew him well; they had not for once questioned his apostleship, which was the case in some of his more troubled churches. This letter was sent to friends with feelings of mutual affection. Paul was in a Roman prison, not feeling sorry for himself, although the prospect of his release was fading. In fact, he was facing the sobering reality that the end was approaching. Although he is writing to friends there is a certain formality in this letter. He includes Timothy as coauthor and he salutes the overseers and deacons, the latter were most likely the ones who had organized and arranged for a generous offering for his support in Rome. This letter was a thank you letter as well as addressing some deficiencies among the brethren. One cannot help but be moved by Paul's attitude of joy, thanksgiving and gratitude that permeates this little letter. At least sixteen times in these four chapters the word joy or rejoice is used. Paul is rejoicing with the Philippian Christians because they are participants or partners with him in the gospel. Three words will help us capture the depth of this partnership in the first eleven verses.

Privilege vv. 1-5

This partnership is a direct result of the work of Christ in transforming the lives of the people. He addresses them as saints in Christ. Oh the great privilege of knowing Christ as Lord and savior! In verse 5 he reminds them of the partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. He is not thinking of a twenty-four day, more like the time when he first arrived. He found no synagogue but learned of a prayer meeting taking place down by the river. It was there Lydia came to faith in Christ. Or maybe he was thinking of the sixteen year old girl who was demonized and she too, came to faith in Christ. The event of which led to a riot with Paul and Silas being flogged and thrown in jail. Paul must have been thinking of the earthquake that loosed the prison chains, but more importantly, his thoughts may have been on the jailer and his entire household who came to faith. Three members of the Philippian First church of the Nazarene, a wealthy business woman, a psychologically damaged teenager and a moonlighting retired Roman soldier were his first European partners. What a privilege to be in Christ! This privilege is articulated even more emphatically in the Ephesian letter. Listen – “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight...v. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

Not only are we saints in Christ, our privileged status, but Paul referred to himself and Timothy as servants of Christ or slaves of Christ. This title implies service but also belonging. Oh the privilege of service and belonging! It speaks of our identity and our solidarity in the partnership of the gospel. We are partakers of grace, we are part of a new community; we have fellowship in the gospel because we are members of God’s family. The second word is Promise.

Promise vv. 6-8

Let me draw your attention to verse 6. *“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”* Paul is persuaded that God is at work, he has been at work with the Philippians from the very first day. He is at work not only to justify them but to lead them into perfection. God who had begun the regenerating work in them will advance it stage by stage until the day of Christ. That same promise is yours tonight. God is at work in you, he was at work in your home church when you sensed his call; he is molding and developing your character. Those of you who are getting ready to graduate in two months time, you are not the same person you were four, five even six years ago when you arrived on campus. Last Saturday I heard it echoed several times in the exit interviews, “God is at work preparing me for the ministry he has for me.” Let me reassure tonight that God did not call you to work for him; he has called you to work with him. Jesus told the disciples to follow me. The promise is one of partnership.

It is important to note also that the Christian life is not based on our achievement; it is God that is at work. It is God that is faithful to bring to completion what he has initiated. We can live out this cross-resurrection life; we can go on to perfection because God has already invested his total self in us.

The third word in this partnership is prayer.

Prayer vv. 9-11

It is prayer for Love. Paul prays that their love may abound more and more. The word abound has a Latin background which means wave. Growing up surrounded by the Caribbean and

Atlantic oceans I can identify with the picture Paul may have had standing on the shores of the Mediterranean. He is praying that their love for Christ and for each other will keep coming and coming. I have watched seasons of high tide and seasons of low tide, but the waves never stopped coming.

It is a prayer for Light. He prays that their love may abound more and more in knowledge and discernment. I like the New English Bible translation of this verse: *“And this is my prayer, that your love may grow ever richer and richer in knowledge and insight of every kind.”*

The ability to discriminate between good and evil, between the good and best, between average and excellence.

It is a prayer for Life. vv. 10-11 What a beautiful request. There are several pictures that come to mind in the choice of words Paul uses.

Pure - Metal that has been refined and all the dross removed.

Sincere - Without defects or cracks. (sun-tested) Sculptor or pottery glazed over with wax.

Blameless – Making a journey without road blocks or any thing to cause us to stumble.

Paul prays that this partnership will result in a life filled with the fruit of righteousness. He shows again that this is the work of Christ in us, and it is all to the glory of God. He had already included the fruit of love, but I get the sense that he includes now all the fruit of the Spirit in this harvest of righteousness: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. (Gal. 5:22-23).

Conclusion

This prayer is nothing short than a call to live out the sanctified life. It is a call to be bathed in the love of Christ, to experience the high tide, to be filled with the fruit of righteousness. You are here tonight because God has been at work in you and his work will not be completed until our Lord returns. This, my friend, is a partnership that comes with privilege, promise and prayer for you. As he reminds you of this partnership in ministry I would invite you to find a place where you reaffirm your commitment to him. If for any reason you are not where you ought to be in this partnership, take care of your end of things. Remember, "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Let us pray.