

This is the last week in our Philippians sermon series together. Fifteen weeks we've been digging deeply into the treasure of this letter.

And I hope you've been able to see some of the benefits of walking through a letter like this one rather than rushing through it. Because there's something significant about walking at the pace of Scripture. I don't think the Holy Spirit ever says to us, while we're lingering on one or two verses, "For goodness' sake, hurry it up, will ya? Move on already—there's so much more to read."

In fact, the more that we dwell in Scripture and take our time with it, the more we receive from it. Because we're so much more observant when we go at a gradual pace. We care more for the words that we're reading and the opportunities to engage with the Spirit when we aren't trying to 'get through it.'

So with that in mind, then, we're finishing the series today with just three verses—Paul's final greetings to the church at Philippi. And I've intentionally not done a recap today because this whole sermon is going to be a bit of a summary of the letter.

Read Philippians 4:21-23.

A number of weeks ago, I was reading a short article from the BBC about the Flatiron Building in New York. It's the kind of building that if you've seen it before, you remember it.

It's a building that was originally designed and completed in 1902 as one of the city's first skyscrapers. And the architect, Daniel Burnham, designed it to fit onto a wedge-shaped plot of land at the intersection of Broadway and Fifth avenue—and the newspapers considered it ludicrous because everyone feared that its height and thinness would cause it to just blow over.

But to Burnham's credit, the 24-story building has stood the test of time. And after undergoing a number of large-scale renovations, the building is once again open to the public. So if you're looking for property in New York City, I think an apartment is about \$58 million. Not too bad.

But cost aside, the building itself has—as the article put it—been "a testament to architectural ingenuity." And something that appeared initially to be weak and fragile—something that people thought would blow over—has ended up becoming a historic landmark that everyone wants to see and experience.

In a similar sense, I think the letter to the Philippians is a little bit like the Flatiron building. It historically hasn't received the same amount of 'applause' as Romans or Ephesians; it doesn't have the same breadth of drama as Galatians or Corinthians. But the spiritual depth and joy-filled insight that is present in this letter—the uniqueness of it—is what makes this letter the historic and living treasure that it is.

If I can put it this way, this letter is a testament to Spirit-inspired ingenuity. Because there's no other letter like it. And there's always more that the Spirit can reveal to us in these chapters the more we sink our teeth into them.

Even these last few verses, which we've just read, may feel like throw-away lines, but they demonstrate this kind of depth and ingenuity if, again, we *walk* them and take our time with them.

Verse 21: "*Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus,*" says Paul. Now, now that we've gone through this book, what do you notice about that statement? What has Paul been doing this whole time that he's *still* now doing even as we come to his closing remarks?

"In Christ Jesus." Everything from beginning to end is *in* Christ Jesus, *for* Christ Jesus, *with* Christ Jesus. The readers of this letter aren't even to say 'hello' to the church from Paul without doing so *in Christ Jesus*.

But what does that even mean? We gloss over these kinds of sentences all the time without asking ourselves what Paul is really talking about. What does it mean to greet someone *in* Christ Jesus? Are *they* the ones who are in Christ Jesus, or do *I* need to greet them *as one who is in* Christ Jesus?

Let's go back to earlier in the letter. A number of weeks ago we looked at all the times that Paul speaks about Jesus in this letter—all the occasions when Christ is mentioned. And they almost always involve a preposition in front: *in, with, for, of, through*—as if there's an inherent connectedness. As if we can't speak about Christ without speaking about our relationship to Him.

And when it comes to how Paul relates to the Philippians and how they relate to one another, it's the same thing. You can't leave Christ out of it.

"To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi," he says back in 1:1. In other words, this is who you are. That's how he identifies them from the very beginning. You are *in* Christ Jesus. Everything you do stems from that foundation.

Which is why his greatest prayer for them—what Paul desires most for this church—isn't that they would see massive growth, or have a nice building, or be free from persecution, but that they would be *"filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ."*

Whatever fruit you are producing, he says, may it come *through* Jesus. May Jesus be the producer of the fruit that you show towards one another. Paul's prayer is for the Philippians (and for us) to be so animated by Jesus, to be so *in* Jesus, that *He* produces the fruit in us. That we display the fruit of *His* righteousness. And that this would be the case for us no matter what our situation is. That we would display the fruit of Jesus in us no matter the circumstances.

Let me give you just a small example of this. For five years now, Danny and I have enjoyed the company of a dog in our family, a very lovable goldendoodle. But a couple of weeks ago, he got seriously ill, and it was so bad that we genuinely thought we were going to lose him.

And what was interesting was that literally the day before he got sick, I had just preached on Paul's words earlier in chapter four about not being anxious but bringing our requests before God in prayer *while rejoicing in the Lord's nearness*. I had just preached on it the day before and felt like I was being asked to essentially eat my own words.

So the whole situation ended up being a spiritual learning curve for me—being faced with a hard situation and have the exact Scripture needed to help me process it.

Here was an immediately applicable situation where I was challenged to practice rejoicing in the nearness of Christ *before* presenting my anxiety to God. And in doing so, I found myself quickly being filled with gratitude for the years that we've had with this incredible dog. It was really quite wonderful because I felt like I was receiving a peace that would have otherwise been pushed out by my anxiety.

Now, thankfully we were able to get him on the right medications, and his symptoms improved. But having had those moments of prayerful gratitude, it felt almost jarring to then sit with the veterinarian and hear her literally go through the list of things that might still be wrong with him.

Because everything in me was saying, "Rejoice. Be grateful. Tomorrow has enough worries of its own." Like, let's just take this one day at a time. Don't pop my joy bubble.

Now, there are of course far more serious situations than this. But I use it as an anecdotal example of how being *in Christ* isn't simply a concept but something that we can practice on a regular basis and enter into in any of life's circumstances. Because it truly transforms how we perceive our situations.

For Paul, to be 'in chains' or under house arrest had no impact on his ability to be *in Christ*. And it was because of his situation that the believers in Rome had become more confident *in Christ* and dared all the more to proclaim the gospel.

In other words, our 'in-Christ-ness' in difficulty or trying circumstances can end up being an encouragement to others who are seeking to strengthen *their* confidence in Christ.

See, being *in Christ* is never just about us; it's an inherently communal activity. As we've seen all the way along here, Paul never assumes that we have to do anything on our own. To be *in Christ* assumes being *in* fellowship with the Body of believers.

In the case of the Philippians, in their relationships with one another, Paul's encouraging them to *collectively* seek to have the same mindset *as* Christ Jesus—who, although in nature God, became a servant. Who practiced downward mobility. Who humbled himself to then later be exalted at the appropriate time.

It's why Paul says to Euodia and Syntyche in chapter four: "*Be of the same mind in the Lord.*" Be of the same mind *in* Christ. Because your differences—whatever they are—will fade significantly when you too practice downward mobility and seek to serve one another. When you learn to rejoice in what God has given to you *in* one another. When you see things from the perspective of Christ.

So when Paul, then, at the end of his letter, requests that the church leaders greet all God's people *in* Christ Jesus, he's saying two things, I think. First, he's reminding them of their identity as God's holy people who are *in* Christ Jesus—as he did at the beginning of the letter.

But then secondly, he's also reminding them all that everything they do, including *how* they greet one another, is to be *in Christ Jesus*. Because every element of your relationships with one another, as the Body of Christ, is to be *in Christ Jesus*.

For example, when we say good morning to one another before a service, are we doing so *in Christ Jesus*? This is how detailed Paul is asking us to be in our 'in-Christ-ness.' Are we mindful, attentive, and seeking to walk with one another in even something so simple as a greeting? Because if everything we do is meant to be *in Christ*, then it must be our modus operandi, our way of being, to be animated *by* Christ in every interaction that we have.

Now, that may sound like a lot to think about, but as one individual recently said to me, "The more time I spend with God, the more I instinctively find myself caring for others."

When we acknowledge one another—even in our short little greeting time in the service that we do every Sunday—that is an opportunity to truly look people in the eye with the eyes of Christ and let them know and feel that they are seen. We need to understand how significant this is.

Too many people these days slide in-and-out of church buildings without ever feeling like someone has actually acknowledged their presence. And what's so sad about that is that we've built a culture in North America where that's normal; where anonymity is actually the desired goal of attending church, so that I can slide in and slide out without anyone noticing.

That is so incredibly far from anything that Paul's talking about here in Philippians.

Because again, *everything* that Paul's talking about here in this letter implies two things: 1) the presence of Jesus by His Spirit *in* us, and 2) the believing community in relationship with one

another *in that same Spirit*. The Body of Christ does not make sense without those two things.

Paul himself, as he's making these closing remarks, acknowledges the believers in Rome who are in correspondence with him. They are 'with him' in some capacity, and so he brings them into this letter as if it's the natural thing to do. If he's sending greetings, they're sending greetings too.

"All God's people here [there's that language again] send you greetings....," he says. And then he adds this: *"...especially those who belong to Caesar's household."*

That's strange. Have you ever noticed that before? Why are people in Caesar's household sending greetings *with* Paul? Why on earth does *Caesar's* household gets mentioned here?

Because remember, Paul had directly encouraged the Philippians to conduct themselves—literally to act out their citizenship—in a manner worthy of the gospel *of Jesus*, not of Caesar. Everywhere you go, he said, you demonstrate that you are citizens of heaven, *not* of Rome. Be good citizens but do so because your allegiance is to *Jesus* as Lord and Saviour and *not* Caesar.

Which again, for the early Christians, was an incredibly courageous thing to do. Paul has directly told them, "Be like Christ." But Christ was crucified. And crucifixion was a Rome's way of sending a warning to anyone who would do as the crucified one did. So, you don't worship a crucified Messiah without being very aware of what the cost might be.

And yet, when we come to the end of this letter, who now also has come to faith in Christ but members of the Roman Emperor's own household? If that isn't a testament to the transforming power of the good news of Jesus Christ, I don't know what is. There is *no one* for whom it would be more costly to follow Christ than members of Caesar's own house.

And get this: they are the ones who are *especially* sending greetings to the church at Philippi. Almost as if to say that they are the most eager to be in fellowship with other believers, in a 'we've-all-sacrificed-something-for-this' kind of communion with God's holy people *in Christ Jesus*.

Like what Paul said in chapter three: *"Whatever were once gains for me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."*

I recently read the testimony of a woman named Madison Rose who had left her livelihood of being a social media influencer to find Christ. She had a prolific career in teaching people the tool of 'manifestation,' and had hundreds of thousands of followers because of it.

'Manifestation' is a teaching that is grounded in the New Age belief that focused thoughts and energies can interact with the universe to shape reality. So basically, if I visualize something and combine that with self-affirmations, I can shape my own reality.

And so, followers of this practice are encouraged to believe that they can manifest things like wealth and success simply by aligning their minds with their desires. As if to say: ‘Be of one mind with what you want most, and it will come to you.’ Madison and her dad together had built a whole consulting career grounded on this principle.

However, after her dad very sadly took his own life, Madison fell into a kind of disillusionment about this whole belief system that she was steeped in—because clearly it didn’t work.

And when she came to faith, she said that surrendering to the will of God and receiving grace *through* Christ was far more life-transforming for her than trying to manifest her own happiness. She no longer wanted to find her identity in those things.

Because again, what, ultimately, is our great commonality in which we find ourselves? Verse 23, the grace *of* our Lord *Jesus Christ*. We might read that and instinctively think that grace is the great commonality, but that’s not the emphasis here, based on the trajectory of this whole letter. The emphasis here is not on what we’ve received but *the One from whom we’ve received it*.

Our great commonality is *Jesus Christ*. To be *in* Jesus Christ. It never begins with the gift, but with He who humbled Himself and died to give us this gift. Grace doesn’t make sense without Him.

Because it’s all for Jesus.

So, as we come to the end of this series, let me end with this encouragement to you.

To all God’s holy people *in* Christ Jesus, rejoice in the Lord—I will say it again, rejoice. Because despite our fragility and weaknesses, God is yet building us into something that will stand the test of time, that will allow us to shine like stars as we hold firmly to the Word of life and gain the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus.

A building—some would say a Temple—that speaks volumes of the grace-filled ingenuity of God to take sinners like us and call us holy.