

I thank God for you

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 January 2012

Preacher: Euan Dodds

[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn to our reading this morning. I'll leave you to look at the rest of these notices at your leisure. But we're going to be looking at Paul's letter to the Philippians, Philippians chapter 1, and the first section there.

If you have one of our church Bibles, it is page 980, I think, 980. And Euan's going to be sharing from this opening part of Paul's letter to this church that he loved and that were so active in partnership and fellowship, in tangible help to his apostolic mission.

So let's read then Philippians chapter 1 at verse 1. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you, for you all, making my prayer with joy.

Why? Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

[1 : 25] It's right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart. For you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

For God is my witness, how I yearn for you with all the affection of Christ Jesus. And it's my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so 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.

Amen. May God bless to us these, his words. Okay, let's pray. Father, as we gather, as you are family, we pray that our love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment, that we may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through him to your glory and your praise.

Amen. Amen. Well, friends, thank you very much for your support today and over the past years.

It was very difficult thinking what to preach this morning, but as I thought and prayed about it, this passage in Philippians, it seemed just to summarize our feelings as we leave Glasgow and move to Edinburgh, our joyful gratitude to the Lord for you.

[3 : 13] And I suppose the key word in Philippians is partnership. A Christian life is not a solitary exercise. I was in John Lewis on, was it Friday when Andy Murray was playing?

And I was in the television section, and on all 50 or 60 screens, they were showing the match, Murray versus Djokovic, and it was the point where Murray was coming back, and it looked like he might win.

And I stood there for a while, and I said to the guy, you don't have a sofa, do you? And he did. Actually, next to the television section, they have sofas. And I said, that's very handy.

He said, yes, but it's often abused, because there were some people in the other day, and they were watching the telly, and they asked me to change the station. And he said, you know, why?

Do you want to see the high definition on another channel? And they said, no, the snooker's on BBC too. But tennis is a solitary game, isn't it? It's Murray versus Djokovic.

[4 : 13] He's on his own. But the Christian life isn't solitary. It is a life of partnership. We've been thinking about that this week with our partnership with the Delhi Institute, and we want to think about it this morning.

So, really, Paul begins by praying for the saints, and he begins by thanking God for their partnership. Verse 3 to verse 6.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you, all, making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

The word Paul uses, partnership, often translated fellowship. And we sometimes take that to mean just sort of Christian friendship. So we meet some friends for a coffee, and we call that fellowship.

Well, it's not less than that, but it's more than that. It's the language of players in a team. It's the language of colleagues at work, of people striving and laboring together.

[5 : 14] It's the language of the Christian partnership, working towards a common goal to make Christ known among the nations. And the particular partnership between Paul and the Philippian church took various forms.

The letter was occasioned because they had sent to him a gift, a financial gift to take care of his needs. And they'd sent it by the hands of Epaphroditus, who'd almost died in the work.

They gave him some money, and they sent him a personal visitor. And it's so good, isn't it, to see the face of people we're partnering with. It's great to have Scott back with us, Scott Murray today.

Great to have that personal contact with people with whom we serve. So they sent him a gift to support him. They sent someone to encourage him. And of course, they were praying for him.

Paul is in prison. And he thanks them and says, By the help of your prayers, I expect to be set free. They were eagerly praying for him. Praying that he'd be strengthened.

[6 : 16] Praying that he would have opportunity to share in that prison. Just praying for him and bringing him before the Lord. They prayed for him. They visited him.

They supported him. A picture of Christian partnership. And I suppose that's what we did on Friday night, isn't it? We had that wonderful evening, the food, the decorations, the videos.

And we thought about our friends in the Delhi Bible Institute. We thought about praying for them and made a commitment to pray for these five men of God in particular. People went to visit them, to see them face to face, to pray with them, to embrace them, to worship with them.

And of course, there was that gift, the tithe offering, which enabled them to buy two buildings. Praying, visiting, giving. Christian partnership. And of course, as February approaches, there's all sorts of partnership happening.

It's university mission time in a couple of weeks. Glasgow, Strathclyde, Caledonian, the universities in Edinburgh. And I suppose the university mission is a bit like a Christian partnership concentrated.

- [7 : 26] It's squeezed into one week. And there's such exciting times because it's when all the Christians come together. You begin the day having breakfast and praying. You go out together onto campus to meet people, to do questionnaires, to invite people.
- You attend talks together and seek opportunities afterwards to ask people questions. And then in the evenings, again, inviting friends and so on. But doing it together and encouraging one another, asking each other how you're getting on, sharing the stories and the testimonies of what the Lord has done each week.
- So university mission is concentrated, passionate Christian partnership. But that partnership was especially important at this time. Paul was in prison.
- And it's one thing, isn't it, to follow someone when they're a well-known preacher, when they're a mighty apostle, and their ministry is attended by signs and wonders.
- But it's quite another thing to be associated with that person when they're in prison. And when your association with Paul leads to shame in the eyes of your peers.
- [8 : 36] And yet the Philippines hadn't given up on him. And they continued to own him, to not be ashamed of him nor his gospel, and continued to support him. People then were ashamed of the things Paul was saying and teaching.
- And of course, now as Christians, people often take issue with the things Paul, and indeed the Lord, said and taught. And so we mustn't be ashamed of Paul or his gospel.
- And we must recognize that Christian partnership will invariably lead to opposition. But I suppose as I look back on the past four years, the word partnership really is the word that comes to mind.
- You've probably heard me speak on many occasions of the huge significance of the ministry we've been trying to do among international students, among migrant workers, among our service seekers.
- and I'm sure some future church historian will write a chapter on the 21st century and the huge movement of people out of countries where they cannot hear the gospel to the West, to the UK, to the US, to Europe, and the hundreds of thousands who came to faith there and who went back to their countries as missionaries to their own people.
- [10 : 14] I'll give you one example. So a few weeks ago, Kate and I, a few months ago in fact, were in a meeting and the doorbell went and I've learned to accept that interruptions are often the Lord's way of beginning something new and it was two men from Libya.
- And it's quite unexpected in a church, of course, to have two men from Libya. It's a country where people are not allowed to build churches and I don't believe in fact there are any known Libyan believers or perhaps just a handful.
- So we have these two men at the door. One of them had been to Glasgow and he'd come into the building and he'd had a warm welcome and somebody had befriended him and his wife and he'd left for England.
- But this friend was coming to study here and he'd flown from Libya to meet his friend in England and they'd travelled up together to Glasgow. And one of the first things they did was to come here and to ring the bell and his friend said, these people will look after you.
- And indeed, he was looked after. So he was welcomed. He came for a bit to the English class. People took time to help him with his language. People took him into their homes and there was opportunity to do Bible study with him.
- [11 : 35] And I thought, isn't that astonishing that a closed country where there is no church and when this young man came to Glasgow, they didn't go to the mosque for help.
- They came to the throne. And friends, that is a Christian partnership. Somebody welcomed him and people always seem to talk about the warm welcome they receive.

I think somebody used the term everyone's so strangely friendly. I think it was rather than strange unfriendly. I think it was strangely friendly.

People took time to welcome him. People took time to help him with his language and to perhaps do a bit of proofreading for him to look at his essay and to offer advice. People took time to show friendship to sit in a coffee shop to take him home for lunch to take him for a drive.

My favourite statistic you'll know is that 65% of international students never get an invitation into a British home.

[12 : 46] Well, I like to think we've lowered that statistic significantly. It's partnership and I've just been so encouraged how in recent years so many of you quietly and faithfully have been showing a welcome and praying for people and helping people and sharing your testimony with people from other nations.

I give thanks to God because of your partnership from the first day until now. So my prayer, of course, is that it will continue.

I think it's been wonderful to have these encouragements but it is really the tip of an iceberg and there are just so many tens of thousands of students not to mention migrant workers not to mention asylum seekers from closed countries in Glasgow and I just want to pray that in the years ahead the Lord will raise up labourers to continue that work to develop it people who might give up their time to learn a language and just to open their homes and their lives to share with these people.

So I pray that the partnership will continue. Secondly, Paul reminds them that their partnership is all due to grace chapter 1 verse 6 down to verse 7 I'm sure of us that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.

It is right for me to feel this way because I hold you in my heart for you are all partakers with me of grace both in my imprisonment and in the defence of the gospel.

[14 : 52] The Philippian church was really a picture of grace wasn't it? People from different places different backgrounds different strata of society a jailer a girl possessed by a demon different people brought together by the gospel and united by their fellowship in Christ.

It was all of grace bringing people together across sectarian divides across national divides across language divides and making them one. Christian life is a life of grace and certainly as I look back to my own conversion 15 years ago it was entirely the grace of God at work.

It was a university mission and some friends invited me to a meal some friends took time with me some friends actually even paid for the meal and I was able to hear and understand the gospel and the personal implications of it to myself.

it was grace I wasn't seeking God but he was seeking me and others during that university mission. Well the church in Philippi was a picture of that grace it was grace that had brought them together it was grace which had enabled them to serve together and to partner together and Paul wants them to remember that that it was God's work in them that enabled them to do God's work in Philippi that it was not because of their own righteousness their own works that he'd accepted them it was purely because of grace amazing grace and that was so important for them to hear because we're told in chapter 3 of this group these Judaizers who were insisting on circumcision they said well of course you have to believe in Christ but you also need the law of Moses and they had confidence in the flesh chapter 3 verse 4 we are the real circumcision who worship by the spirit of

God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh these people were putting their confidence in something else not in the grace of God and Paul says in chapter 1 verse 6 and I am sure of this and the word used is exactly the same I have confidence of this not a confidence in the flesh but confidence in the grace of God that the grace of God which had justified them it was the same grace of God which would ultimately glorify them that God would begin a good work and he would continue it on the first day he'd begun it and on the last day it would be brought to completion brought to perfection we drove from Edinburgh this morning where we moved into our flat and Prince's Street really is a sort of monument to unfinished things you've got Calton Hill and you've got those lovely Greek colonnads and they're very attractive but

[17 : 52] I think there was meant to be a great big building attached to them but they ran out of money and they never finished it and of course as you come down you come to the tram works and they haven't yet run out of money they haven't yet finished it either but that seems to be human nature it starts but it doesn't finish and Paul says I am confident that the grace of God will bring to completion what he has begun in you don't worry about these Judaizers insisting on what's righteousness insisting on the law as a means of being made righteous with God have confidence in the grace of God the amazing grace the grace which has brought you safe thus far and the grace which will lead you home so friends keep having confidence in the grace of God and actually that's very important to remember the Philippian church was in some ways a model church they were sacrificial they were loving they were united they were outward looking and there's a temptation of course with model churches to become a little bit puffed up that's what happened in

Corinth they got a little bit proud it's interesting I first came to the church I'd heard about the church but when I arrived in Glasgow to work in the royal I was praying a lot actually working in the royal praying all the time but I was praying about which church to go to and spoke to people asked around but I happened to be visiting some friends in Paris and we were having lunch and the wife of my friend said you're in Glasgow you must go to the Tron so I took that as quite clear guidance and that's how I first came in through these doors you see there is a reputation reputation as a church where the truth of God is preached of godly leadership of a loving fellowship and that's a wonderful thing it is evidence of the grace of God but the danger is we might become complacent and Paul is saying here you are partakers with me of grace we must always remember it is because of grace that we have this partnership and the credit and the glory and the praise alone is

God's Paul wasn't very promising material for a praise to him who by his grace enables us to serve him so secondly Paul prays for the growth of these believers verse nine it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment where I first lived in Glasgow in Broomhill there's a Bradford's bakery and after night shifts

I used to go into the bakery and buy myself something to eat for breakfast and I used to eat a lot of doughnuts and I realised that that probably wasn't the healthiest not a good example for a doctor to come off shift and go and eat some iced doughnuts so I went for this sort of vegetarian option I had a fruit Danish or an apple turnover and you know these Danish pastries it's amazing you get your five a day in one you have a and their motto was you can always make a good thing better they were never happy just to sit back and say we've got these lovely pastries why don't we just keep making them they were all saying how can we develop how can we make these things better and Paul has that attitude here we have this model church this sacrificial loving serving giving proclaiming church verse 9 but he says my with knowledge and all discernment he wants them to grow he feels for them verse 8 the affection of

Christ he knows the love of Christ for his people and he wants them to return that love to grow more and more in their love of God a greater desire to know him to love him to serve him but it's not a sort of sentimental love verse 9 it is a love marriage with knowledge and all discernment he wants them to know God better one of the great privileges these past four years is the occasional overseas trips we've made and it's fair to say I've actually been on more overseas trips with Terry McCutcheon than with Helen which is a great privilege for me but spending all that time with Terry I've got to know him very well to know him better I know what he doesn't like Paul is saying he may discern what is pleasing to him that they might know what he loves righteousness holiness love and they might know what displeases him hypocrisy dishonesty he wants them to grow in love to grow in knowledge verse 10 in order that they may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of

[23 : 39] Christ he wants their ambition to be to be holy to grow in holiness and to make decisions each and every day that will facilitate that growth in holiness there's a lot said and taught and thought about guidance but it does seem from this passage that the Lord's will for us is that we be holy that we be pure and blameless on that last day and therefore when making decisions especially as a student when all these formative decisions of life seem to be made the question is what will help me to grow in love to grow in knowledge to discern what is excellent and to help me to be pure and blameless and growing in holiness you see see the Christian life it's not a a case of do's and don'ts halal and haram it is a question of how do we please God what is the best use of my time what will bring most pleasure to my heavenly father when I come into some money what is the most pleasing way to use this money to invest it when I'm thinking of the company

I keep and the places I go and the things I do which of these will be most pleasing to God and most help me to grow in knowledge of him and to grow in holiness and the goal of course verse 11 is that they will be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God he wants them to be a praising people and a people who glorify God in their daily lives and I suppose the church in Philippi is just a little picture then of Christian churches throughout the ages people from different backgrounds nationalities different places in the world different sort of upbringings united in Christ praising him and giving the glory to God and it's a little picture isn't it of that great multitude in heaven people from every nation praising and glorifying

God in Jesus Christ so Paul prays for them he gives thanks for them and Helen and I just give thanks for you in your support in your love in your encouragement over the years and in the encouragement we have derived from learning of your partnerships your initiatives in the gospel in your homes your schools with your neighbours as we stand together he wants them to remember it's all by grace certainly as I look back to my own conversion my own Christian walk and indeed to the things the Lord has done in Glasgow we recognise it is all of grace and we give him the glory and he wants us to grow we'll be praying that as a congregation you continue to grow in love and godliness and I hope that you will pray the same for us as well so we are deeply grateful to you deeply grateful to the Lord we thank God for you and we seek your forgiveness if at any point we have said or done anything that has caused unnecessary offence so we look forward to our ongoing partnership in the years ahead and of course to seeing some of you on Wednesday and I would really value prayer so many unknowns in Edinburgh but we are right next to a great shopping centre that's a great opportunity there and we're exploring some avenues

I mean Paul went into the marketplace and we pray that we might have a chance to go into that marketplace in some way we're in the middle of I believe a great community of Eastern European migrant workers and it's obviously on the radar and a great community of some settled residential people so we don't know quite what the Lord has in store but we thank you for your partnership in that and look forward to partnering with you in the days, weeks and years ahead let's pray together Father we thank you for your amazing grace we thank you for the work of grace in each of our lives Lord bringing us into your family training us in godliness and employing us in your service

Lord we praise you and glorify you for taking us Lord and making us your saints calling us out of the domain of darkness and bringing us into the kingdom of your son forgiving us our sins and sealing us with your Holy Spirit we thank you Lord that we are one in Christ united in him around the truth of his word and of his gospel and we are not ashamed Lord of that gospel which is the power of God for salvation for all who believe nor ashamed of Paul who is a prisoner for it and Lord we just pray as we humanly speaking part this week that we will know that you are with us that your grace will continue that good work in each of us bringing to completion what you've begun and whether like the Philippians and Paul we might meet face to face or whether Lord we will meet again on that last day when we will see you face to face Lord we thank you for your amazing grace and your covenant faithful love to each one of us so strengthen encourage and equip us Lord that we may go out in the name of Christ to make him known to those who do not know him and we thank you and offer this prayer in his name

[29 : 53] Amen Amen Amen Amen ■ ■ and let him Amen and ■