

The Grateful Encourager

We come to the end of this lovely letter from Paul to the Philippians with these verses at the end of chapter 4.

Once again we have this feeling of JOY as Paul rejoices as he writes his 'Thank You' note to the church in Philippi. At the beginning it reads a bit like a letter from an old aunt to her wayward nephew thanking him for his gift to her on her birthday – which arrived 4 weeks late! "***at last*** you have renewed your concern for me".

But Paul is very grateful for the church's generosity in supporting him at various times when he was in need – they obviously were concerned for him and his difficult situations, and now, once again, he is in prison - this time in Rome when Epaphroditus brings him a gift. It was probably a monetary gift and had been taken by hand to Paul over a long and dangerous journey. There was no Royal Mail to do the deed for him and no electronic transfers to make it easy so this long journey was the only way.

This is a generous church that gives time and again to support the work of the gospel. Is there a lesson for us to learn there? The PCC will soon be discussing our giving policy as a church and whether we should be giving more money to support the work of the gospel. Do pray about this and let us know what you think.

Paul is grateful to the Philippian church and to God for supplying his needs. Paul knew what it was like to be in need but he has learnt to be content (verse 11b-12) - not something which came naturally to him.

A fortune-teller studied the hand of a young man and said, "You will be poor and very unhappy until you are 37." The young man responded, "Well, after that, what will happen? Will I be rich and happy?" The fortune-teller said, "No, you'll still be poor, but you'll be used to it after that."

Paul knew what it was like to be hungry as well as well fed; he knew what it was like to live in plenty and in need and yet he was contented with either situation. Perhaps it had something to do with the way he looked at things - his perspectives. His perspective on life and death (Phil.1.21-24):

²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

and his perspective on the true necessities of life:

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. (1 Tim.6.6-8).

Another lesson for us? Do we strive for material things to try to make us content? We all know that buying new things doesn't bring contentment – because there is always something else that we want! Commercial television presupposes that we are discontented! Adverts are designed to create the thought within us that we have a need which, if satisfied, will bring contentment. Are we willing to give everything over to God and to trust him completely – to be contented and let him control ALL of our life – or do we need to hold some things back which we want to keep control of?

To be contented in the way Paul was, we must be able to distinguish between needs and wants. We want a spouse. We want our family to get along. We want a nice car. We want a meaningful job. We want a better income. But what we **need** are loving relationships, food, drink, warmth and shelter. When we understand the difference, we can realize and appreciate that God is meeting our needs. And when we appreciate that God meets our needs, we are renewed in our faith.

At the wedding yesterday we had the reading from St Matthew 6.25...

Paul is able to be content because he recognises and accepts the strength which God supplies (v.13). God's enables him and us to do all things necessary to serve God. Paul talks more about God's power in his letter to the Ephesians. – Eph.3.16, 21-21:

¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being. ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

These riches are mentioned in Phil.4.19 as “glorious riches in Christ Jesus”. To enjoy these riches we are to be “in Christ Jesus” and he will provide not only our spiritual needs but ALL our needs. To be “in Christ” we must have taken that step of asking Jesus into our lives so that He lives in us and we live in Him and he takes control. So then how can we be less than content and satisfied? We have an abundance of spiritual blessings and an assurance of physical needs being fulfilled. v .19

And finally Paul sends his greetings – and those of the brothers who are with him (Timothy? Luke?). Then all the saints ..especially those who are of Caesar’s household – probably Christians who on the staff of Caesar’s imperial palace in Rome. Greetings serve an important function both then and now:

- Express our love and appreciation for one another
- Nourish relationships we have as brothers and sisters in Christ
- Paul wanted to greet “all the saints” – no room for favouritism

How we greet (or fail to greet) other Christians in our fellowships reveals a lot about ourselves:

- Either that we are caring and loving without partiality
- Or cold and insensitive – except for those in our “clique”

So when we greet each other this morning during the Peace, we express that love and appreciation for each other – and it’s so good that we do that here by moving around and greeting everyone – not just those close to us.

So we have come to the end of our series on Philippians. Looking back we have heard:

1. Greg preaching on “The joyful servant of Christ
2. Sue preaching on The Optimistic Prisoner
3. Greg preaching again on The humble saviour
4. Terry Mason preaching on Faithful servants
5. Kevin preaching on The persevering idealist
6. Joyce preaching on The reassuring pastor
7. And finally this sermon on The Grateful Encourager

I hope that you have enjoyed this series and that you have found it useful and helpful. The texts and audio recordings are all available on the website if you want to remind yourselves of what was said.

Two words stand out at the end of this letter: **Glory** and **Grace**:

- ***To our God and Father be GLORY for ever and ever. Amen***
- ***The GRACE of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.***

Have you received the wonderful GRACE of our Lord in your life, by obeying His gospel? Are you living so as to offer GLORY to God, both in word and deed?

May God's Word, and especially this Epistle to the Philippians inspire you to do both!