

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

JANUARY 7-11, 2019

The word 'TON' is written in a large, white, brush-stroke style font. It is centered on a background that transitions from blue at the top to red at the bottom, overlaid with a white halftone dot pattern. The letters have a textured, hand-painted appearance with some internal detail visible.

SERMON SERIES

A Study of Philippians

MONDAY

Philippians 1:1-11; Acts 15:36-16:40

Philippians is meaningful not only for its content and Paul's circumstances, but also because of Philippi's position in the Roman Empire. The places Paul focused upon in church-planting were very purposeful: he was Spirit-led to emphasize influential cities ideally situated for spreading the Gospel. Given his trade as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3), Paul's clients were mobile and networked; many of them were Roman soldiers on the move as they were reassigned.

"Philippi was a strategic center from which Paul could begin his evangelization of Europe ... a Roman city that would facilitate penetration of the Roman world." (Precept Austin) "[Philippi] was on the great highway through which all trade and traders going eastward and westward must pass ... therefore, a fit center of evangelism. ... It was the place where the first church of Europe was established by Paul on his second missionary journey, A.D. 52." (Peter Pett)

"[Establishing the Philippian church included] Paul's selection of young Timothy to travel with him to Philippi ... the first 'European' convert named Lydia, a Gentile Asian from Thyatira in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) and a proselyte to Judaism ... [and] the first Roman convert in Europe, a jailer." (Precept Austin) The Philippian church's founding came in the wake of Paul's and Barnabas' split over Mark's desertion during their earlier, first missionary journey (Acts 15:36-41). "God providentially used the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas to prepare the way for a new and unexpected thrust of missionary activity." (Bible.org)

“Philippians was written ... about 61 A.D. by Paul during his first imprisonment in Rome.” (Precept Austin) Paul penned this epistle, along with Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon, while awaiting trial before Caesar Nero. It’s remarkable that a key theme of this letter—joy—prevailed despite Paul’s incarceration, impending trial and possible execution.

Pastor Tim Peck’s opening sermon in October emphasized “beginnings and the sometimes painful endings preceding them.” Philippians is a fitting place to begin 2019 and Glenkirk’s new chapter: leadership trials climaxing in 2016, then two years of recovery and restoration under the giftedness of Pastor Tim Fearer, and now Tim Peck to pastor us going forward. “Be glad and rejoice with me ... rejoice in the Lord!” (Philippians 2:18, 3:1).

QUESTION

Why was Philippi a good location for starting a church? What were some of the unique circumstances of Paul penning the Philippian epistle? What is a surprising theme of Philippians, given Paul’s situation? Why was Philippi a good location for starting a church? What were some of the unique circumstances of Paul penning the Philippian epistle? What is a surprising theme of Philippians, given Paul’s situation?

PRAYER

Pray for God’s leading and your related faithfulness in 2019. Pray also for Tim Fearer and what God has next for him, and for Tim Peck as he pastors Glenkirk going forward.

TUESDAY

Philippians 1:2-11, 25-28; James 1:2-3; Hebrews 12:1-2

“If there was ever one who would be justified in writing a depressing and discouraging letter, it would be Paul. However, Paul took up pen and papyrus to do just the opposite, for Philippians is commonly known as ‘The Epistle of Joy.’” (Jon Courson) How can one presumably on “death row,” a survivor of imprisonments, stonings, beatings, shipwrecks, death-threats and deprivation (1 Corinthians 11:23-27), exhibit joy despite such hardships?

Whether joy and happiness are synonyms is debated even in Christian circles. Secular sources define joy as “a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.” (Oxford dictionary). Perhaps this applies for unbelievers. In a Christian context, however, happiness is a fleeting emotion ebbing and flowing with circumstances. Joy, on the other hand, is a sustainable heart-set of peace and contentment regardless of external circumstances, realizable only in following Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul is the poster child for Christian joy.

Throughout today’s Philippians verses, Paul shares secrets of joy. He describes Timothy and himself as “servants of Christ Jesus” (v. 1). We were created to be servants; godly service is key to sustainable joy. He greets the Philippians with “grace and peace” (v. 2); we can only know peace—reconciliation with God—if we’ve experienced His grace. Paul grasped that “God is love” (1 John 4:8); his love for God filled him with

joyful love for the church at Philippi, displayed throughout Philippians. “Joy ... is a state of being. It does not depend on circumstances, but triumphs over circumstances. It produces a gentleness of spirit.” (Billy Graham)

Was Paul’s joy delusional? Hardly—he’d discovered how to achieve a steady state of “divine discontent.” He’d learned to be content with varied external circumstances, embracing these as God’s provision (Philippians 4:11-12). However, he balanced such personal contentment with restless discontentment regarding the lost, including Jewish countrymen (Romans 9:1-5)—thus his heart for proclaiming the Gospel.

Though I’ve followed Christ for years, I’ve wrestled with sustainable joy throughout. Ironically, recognizing my own joylessness was a factor driving me toward Jesus 33+ years ago. Sin is the great joy-stealer, which Paul understood (Romans 7:21-25) and I continue to learn “the hard way.”

QUESTION

What are the differences between happiness and Christian joy?
What’s the relationship between grace and peace? What are some of the means to attaining and holding onto joy?

PRAYER

Ask God to help you embrace the fullness of His joy. Pray for His guidance regarding areas where you can serve more and thereby increase your joy in Christ.

WEDNESDAY

Philippians 1:6-11, 27-30; Matthew 25:31-46

A recurring theme throughout Scripture, particularly in the Psalms and the Prophets, is the lament that God can sometimes seem idle while the wicked prosper and evil continues. Christianity's critics often use this to support their notion that God is limited and/or unloving or nonexistent. But we know that the living God is eternal, all-powerful, caring and righteous. Why, then, such questioning from both unbelieving and godly sources?

God's longsuffering [patience] confuses many. The Bible tells us why God withholds His full judgment presently: He is waiting for the elect who've not yet accepted Christ to turn and be saved (2 Peter 3:9). However, Christ *will* return and God *will* judge. The biblical expression "the day of the LORD [Yahweh]" speaks to when God intervenes in human affairs in righteous judgment. This "day" is the central theme of Zephaniah while showing up in other prophets' books and elsewhere in the New Testament.

Twice in today's Philippians passage, Paul uses an expression that's unique to his epistles, "the day of Christ" (vv. 6, 10), which sounds like "the day of the LORD." Are these synonyms? Many say no, interpreting the day of Christ as a time of hope and blessing for the church, the day of the LORD as a time of judgment and woe for the unsaved. I differ, viewing the day of Christ and day of the LORD as two sides of the same coin.

“Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). This same Jesus “came to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10) and “bring peace” (John 14:27) while also bringing “a sword” (Matthew 10:34) and “tread[ing] the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God” (Revelation 19:15).

He came as the Suffering Servant and will return as the Righteous Judge and King. Similarly, “God is love” (1 John 4:8) while He is holy concurrently.

Is “the day of Christ” a “day of the LORD”? It was in the 1st century on Calvary’s cross—He was judged in our place as the ultimate act of sacrificial love. And He’s coming again to judge the unredeemed and claim His beloved Bride. Paul understood this.

QUESTION

Is it wrong to question God? Why does God appear to let wicked people prosper and evil to continue? What is “the day of Christ”?

PRAYER

Consider any “injustices” you’re attuned to and bring these to God, asking for His comfort despite these challenges. Pray for Him to guide you regarding such issues.

THURSDAY

Philippians 1:12-18; Acts 15:36-41; 2 Timothy 4:11

Monday we touched upon Paul and Barnabas' split over Mark's AWOL episode (Acts 15) as a catalyst for founding the Philippian church. Glenkirk has recent experience with splits and their painfulness. (As a serving elder when our former pastor and others departed in 2016, I was close to the related dynamics.) I continue to see the residual "scar tissue" from these events, both in Session colleagues and among other Glenkirk members.

Paul knew about extreme trials and shared his method for dealing with these in Philippians 1. First and foremost, he remained true to his calling and passion for sharing the Gospel (v. 12). Apparently Paul could not stop evangelizing any more than the prophet Jeremiah could cease prophesying despite his resulting pain and persecution (Jeremiah 20:7-10). Note Philippians 1:13: "... it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard ..." Paul saw being chained to Roman guards as an opportunity to lead others to Christ. Paul later hints that even some in Caesar's household had come to the faith (Philippians 4:22).

Paul also learned to embrace how God might use his trials for God's glory. (See verse 14 and recall his writing in Romans 8:28: "... in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.") As well, Paul chose to dismiss when others were opposing him or trying to discredit him; forgoing cynicism and animosity, he rejoiced instead if Christ was proclaimed (vv. 15-18).

How can we, Glenkirk Church, apply Paul-like wisdom to moving beyond our recent challenges? Pastor Dan Reiland offers experience-based advice to churches following a split: “Forgive those who hurt you ... Keep in mind your church belongs to God. You are dealing with precious spiritual real estate ... Spiritual leaders are human ... imperfect people ... Put your faith in Christ; He won’t let you down. Extend grace to [all] as Christ extended grace to you.” Paul’s letter to Timothy indicates that he later reconciled with Mark (2 Timothy 4:11).

I’ve heard it’s impossible to be bitter toward someone for whom you’re praying. Have you prayed for those who left Glenkirk, including our ex-pastor? If their church is proclaiming Christ and building God’s kingdom, why not rejoice?

QUESTION

How did God use Paul’s and Barnabas’ contention over Mark’s abandoning their earlier missionary journey? How did Paul get over painful splits and opposition to his ministry? How can we apply this to Glenkirk’s recent past?

PRAYER

Pray for those who left Glenkirk Church during the 2016 church split. Ask God to bless them and keep them, to use them to build His kingdom. Rejoice as they proclaim Christ.

FRIDAY

Philippians 1:18-30; John 12:23-25; Galatians 2:19-20

We end the week with one of Paul's most remarkable quotes: "To live is Christ, and to die is gain" (v. 23). This could hardly feel more counter-cultural today, likely sounding both nonsensical and morbid to the uninitiated. Paul was uniquely qualified to write this—he'd spent meaningful time with the risen Christ, first at his conversion on the Damascus road (Acts 9:3-6) and later as his personal Tutor for three years in the Arabian wilderness (Galatians 1:11-17). This same Paul, as a consequence of his stoning at Lystra, also had an apparent "out-of-body/near-death" experience which took him temporarily to heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2).

Jesus addressed "to die is gain" in His teaching, "... whoever loses his life will keep it" (Luke 17:33). There are two aspects of this: literal physical death, whereupon a believer immediately passes into the Lord's presence (2 Corinthians 5:8); and death to self, the abundant life of unselfishly living to glorify God. The Tuesday devo develops the joy in "dying to self." Paul also characterizes it in "striving" (v. 27), "to suffer" (v. 29) and "conflict" (v. 30) as examples within today's Philippians text.

Tuesday's and Thursday's devos explore what "to live is Christ" means. "The importance of [this] ... should be central to every Christian's life. ... [It] means that we proclaim the gospel of Christ ... that we imitate the example of Christ ... that we pursue the knowledge of Christ ... that we

are willing to give up anything that prevents us from having Christ ... that Christ is our focus, our goal, and our chief desire. Christ is the center point of our mind, heart, body and soul. Everything that we do, we do for Christ's glory." (GotQuestions.org)

Jesus said, "the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke 17:21), meaning we don't have to await physical death to grasp it—it's available to us in Christ Himself, here and now. But living this, in Christ, necessitates dying to self—a seeming Christian paradox and a stumbling block to many.

Whom do you know who doesn't grasp that they need to "die" in order to live abundantly? How are you living out your life in Christ? For whom are you praying?

QUESTION

What qualified Paul to state, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain"?

What does "to live is Christ" mean? What does "to die is gain" mean?

PRAYER

Ask God to help you "die" even more—to your selfishness, to any retribution you might have wished toward those who've harmed you, to animosity toward any who appear to embrace ungodliness. Pray for a heart more like God's, for greater capacity to "love the unlovable."

Sources:

- The Precept Austin quotes can be found at www.preceptaustin.org/philippians_11-8.
- Peter Pett's quote is from www.studylight.org/commentaries/pet/philippians.html.
- The Bible.org quote can be found at bible.org/seriespage/1-birth-church-philippi-acts-1536-1640.
- Jon Courson's quote is from *Jon Courson's APPLICATION COMMENTARY* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, © Jon Courson 2003).
- GotQuestions.org reference can be found at www.gotquestions.org/joy-happiness.html and the quote at www.gotquestions.org/to-live-is-Christ.html.
- The Oxford dictionary "joy" definition can be found at <https://search.yahoo.com/search?fr=mcafee&type=D211US1249G0&p=joy+definition>.
- Billy Graham's quote can be found at www.goodreads.com.
- Dan Reiland's quote is from <http://globalchristiancenter.com/administrative-leadership/church-leadership/24860-surviving-a-church-split>.

