

House Church Message Notes April 19th, 2020 – In Lockdown (8 Weeks in Philippians)

Week 1: Gratitude in Lockdown (Philippians 1:1-11)

• **INTRODUCTION**

- “¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: ² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Phil. 1:1-2)
- So begins Paul’s letter to the Philippians, the book we’re studying for the next 8 weeks in this series we’re calling “In Lockdown.”
- N.T. Wright, the great New Testament Scholar, said that for Christians, reading the New Testament is like reading a great Play, a Drama, which is continuing to unfold with us in the Church today.
 - Think of the books you have in your house: maybe you’re not someone who loves books and you just have a few on the shelf in a study somewhere. But I know some people who have shelves full of books, enough for a small library—my grandfather owned a book store and he had a lot of books. I love books, too, and I inherited some of his. We all probably have different types of books in our house: some technical books that tell us how to do things like cook or fix stuff or operate things, history books that give accounts of real people and events that happened in our world, novels that tell fictional stories but still contain deep truths about what it means to be human, poetry books that contain beautiful poems. You might even have some plays on your shelf—some of the greatest works of literature have been plays.
 - I inherited a collection of books from my grandfather called “The Great Works of the Western World” and it has everything from Philosophy to Novels to Plays which have shaped Western Culture, from Ancient Greek Plays to 20th century Sigmund Freud. There are two books in the collection that contain all the plays of Shakespeare. I’ve only read a little bit of Shakespeare in high school literature classes—but it is a pretty cool experience to get into his works. When you’re reading a play, if you use your imagination, you can get inside the story and envision how it would all look to see this drama unfolding on stage—you could even go to a local theater and see it performed.
- But imagine if you were reading a play because you were actually going to play a *part* in it—you’d be reading it in a whole different way: you’d be studying the characters, memorizing parts, trying to get inside their world to imagine what life is like for them.
- N.T. Wright said that this is sort of what it’s like for Christians to read the Bible: we’re reading the great unfolding Drama of God—it’s the true story about God, creation, and redemption, that’s still playing out today, in us, as we move towards God’s grand conclusion. He wrote: “The New Testament can be seen as the *first scene* in the *final act* of God’s great narrative. The early Christians saw themselves within a much longer story: the story of Creation (act 1), the Fall of humanity (act 2), of Israel (act 3) and ultimately of Jesus himself (act 4)...the New Testament writers find themselves at the start of the fifth act of God’s heaven-and-earth drama, and they sketch here and there how that drama is meant to finish, in the ultimate rejoining and renewal of heaven and earth, the new creation...Understanding this and living it out is quite challenging, as every generation of Christians discovers... As in a theater where the actors have to understand ‘the story so far’ and then improvise their way faithfully towards the intended conclusion, the New Testament calls for a self-involving performance of its text, in which we, the actors, will ourselves be transformed...” (*The New Testament in its World*, © 2020 Zondervan)
- Philippians is one of the scripts we get to study so that we can learn how to live out this story God is writing. Even though it wasn’t written *to* us (literally, it was to the Philippians), it was written *for* us—the church, followers of Christ. It was inspired by God’s Spirit, through one of his servants, Paul, to be a guide to His people everywhere.
- As we read this amazing text, **we’re going to learn how to love like Jesus and how to live in the love of Jesus, so that we can find contentment, joy, and peace in *all circumstances*, and so we can *be* the church for one another and for the world.**

- The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write many letters which are now part of the New Testament, but Philippians is easily Paul's most joyful and encouraging letter. As we get a glimpse into the heart and mind of this amazing follower of Christ, we also get a glimpse into the heart and mind of Christ. It shows us just how transformative and world-changing a relationship with Jesus can be.
- And the amazing thing is: Philippians was written *from prison*. As you read these words of Scripture every day, *let that sink in*. Paul wrote this letter to the church of Philippi, the first church in Europe, in Northern Greece, that he had helped to plant. And he wrote it from imprisonment—either from house arrest in Rome, or from prison in Ephesus (there's some debate among scholars). He wrote it in lockdown. And I think you're going to find there's so much relevance and encouragement here to our situation.
- N.T. Wright, again, said this about the book of Philippians: "Things don't always go the way we intend. It's easy to feel discouraged because what we hope for is badly thwarted, or because people make life difficult. Paul, writing to the Philippians from prison, certainly knew what it was like to have plans interrupted. But he maintained robust confidence in God's overruling power, even when everything seemed to be going wrong. This book will help us learn the art of seeing God's purposes working out through problems and difficulties, and deepen our own confidence in God's power." (*Philippians: N.T. Wright for Everyone Bible Study Guides*, © 2009 IVP)
- As we think about all the challenges, both small and large, that face us right now in this season of lockdown, I can't think of a better guide than Paul in this text to help us not only survive, but *thrive* in Christ through this season.
- So, let's get out our Bibles and take a little time going verse by verse through this week's passage, Philippians 1:1-11.
- **Philippians 1:1-2**
 - Remember how Paul opened this letter with a greeting: He referred to himself and Timothy as "servants of Christ," and he referred to the church, us, as "God's holy people in Christ."
 - This is basically how Paul begins all of his letters, and it's really important, because before anything else, it speaks to identity—we are *servants* of Christ, and we are *God's holy people*.
 - The word servants here has the literal meaning of "bond-servants" or "indentured service," literally "slaves" of Christ. And "God's holy people" means essentially that we are set apart *to God* for the sake of the world.
 - Think of all the social media bio's we have today to identify who we are: "Husband, Father, Runner, Musician, Pastor...author...yada yada... Christian." For Paul there was *one* thing he thought people needed to know, and that was "servant of Christ,"... "God's holy people"...in other words, Christ is my *master* and I am set apart to him.
- **Philippians 1:3-8**
 - "³I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus."
 - V.3-4 Picture Paul sitting in lockdown, confined in a place where the basic comforts that make you feel human have been stripped away. A place where, unlike modern prisons that feed and clothe you, he had to rely on friends to bring him food and money or he would not eat. What is he doing? What is he thinking about? He's praying and he's *remembering* his love for God's people.
 - When you think of your church, what do you think of? Is your heart filled with gratitude? joy? Do you jump right to the problems, the intercession for issues people need help with? Do you ever take time to just celebrate with confidence what God is doing in your brothers and sisters?
 - I think sometimes for many Christians today, we give thanks to Jesus for his gift of salvation, but we just *tolerate* the church.

- We see so many places of dysfunction and it's so hard to sustain a loving walk with so many different people, that we forget that *one of God's greatest gifts to us is the Church*. In fact, the more we fall in love with Jesus, the more we will love His people—the Church is His bride. And it is central to His unfolding drama of redemption.
- V. 5-6 “partnership in the Gospel” One of the reasons Paul is so thankful for the church in Philippi is because it seems they really grasped that they were not just spectators but participants in God's work. They actively partnered with Paul for the advance of the Gospel.
 - Church is not a consumer activity. It's not a country club. It's not an event where the experts lead the show and everyone else comes to watch. Imagine if Christians everywhere saw themselves as *partners in the Gospel* for the sake of God's Kingdom?
 - When you give to the church, you are partnering in the Gospel. When you pray together with the church, you are partnering in the Gospel. When you serve in all kinds of ways in the life of the church you are partnering in the Gospel. When you live your everyday, ordinary life for the glory of God, loving the people around you in Jesus name and using each opportunity to serve people with the heart of Christ, you are partnering in the Gospel.
 - And know that, if sometimes you feel like it's not enough, it's not *your work*, it's not *my work*, it's not the *church's work*, it's *God's work* from start to finish. And if you just stick with Him, *He will finish and perfect the good work that He started in you*.
- V. 7-8 Have you ever experienced this kind of delight and affection for God's people? Speaking of “doing God's work,” I wonder sometimes if the best missional strategy we could adopt, for starters, would be to love the church the way God does. If the world would see how we interacted with the love of Christ toward one another, that love is bound to spill over into the world and they'll see as Jesus said, “they'll know you are Christians by your love.”
 - When I participated in the 24-7 prayer and found myself, *really* tired towards the end of Holy Week, praying at 3 in the morning—I was overwhelmed in that moment with gratitude for God's people. I could see the faces of people who had been praying with me throughout the day, I could see their lives in Christ, and I felt so much gratitude to be with you all in prayer—even though we were apart.
- **Philippians 1:9-11**
 - “⁹And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.”
 - All of this is going somewhere—this story is building towards its conclusion—that Day, the Day of Jesus Christ. We want to be ready for that Day. We want to be ready.
 - Notice that Paul's prayer is that “your love may abound more and more” but not just in a “touchy feely” emotional sense, but that this love for God and love for others naturally flows into “knowledge and depth of insight,” to wisdom, to righteousness. This is the growth of maturing in Christ.
 - Where does it come from? It comes *only through Christ* (v.11). What does that knowledge and insight look for us? What does that fruit of righteousness look like *right now*, in lockdown, with our families, with our hurting world?
 - Whatever it is, it's *all* for the glory of God—not to grow a platform, not to make the community think what a great church that is, what nice people those are, what an influential and powerful organization that is, how cool they are—no, for the glory and praise of God.
 - And so, church, this is my prayer for us: *that our love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Christ—to the glory and praise of God. Amen.*