

Partnership In The Gospel: Part 2

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[0 : 00] My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the assistant pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. A special welcome if you are new with us or you're visiting.

We're glad you're here. And we're glad you're here, as I say every week, not because we are trying to fill seats, but because we are following Jesus together as one community.

And we're convinced that there is no one so good that they don't need God's grace, and no one's so bad that they can't have it. And so we're convinced that God has something to say to everyone, and that everyone needs to hear what God has to say.

Whether you called yourself a Christian for 10 years or your whole life, or whether you don't call yourself a Christian. Maybe you have questions or doubts or objections about Christianity. God, in his word, speaks so powerfully that he's willing to speak to all of those things.

He's willing to speak to our faith, but also to our doubts and our questions. If you've been with us, you know that we're starting a series in the book of Philippians. And if you remember from last week, Philippians is a letter.

[1 : 07] It's a letter that's written to a church, and that church is much like our church. Now, that church in Philippi, it's a Roman city in Macedonia, would have been around for about 10 years at the time that this letter was written.

We've been around a little over 20, so it's a little bit different. But we're both still churches that are relatively young, still trying to unify and figure out how exactly we're going to move forward together in our community for the gospel.

This church also had deacons and elders and saints, just like we do. We saw that in the very first verse. But this church also has struggles, and they're struggles like our struggles.

This church has living in a culture that worships the emperor as king rather than Jesus. And so the congregants in it, these saints and deacons and elders, have to face opposition because of that.

It's a church where, while everyone agrees about Jesus, they don't agree about how to pursue him. There's disagreement about the best way to do ministry, the best way to move forward.

[2 : 08] We're going to see that especially in chapter 2. And so this is a church like our church that's in difficult circumstances. And if that weren't enough, this church happens to be in a city like our city.

Remember that Philippi was known for its military history, and it had a large number of military retirees and military families because of the tremendous benefits that were offered to them in that city that were not available in other parts of Macedonia.

And that is because it was granted status as a Roman colony where other cities were not. And so Roman citizens and soldiers had special rights and privileges that they would not have had access to in other areas.

And so in the midst of all these difficult circumstances, we saw last week that Paul places the accent mark on partnership in the gospel. That the gospel, which is the news about Christ's death and resurrection, not only in the past, but the power that it brings now, has to be joined with our partnership as we pursue it together.

And so that great treasure of the gospel is what binds us together as one community. As we follow Jesus together as one community, that's the treasure that keeps us together.

[3 : 18] If you remember from last week, I said that the beginning of Paul's letters often function as a movie trailer. They tell us everything that's going to come later in the letter. And we're not done with the trailer.

We only watched the first half last week. So we're going to be in the second half of the trailer this week in Philippians 1, verses 7 through 11. And if we saw last week the importance of what Paul tells us in verse 5, the importance of partnership for the gospel, this next section is going to answer the question for us, if that's so important, if a partnership in the gospel is so important, how do we know that we have a true partnership in the gospel?

What does true partnership look like? What are its characteristics? Its results. And so that's my question for you if you call yourself a Christian. If you don't call yourself a Christian, then the question could be this, why is the gospel true?

Why should I believe it? Why is it something that I should seriously consider? So we're going to ask that as we come now to Philippians chapter 1.

We're going to start in verse 7. Remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold. Even the finest gold. And that it is sweeter than honey.

[4 : 30] Even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so we're going to turn to it now. We're in Philippians chapter 1 starting at verse 7. Verse 9.

Please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that you, as Jesus tells us in the gospel of John, have not left us as orphans in a merciless universe.

You haven't left us alone. But you've formed us together as a partnership. You've sent your son to pay the price for our sin.

But even more than that, you speak to us. And you speak to us through your word in ways and words that we can actually understand. And so we ask for that understanding this morning that you would help us.

[6 : 02] That you would open our eyes and unstop our ears. That you'd soften our hearts and you'd give us clear minds that we could hear and see and understand and believe. Everything that is written about you in your word.

And we ask all of this in the name of your son. Amen. If you remember from last week, Paul is filled with lots of emotions.

He's filled with thankfulness in verse 3. And then in verse 4, his thankfulness moves to joy. And even more than that, in verse 6, we saw that he was sure.

He had this confidence. He was sure that, as he says here, And so he seems to have a tremendous amount of confidence, of sureness, of joy, of thanksgiving in this partnership that he sees in the gospel between him and the Philippians.

What is the basis of this joy for Paul? Why is he so sure that this is something that he can give thanksgiving for? Why is he convinced, in verse 6, that God is bringing this work to completion?

[7 : 15] Why is he convinced that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead isn't just work in generally in Christians, but it's work specifically in this congregation in Philippi? Even as they're in the midst of conflict and disagreement.

Well, we find out in verse 7. He says, In other words, Paul is sure.

He's confident. He's joyful. He's thankful. Because this congregation has stuck with him, both in the good times and in the bad times. Both in his imprisonment.

Remember, Paul writes this letter from a Roman prison. Philippi was a city where he was in prison back in Acts chapter 16. And that's where we have the famous story of him singing in prison with Silas.

The Philippian jailer is converted. That jailer is probably one of the recipients of this letter. They meet a woman named Lydia. Her and her whole family are converted to follow after Jesus.

[8 : 25] She's actually, Lydia's very wealthy, we find out. And so when we leave the church in Philippi in Acts, we find out that they're meeting in her house. She probably has a house large enough to fit all of them. And they stuck with him then.

They stuck with him when things were going really well. Prison bars were being destroyed. He could have left the prison if he'd wanted to because God was doing a miracle there. He'd set them free. People were coming to faith.

They had Paul, the great apostle, with them. Everything seemed to be going well despite opposition. Things were exciting. Things were good. And so, of course, it would make sense during that time that people would stick with Paul.

That they'd want to be with him. Who wouldn't want to be with someone who wasn't such a powerful communicator? Who wasn't clearly demonstrating the power of God at work in the city of Philippi? It would make sense, right? That these people would be with him during that time. Ten years ago, they were his. He had them in his hand. And so, Paul gives thanks not because of that, but because they've still stuck with him even when he's in prison.

[9 : 27] They've stayed with him even when things weren't going well. Even when things weren't exciting. When prison bars weren't being opened anymore, the church in Philippi stuck with him.

In fact, we'll find out later that they're so concerned about him that they've sent a man named Epaphroditus. And they sent him to go check in on Paul to see how he's doing. So the point is this. People come to the church for all sorts of things. Some people want to be a part of the partnership in the gospel because they want to be important.

They want influence. They figured out that the church is a really good place to do that. If you know enough theology, if you have enough money, people will pay attention to you.

And so it's a good place to feel like you're powerful. You have something to offer. Some people come to the church because they just want the partnership. They realize the church is a great place to meet people.

[10 : 33] It's a great place to find community. It's a great place to make friends. Some people come to the church because they love being right. And if you have a book that's inspired by God and you know it really well, it's a great place to tell other people what to believe.

It's a great place to have confidence, to say things strongly. And so people come to the church for all sorts of things that have nothing really at heart to do with the gospel.

All sorts of reasons people come through our doors. And so the real test comes when things are hard. If someone comes to the church for power and influence, when they're told, no, we're not going to follow your brilliant plan.

No, we're not going to promote you into leadership. If that person's goal and motivation is power and influence, they're not going to stay. They're going to leave.

If someone's goal in coming to the church is simply to find community, but they're there for the partnership and not the gospel, when things get hard in the culture for Christians, they're not going to stay either.

[11 : 46] When their friends that they are so close to leave the church, they may stop attending church as well. Because they were there for the partnership and not for the gospel. Some people come to church for a man.

They come for a preacher. They're not interested in the partnership. They believe they're interested in the gospel. They are mesmerized by someone's speaking ability or their wit or their stories.

But when that preacher leaves, so do they. And so Paul's thanksgiving, his confidence, his sureness that God is at work in this congregation is because they have done none of those things. They have stuck with him, even when he's in prison. Even when he's not performing miracles for them. He's far away from them. He's expensive to them. Epaphroditus is bringing an offering that they've made.

And this is apparently not necessarily everyone in this congregation is rich, but they've all given what they can to help Paul. And so Paul sees that they have stuck with the gospel.

[12 : 48] That their partnership is real. That they've proven it. They've proven it by staying even when things were hard. And so how do we know that we have a true gospel partnership?

How do we know that's the basis of our partnership? Well, one way that we know is that we stick with it when things are hard. We're committed to the partnership even when things don't go well. That we come for the gospel. Next week we're going to see that God can use anything to advance the gospel. He's going to use Paul's imprisonment. He's going to use people who are selfish within the church.

He's going to use all of it for his glory. That God does not need what we want. And so as we are here at Cheyenne Mountain, you see in verse 8, Paul says, For God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

That's the affection that we can have for one another. Because we at this church are in difficult circumstances as well. It was this Sunday, the second Sunday of September last year, that our previous senior pastor announced that he was leaving to take another call.

[14 : 02] And it was this summer that we thought we had another candidate, but we didn't. And that we discovered that we had mold in our building. But it's not just this past year. If you're familiar with the history of our church, the past 20 years, those of you who have been here know that there have been good times and bad times.

There have been times that perhaps we got close to closing our doors, times we were unsure of what God was doing. And so we can say in verse 8 to each other, For God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Because you are still here. Those of you who have been here the past year, and those of you who have been here the past couple decades, the families who helped start this church, Ken and Nancy O'Connell, Paul and David Johnson, we can have the affection of Christ Jesus for them because they've proven their partnership in the gospel by being here not just when things are going well, but when they're going poorly.

Not just when the circumstances are good, but when they're difficult. And Paul is sticking with this as well, and Paul is sticking with this even though he's in prison.

And so if you're not a Christian, if you have doubts or questions or objections, I'd ask you this question. Why is it that Paul sticks with things when they're difficult? Why is he willing to stay when he's in prison?

[15 : 27] He had everything as a religious, a Jewish religious leader. He was influential. He was powerful. He's going to tell us all about that in chapter 3. And yet he gives all of it up and sits in a prison.

Why is he giving up everything? Well, it's because Paul is convinced of the historical reality that Jesus died, and then he was raised again from the dead.

Paul tells us in a different letter in 1 Corinthians 15 that there were over 500 people who saw Jesus after he was raised from the dead, including a man, he refers to a man named Cephas, which is a reference to Peter.

So Paul knows, he has tremendous confidence, not just that God is at work in this congregation, but that Jesus really did rise from the dead. And so the success of Christianity that it's had, it's not because it's a good life philosophy.

The reason it's been able to make it through thick and thin is because of Jesus. Remember we talked last week that the gospel is the news about Jesus' death and his resurrection.

[16 : 35] And so we know our partnership is true when we stick through thick and thin, but we can also know that the gospel is true because we look back to people who lived when those events happened and they stuck with it through thick and thin.

They suffered things that would have made no sense did they not actually believe in Jesus' death and his resurrection. And so that's the kind of power that we have with a gospel partnership. Now if you had a friend and they told you about their church, it was in this place called Philippi, and they were going through difficult circumstances.

There was some fighting going on in the church. There were actually some teachers who were teaching not because they loved Christ, but because they loved themselves. They loved to hear themselves talk. And on top of that, they were in a culture that didn't like them.

What would be your number one prayer request for them? What would you pray for for them more than anything else?

[17 : 44] What does Paul choose to pray for more than anything else? For people who are trying to have partnership in the gospel. Did you see verse nine?

And it is 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.

Paul does not pray for a change in their circumstances. Paul doesn't pray that the Roman government would suddenly have favor on them. And Paul doesn't immediately pray for the resolution of all their problems.

No, instead he prays that their love would abound more and more. That it's something that's there, but it's also something that's growing.

And he speaks about it as fruit in verse 11. Now, my housemates and I made a decision this past summer that we were going to plant a little garden in our backyard, and we haven't been the best garden caretakers, so I'm not sure if it was a great idea.

[18 : 59] But I bought several mint plants, and I made a mistake, so I bought, this is my advice to you, my pastoral advice, don't buy your mint plants from a grocery store. Buy them from a place that actually specializes in plants.

So I bought several mint plants, and most of them died except for one. But the one that didn't die, if you know anything about mint plants, you know that they abound more and more. Because they're a weed.

I mean, it's a weed that you eat. So this mint plant has just been growing and growing all summer. When I see it, there's more and more fruit on it. I haven't taken advantage of all of that, but that is the idea here that Paul has, that this love is just growing.

It's love that's already there, so he's not saying you need to do something that's not there, but he wants it to be more and more. This goes back to his vision of the Christian life from verse 6, that God who began a good work will bring it to completion.

That the good things that are at work in this congregation will grow more and more. But this also raises a question for us, because what in the world does Paul mean by love?

[20 : 05] There are all sorts of definitions for love in our world right now. For some people, I might say I really love pizza. It could be I enjoy something. For other people, love means not questioning someone else's choices in their life.

No matter what they do, you approve of it because you love them. For some people, love is an emotion. So what is it here that's supposed to abound more and more?

What is Paul's definition of love? I'm going to jump around a little bit here between verses 9 and 11, but we're going to cover it all. Let's look first at the result. The result of this love is that it would be pure, they would be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

So whatever this love is, it has to result in being pure and blameless. Now, we might think here that Paul is talking about perfection, that these people are somehow going to reach perfection in this life. That is not what he's saying. We'll see that later in chapter 3. He'll make it clear that he has not reached perfection. He doesn't think he's going to ever become perfect, but he's working towards the goal of growing, of abounding more and more.

[21 : 13] These words here, they're less, they're not the legal words that we would expect in other parts of Paul's letters. These are more relational words. And so this word pure, one way we could translate it is sincere.

Paul's going to speak in the next chapter about people who are not sincere. They're preaching the gospel, actually in the next section, they're preaching the gospel because they're selfish, not because they're interested in Christ.

And so the purity here is a purity in motive. That you, in what you do, would be interested in other people, not yourself.

Remember, he's writing this to a church that has division. That you would be interested, that your motives would be pure, you'd be sincere in what you're doing. And blameless here, we could take it as not causing other people to stumble.

In other words, if there's been a conflict, we're able to say, that person had no part in it. They didn't contribute to the conflict. Parents, you know this, if you have two children come to you and one's complaining about the other, often your first move is to ask, well, what part did you play in it?

[22 : 24] There's usually no one who's blameless in these sorts of things. There's usually no one who's pure. I got to see this a lot when I was teaching. You know, students would, Colin's laughing. Students will come and complain about another student and you'll quickly find out that they're not telling you the whole story.

Oh, they hit you after you kicked them in the leg. Okay, I got it. And so Paul is speaking about a love. Not an emotion primarily, but a selflessness.

He's asking these people to grow as they're with one another in a congregation, that they grow in their selflessness, that they would be pure, that their greatest desire would be for other people's good, and that they would be blameless, that nothing they would do would cause other people to stumble, that they would not be the cause of division.

And how are they going to do this? Well, this is a specific kind of love. It's love with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent. This knowledge here is knowing the right way and then the discernment is being able to act on it.

And so this love is something that's informed by their knowledge of the gospel. As they prioritize the gospel, as they understand the gospel and what it means for their lives, they realize that the example of Christ is their example as well.

[23 : 44] And so they can continue in this partnership because they don't always have to be right. and they don't always have to be in power and control. That they're willing to be in this church that's not their perfect church and still work with the other people beside them for the gospel.

They're willing to keep pushing forward. I've made jokes with a few of you a few times about a church, and this church is called Matthew Presbyterian Church. And at this church, everything is done exactly the way I would like it to be done.

All my preferences are met. All my convictions about small things that aren't important, those are met to a T. Matthew Presbyterian Church is a really great place. And it would also be a really terrible place because all of my personality flaws, all of my weaknesses, all of my sin patterns would be amplified throughout that entire church.

church. And you know, I've been to a lot of churches in my life, I've grown up in the church, and I've never, I've never actually found a church that's Matthew Presbyterian Church.

I don't understand. But I would imagine for many of us that all of us have a perfect church in our minds. a church where everything's done exactly the way we want it to.

[25 : 13] And what Paul is telling us here is that we push not for our preferences, but we push together for the gospel. That we would be pure and blameless. That we would be able to know what is actually important.

That's the knowledge and discernment here. We would approve what's excellent. That as we work together for the gospel, we'd be able to figure out what matters and what doesn't. what we need to fight over and what we don't need to fight over.

By the way, Paul is certainly willing to fight. In chapter 3, he's going to refer to certain people as dogs and mutilators. So if you think that Paul is unafraid of conflict, that's certainly not true.

And if you think he's not willing to draw lines over certain things, that's not true as well. He's going to start throwing some names around in chapter 3. But he's saying here, as you're moving forward together, as you love one another, you would know what's important, what matters.

You would put it all in light of the gospel, in light of Jesus' death and his resurrection, but also in light of the good work that he's doing. So that verse 11, you would be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

[26 : 26] So that they would be these plants that are growing and abounding more and more. so that they would stand on the day of Christ. Remember, we talked about last week that the day of Christ is the day of Jesus' second coming, the day that he's going to come with judgment on the world.

His first judgment focused on salvation, his first coming focused on salvation but included judgment. His second coming will focus on judgment but include salvation. salvation. And so, these saints, these saints and elders and deacons are all in God's garden.

And if they're in God's garden, they're producing fruit together, the kind of fruit that he brings. And that's how Paul knows that there's so much confidence. That's how he has this sureness, this joy, and this thanksgiving.

And so, how do we know that we have a true gospel partnership? First, we saw that we know we have a true gospel partnership if we stick through things in thick and thin and the hard and the good times.

But we also know we have a true gospel partnership if there's the fruit of righteousness. If we see that we are abounding in love more and more. Remember, I asked you last week, I said we could ask you how you became a Christian but we could also ask you how you are becoming a Christian.

[27 : 48] How is God not just bringing theological truths into your mind but combining it with knowledge and discernment that you're approving what's excellent? That you would have love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

And so, we know that we're a true partnership as we see those things springing up in our church. As we see those things springing up in our lives. And so, we should be asking, how am I different than when I became a Christian?

how have I changed? Maybe it's I, I used to be angry, but now I lose my temper less.

It used to be that I hoarded money, that my security is more important than anything else, but now I realize that God is in charge of my life and so I can be generous with those around me.

Whatever it is, we should be able to look back on our lives and see God at work bearing fruit. If you're not a Christian, how do we know the gospel is true? Well, I hope that as you get to know us, as you see us in our lives, not that you would see perfect people, but that you would see people who have the fruit of righteousness, you wouldn't see people who always get it right, but that you'd see people who are growing.

[29 : 17] And so if you're a Christian, ask yourself, how am I growing? If you're not a Christian, you should feel free to ask any one of us, how have you changed since you became a Christian? How are you changing now?

Where do you see the fruit of righteousness in your life? Now this fruit isn't something that we ourselves generate or make, we see that it is through Jesus Christ in verse 11.

I told you that we've been planting a garden in my backyard and we have this diagram, this map on our refrigerator that my housemate Rory drew and it shows where each plant is in the garden so we can remember where we planted things.

But we don't really need that map anymore because all the fruit has come out. I know whether the mint plant is a mint plant, whether the diagram says it or not because it has mint leaves.

All I have to do is break them and smell them. And I know whether the tomato plant is a tomato plant because it has tomatoes on it. And so our partnership is true when the fruit is produced and yet it's not, it's not something the plant makes itself.

[30 : 35] That mint plant produces mint leaves because it's a mint plant. And if it didn't it's because it isn't. But it doesn't water itself. Rory put in this irrigation system, kind of an entry level irrigation system but it's one of those under the mulch kind of hose tubes that you put in.

And so he turns on the water and makes sure the plants get what they need. And the sun comes and gives them the energy that they need. And that is my prayer for us every week as I prepare to preach.

That God would send his Holy Spirit on us to give us growth. Because it's not growth that we can do ourselves. It's not something we generate it but it's something that he does.

So our partnership is true when we stick through the thick and thin and it's true when we produce the fruit. And it's fruit that God is producing.

He is the great gardener. He's tending his plants and if we're in his garden we'll see that growth.

We'll see it coming and we'll see it as we're working together. And so last week we saw that we're in partnership because we are pursuing the treasure of the gospel together.

[31 : 47] That we're willing to put up with differences because we all agree that that is the most worthy thing. But here it's a little bit different. It's not it's a different angle. We are in partnership together growing fruit together.

We're not just pursuing the same goal in the end but we're pursuing fruit together now as we work as a church as a partnership. filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

And so it's God who is gardening and feeding and bringing out this fruit in his people in his garden. And that is not what earns our salvation but it's the fruit. It shows that we belong to God.

That Christians produce fruit just like mint plants produce mint leaves. because they're weeds and that's what they do when there's water and sun. And God's people produce fruit when they're in his people in his partnership receiving the food of his word working together their love abounding more and more.

I read an article this spring there's been some research that's shown what people suspected for a long time. And some people who suspected suspected this others thought they were crazy but now there's proof.

[33 : 06] And it's proof of the fact that plants actually talk to each other. So it's been proven that plants can communicate with each other not just mechanically not just when their leaves touch each other we all know they're climbing plants right they can feel the environment around them but they're actually secretions that they give out sometimes through their roots to let each other know how close they are to each other so that they can adjust accordingly whether they're going to grow high to get more sun based on the plants around them or they'll grow out plants have to make these sorts of decisions to produce fruit and they're all helping each other they're sending out signals to let each other know how close they are so they can make the right decision to grow the right

amount of fruit and even more than that they'll actually communicate with each other about predators you can search this on Google if there's a predatory insect that's coming at one plant that plant will send out signals to all the other plants to let them know that there's a danger coming and so if we're tempted to believe that we are isolated Christians growing our own fruit just between us and God

Paul is telling us here no that our fruit is something that abounds more and more as we're together in God's garden that we are plants helping each other communicating with each other and growing together each for the other giving each other the information and the help that we need that we can all grow that we can all bear fruit and so that we can all stand for the day of Christ and God is doing that now he's doing that for all of his children who are in the partnership of his gospel everyone who is here following after them he's watering us he's providing us with sun so that we can grow and he's doing it with us together because he is the great gardener so would you pray with me dear father in heaven we thank you for planting us in this garden and this church we thank you that you're the one who produces the fruit and the growth we ask that you would encourage us with it that you would continue to sustain us not just in the good times but in the bad times and that you would continue to grow us more and more in love for you and for one another we ask all these things in the name of your son amen