"*Abounding Love to God's Praise*"
Philippians 1:1-11
January 11, 2026

We are beginning a new series today entitled ***Invincible Joy***, a study in the book of Philippians. Philippians is a small book, but it is rich in so many ways. It is a book that exudes personal warmth and affection. It is a book of encouragement and joy. It is Christ-centered, gospel-rich book that models prayer, calls us to holiness and humility, and sets our gaze on our heavenly citizenship. I did not have enough time in Philippians this week, but already it has been refreshing to my soul.

At a moderate pace, you can read through the whole book in about 15 minutes. Let me encourage you to set aside 15 minutes a week to read through the whole book each week for the next 10 weeks. Fifteen minutes a week will enable you to gain so much more out of our study. We all need all that Philippians offers to our souls.

If you were to ask me why the book of Philippians was written and you only gave me 30 seconds to answer, what might I say? Approximately 10 years after Paul planted the church in Philippi, he wrote to his dear friends and partners in the gospel:

- to thank them for their exemplary generosity (4:14-19),
- to update them on his current imprisonment (1:12-26),
- to commend their friend Epaphroditus whom he is sending back to them (2:25-30),
- to call them to humility and unity in the gospel (1:27-2:11; 4:2-3),
- to warn them of false teachers (3:2),
- and to encourage them to persevere in the joy of Christ regardless of their circumstances.[1]

One of the remarkable features about Philippians is that it was written from prison. Paul was in the custody of the praetorian guard in Rome which had two primary responsibilities: 1) To protect the emperor, and 2) to guard prisoners waiting for trial. Paul cannot be certain of what the outcome of his situation will be. To be in a Roman prison, is to face the possibility of death. Yet Paul's writing exudes joy and calls for persistent rejoicing regardless of life's trials. This is one of the reasons I have chosen *Invincible Joy* as the title of our series. Paul not only uses the terms "joy" or "rejoicing" a dozen times in this short book, he also demonstrates from his prison cell that his joy is tethered to Christ, not his circumstances.

Perhaps the best key verse for Philippians is 1:21: "*For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain*." To live is Christ—what does that mean? It means that the primary purpose of my life, which infiltrates every other aspect of life, is to serve and honor Jesus because He is Lord of all. Living for Christ is not a cold obligation, but a response of love and gratitude for the One who saved us from God's judgment and restored us to God's favor. This is the heart behind invincible joy: ***My life is about Christ who is the source of invincible joy, because in Christ, even death is gain***. It makes me stop and ask the question, "Am I more sensitive to my troubles or to my Lord?" Which one dominates my perspective and the disposition of my heart.

Emotions may rise and fall with circumstances, but true joy is not produced or ultimately destroyed by circumstances. Joy is produced by the Holy Spirit and the life of Christ within us. This means that you can have joy independent of your circumstances because joy is produced by the Holy Spirit. This is why abiding in Christ and walking by the Spirit is so essential to being a joyful person. Circumstances (good or bad) are merely the context in which we live out our joy in Christ. When we are suffering, joy feels like a deep security, a persistent hope, an assurance that in the final outcome, when life is done, all will be well.

We can't completely disconnect our emotions from our circumstances, but we must untether our joy from our circumstances and emotions. Untether your joy from your circumstances, because your circumstances aren't the source of your joy. The source of joy is the Holy Spirit within you who is not subject to your circumstances but sovereign over them. So don't enslave your "joy" by tethering it to your circumstances. Tether your joy to Christ!

Tethering your joy to your circumstances is like tethering your dog to the bumper of your car. When you get in your car and take off, you are going jerk your dog around and probably kill him. It's better to tether him to your house that has an immovable foundation and it's better to anchor our joy to Christ who is a firm foundation.

[1] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians* (Christ-centered Exposition), pg. 12.

Our circumstances are temporary. Our emotions are not fully sanctified and therefore they are fallible. Neither our circumstances nor our emotions are to be trusted with our joy. But **joy in Christ is a deep-seated, enduring security and assurance that our union with Jesus will persevere thru every trial until we are reunited with Jesus face to face where our hearts will be fully satisfied in Him, our circumstances will be eternally good (void of sin), and our emotions will be fully sanctified and infinitely happy**. Joy says, "Christ is mine. God is with me, and my heavenly citizenship is secured. I can grieve my present circumstances yet still rejoice because I have Jesus." One author put it this way, "*If you have nothing but Jesus, you have everything you need for joy*"[2]

This is not just theoretical talk. It was this kind of invincible joy that was put on display at the very inception of the Philippian church. Acts 16 details the amazing circumstances that accompanied the birth of the Philippian church.

In Acts 16 Paul met a young man by the name of Timothy and took him under his wing to mentor him and eventually establish him as the pastor in Ephesus. As Paul and Timothy traveled among the churches, God instructed Paul through a vision to go to Europe, particularly to a region called Macedonia. They ended up in Philippi, a prestigious Roman colony in which the first Macedonian/European church was planted.

When Paul and Timothy arrived in Philippi, they found the place where the Jewish people gathered for prayer and began proclaiming the gospel. The first convert in Philippi was a woman by the name of Lydia along with her family. But immediately satanic opposition arose through a demon-possessed slave-girl who made money for her masters by practicing divination. For days she followed Paul around saying, "*These men are bond servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation*." What she said was true, but because Paul did not want association with her to be a distraction from the pure gospel, he cast the demon out of her. This meant a loss of profit for her masters which enraged them. So they drug Paul and Silas before the authorities and slandered them. As a result, Paul and Silas were beaten and put in prison stocks.

[2] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians* (Christ-centered Exposition), pg. 23.

You know how the story ends. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying (probably not lamenting) and singing *hymns of praise* to God… While the prisoners were listening to Paul and Silas rejoicing in their suffering, there came an earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison, opened the doors, and loosed their chains!

When the jailor awoke and saw that the doors were open, he assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself—because that seemed more merciful than what the Romans would do to him or allowing prisoners to escape. But Paul called out for him to not harm himself. And before the night was over, the jailor and his family had also put their faith in Jesus. Thus, the Philippian church was born—grace blossoming in the midst of turmoil, joy birthed in the pain of suffering. Paul and Silas established a precedence at the very inception of the Philippian church: ***The way of discipleship is hard and gospel living will face immense opposition, but in Jesus there is an INVINCIBLE JOY produced by the Holy Spirit that gives off the aroma of Christ in the most difficult of circumstances.***

Approximately 10 years after the birth of the Philippian church, Paul wrote to thank them for a gift they had sent to help with his needs and to give them further pastoral shepherding—hence, the book of Philippians.

Now, after that long introduction let's turn to the opening verses of this book in which Paul pours out his heart of affection, gratitude, joy and prayer for his dear friends and partners in the gospel. He begins with an insightful greeting. **[vs. 1-2]**

Let me point out several things from this greeting. First, Paul identifies himself and Timothy as *servants* of Christ Jesus. In most of his letters, Paul establishes his credentials as an *apostle*. But there's no need to do that here because the Philippians fully embraced his apostolic authority. The term *servants* in the ESV is actually too mild. The Greek uses the term for *bond-servants* or *slaves*.

The title *servant of the Lord* was regarded with honor in the OT, and certainly we would see Paul and Timothy in that light. But in a Roman society, to be a slave was a despised position. Notice how countercultural this is. To be a "slave" in the world's eyes is to be despised or pitied. But to

be a "slave" of Christ is not only a position of humility, but also nobility because Jesus Himself took the form of a servant in Phil 2:7. So as a bond-slave, Paul is not only serving Christ but also imitating Christ as He models humble, servant leadership to the body of Christ.

As a bond-slave, Paul owns nothing, not even His own life. He belongs to His Master, Christ, whom He trusts to meet all his needs. As a bondservant, he lives not to advance his own agenda, but that of Jesus. And this is the life of nobility and humility that Paul is modeling for us, as He imitates the ultimate servant, Jesus.

Second, Paul not only identifies himself as a servant, but identifies the church as comprised of saints. Notice, he's writing not just to the elders and deacons who exercise leadership within the church, but to *all* the *saints* (1). Today we tend to think of saints as the spiritual elite. But that his not how the Bible uses the term. Saints are those who by faith in Jesus, have been set apart as God's holy people. *All believers are saints*. Notice that Paul identifies the saints as "*in* Christ Jesus." Faith in Jesus, not good works, is the means to becoming a saint. If you are a genuine follower of Jesus, it is essential that you view yourself as a saint—not with spiritual elitism, but as one whose life, purpose, and identity have been set apart as holy, to live your life to please and honor God above all else. [many responsibilities, ***one purpose***]

Third, notice that Paul's aim, his heart motivation, is for these believers to walk in the fullness of God's grace and peace [2]. We know that these are not mere "Christianese," because Paul ends his letter in the same way: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (4:23). Paul's desire is that through his teaching, the Philippians will be able to walk more fully and effectively in the daily grace that is theirs in Christ. And the result of walking in the grace of God will be the experience of God's peace.

Church, you can have peace reign in your heart. As we will discover in 4:7, the peace of God is able to guard your heart and your mind as you walk in the grace of God by means of prayer, actively trusting in the promises of God. So, ask yourself, *how can I walk in the fullness of God's grace today*? What are the means of grace for you to take hold of? Faith in the promises of God, confidence in the character of God, prayer in light of the compassion and sovereignty of God, wisdom based on the word of God, praise for the undiminished hope of the gospel regardless of your circumstances.

Finally, notice how Paul's greeting is consumed with the centrality of Christ. Three times he highlights Christ Jesus with three different prepositions. He's a servant *<u>of</u>* Christ writing to saints *<u>in</u>* Christ for the purpose of grace and peace *<u>from</u>* Christ. This is not surprising from the one who said, "*To live is Christ and to die is gain*" (1:21). This is not a mere idiosyncrasy of Paul. It is the heart of true discipleship. Our lives are bound up in the person and purposes of Christ. Our goal is for the presence of Christ and the purposes of Christ to saturate and color every aspect of our lives.

After this formal greeting, Paul begins to express his heart of personal affection toward the Philippians, followed by a personalized prayer for them. Verses 3-8 are the most intensely personal of all of Paul's letters. The Philippians clearly have a special place in Paul's heart.

How do I preach a passage that is so intensely personal (Paul is not teaching here)? How do we read someone else's personal mail and apply it to our lives? Perhaps a little like we would read a love letter from the days of civil war between a husband and wife who knew they could take nothing for granted. We would read it as an *example* of cherishing love. Yet Philippians is more than a mere personal letter. It is inspired by the Holy Spirit for our edification.

In Philippians 3:17, Paul calls his readers to imitate him. So that's what we are going to do. We are going to see Paul's heart of affection toward his dear friends as a template for our own fellowship. So, let me draw out *four aspects of Paul's heart for us to emulate*:

1. **Paul's heart for the Philippians was expressed through a ministry of unceasing, grateful, and joyful prayer** (Phil 1:3-5).

[vs. 3-5] The deeply person bond that Paul shares with the Philippians is their partnership in the gospel. Paul had brought the gospel to them with great sacrifice, and the Philippians in turn supported Paul with their love, loyalty, and financial support. Even when Paul bore the stigma of being a prisoner for the sake of the gospel, it did not deter the Philippians' loyal support and love for Paul. In fact, it stimulated their care for him.

And as a result, Paul could not help but thank God every time they came to mind, always praying for them with joy! Paul understood that unlike

anything else, *prayer is the work of ministry*. Prayer is trusting God to produce true spiritual fruit out of all we put our hand to for His name's sake. We don't assume that our efforts will yield fruit. We actively trust God to bring about the fruit. So, Paul's ministry was a little preaching and a whole lot of prayer. And his prayers for the Philippians were saturated with thanksgiving and joy because of the work he could see God doing in them.

So how ought we to follow Paul's example? Notice that though Paul is currently in prison, he has not become consumed by his own suffering. Rather, he has turned his heart *outward* to encourage the Philippians from a heart of thanksgiving and joy for what God had done—thanksgiving and joy that could not be bound by prison chains because they were the fruit of the Spirit's work through the gospel. Notice how Paul here is modeling the very mind of Christ that he will exhort us with in chapter 2:3-5: with humility of mind, consider other's interests [and needs} as more pressing than your own by adopting the attitude of Christ.

2. **Paul's heart for the Philippians expressed confidence in God's faithfulness** (Phil 1:6).

[vs. 6] Paul recognized that the spiritual fruit that he sees in the Philippians is the result of God's work in them. And that gives him confidence that God will not abandon, but rather complete what He has begun in them. What is that work? It is the work of sanctification—the Spirit's work of making them like Christ which will be fully completed when they see Jesus face to face.

Church we too need this kind of confidence in God's faithfulness as we minister to one another. We don't give up on each other when we see relapses on the road of sanctification because we believe that God's faithfulness to God's purposes is more persistent and enduring than the weakness of our flesh. How do we not grow disheartened and discouraged by the fickleness of earthbound people? We fix our gaze, not on the failures of others, but on the faithfulness of God which is infinitely greater.

The Philippians were not a perfect church. They too had to deal with things like conflict and selfish inclinations. But don't allow a lack of perfection in your fellow believers to steal your gratitude. Look for the evidences of God's grace and give thanks to God with joy that what He has begun He will finish.

3. **Paul's heart for the Philippians was an overflow of God's love** (Phil 1:7-8).

[vs. 7-8] Paul says, "I hold you in my heart," and its appropriate for me to feel this way because we not only share the common bond of God's grace, but you have also joined in my suffering for the sake of the gospel. We know that the bond of friendship exponentially deepens when people walk through suffering together, but how much more as they experience the grace of God in that suffering. Yet Paul's love for the Philippians is much more than just a shared experience of grace. In vs. 8 he acknowledges that he longs for them all with the affection of Christ. In other words, it is the overflowing love of Christ in him that compels his love for the Philippians.

Oh church, may the love of Christ so captivate and consume our hearts that we too may be able to say to one another, "*I hold you in my heart*." This is what true Christian fellowship looks like. The bonds of love that give, serve, and suffer for the sake of Christ in one another.

4. **Paul's heart for the Philippians was focused on their spiritual maturity** (9-11).

In vs. 9-11, Paul now articulates how he prays for the Philippians. **[vs. 9-11]**

The heart of Paul's prayer is that the Philippians would grow in their capacity and exercise of love. But love for who? In the context of this letter and especially chapter 1, it seems that the focus is on their love for one another as fellow believers. But of course, we also know that love for our neighbor is an overflow of our love for God. And our love for God should extend not only to fellow believers but also to unbelievers and even our enemies. But as we will see, Paul will address a matter of conflict in the church and will exhort the Philippians to imitate Christ in putting the needs and interests of each other ahead of their own. So Paul prays that the dominant characteristic among the Philippian believers will be abounding love for one another.

But this is not the kind of love the world vainly preaches today—the kind of 'love' that affirms people in whatever they want to do as long as it is not restricted by God's authoritative word or call to holiness. The sentiment of love is not enough. So, Paul prays that their love will governed by knowledge and discernment. That is, knowledge of God, his will, and His ways.

Knowledge of Christ and His example of both selfless sacrifice as well as moral purity. Knowledge of God's law/word that enables us to understand how human love is to align with God's pure and holy love.

Furthermore, love must be governed not only by biblical knowledge but also by *discernment*. Discernment has to do with wisdom. Discernment is knowing how to wisely apply what God has said to the various circumstances and relationships in life. Our love needs to be *informed* by true biblical thinking/values, and our love needs to be *applied* with the discernment of wisdom. In other words, in our love and support for one another, we must not only ask, "what is right?" (knowledge) but also, "what is wise?" (discernment).

Knowledge keeps love within the parameters of what is pleasing in God's eyes. Discernment enables us to ascertain how to love one another best according to the need of the moment.

Now there's a purpose to all of this in vs. 10-11. Paul prays that their love will abound more and more, with knowledge and discernment, *so that* they will approve what is excellent and therefore be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. It seems that what Paul is praying for is that knowledge of God along with spiritual and practical discernment will enable them to love one another in such a way that they will take the high road of purity and honor in their relationships with one another so that they will not be ashamed to give an account to Christ when He returns. Rather, they will be filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through faith in Christ and honors God. And as we will see later, some of the fruit is characterized by unity rather than division, selflessness rather than selfishness, and moral purity rather than corrupt character.

Notice how distinctive biblical love is compared to what the world calls love. In the world, self-centeredness, promiscuity, infidelity, and even homosexuality in the name of love produce immorality that invokes God's judgment. But in the spirit of Christ, love governed by biblical knowledge and discernment results in purity, blamelessness, and righteousness that honors and glorifies God, invoking His favor.

May this be our prayer for our own church family, that our love may abound still more and more with real knowledge and all discernment, that we may demonstrate the excellence of wisdom in our relationships with one another so that we will be pure and blameless, flourishing with righteous fruit at results in praise to God.

Now let me conclude by stepping back and highlighting the many characteristics of Paul's heart and ministry in these first 11 verses that we want to be the tone and reality of our own fellowship here at Trinity:

- **Humility** & **servanthood** (1)
- **Grace** and **peace** (2)
- **Gratitude** (3)
- Unceasing, exuberant, faith-filled **prayer** (3-4, 9-11)
- **Joy** (4)
- **Partnership** -partnering together for the gospel (5)
- **Faith** in God's persistent work of sanctification (6)
- **Deep affection** – holding one another in our hearts with overflowing love of God (7-8)
- **Suffering** – embracing the cost of discipleship as we embrace the sufferings of Christ (7)
- Abounding love that results in pure lives and praise to God (9-11)

This is where the book of Philippians is taking us as we live it out. So let me urge you to take hold of Philippians for yourself—let's do it together—over the next 10 weeks. Let's:[3]

- Recognize that gospel ministry is costly, but Jesus is worth it.
- Fight for joy in Christ.
- Pursue the unity of the Spirit in our fellowship with one another.
- Become large-hearted "Macedonian" givers that reflect God's heart of generosity.
- Partner together in and for the gospel.
- Model for our neighbors what citizenship in God's kingdom really looks like.

[Pray vs. 9-11 (and list)]

[3] The following six challenges taken from Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians* (Christ-centered Exposition), pg. 12-14.

****Julie H. announcement**: *PEM School Board Strategic Planning*