

**Philippians 1: 1-6; “Fellowship From the First Day”, Sermon # 1 in
the series – “To Rejoice in Christ”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
December 16th, 2018, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

I want to begin to preach to you from the book of Philippians because it is a letter which the apostle Paul wrote to them to encourage their faith. He knew that each and every Christian should have joy at the thought of their knowing Christ. They should have joy in knowing that God has called them to rejoice in Christ continually. We are to rejoice in Christ continually realizing that our faith is secure in Him. It does not ultimately rest upon our strength to persevere, although we must and will persevere, but it rests upon Christ giving us the continued grace that we will need to persevere. And He has promised to do that very thing. Our salvation rests upon His finished work, and upon the Holy Spirit and His on-going work of sanctification in our lives. This is a truth that is much needed, for each of us to understand. Our salvation is a very great salvation and we should realize that it is our responsibility to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As we grow in Christ, it is our responsibility to learn to encourage each other on our pilgrimage to the Celestial City by our having fellowship in the gospel with each other. In other words we consciously make efforts to share with each other the many blessings that the Lord has died to bring to us, so that we might live in a way which is pleasing to Him. This is what I want to bring to your attention at this hour; what fellowship in the gospel really is. Fellowship in the gospel is first of all a joyful recognition of God’s good work in your remembering the saints. It is 2nd – A joyful recognition of God’s good work, in your remembering His faithfulness. I would like you to see, dear brethren, the importance of remembering that God’s good work is the basis of your having joy in the Lord and that you will be trying to learn how to be an encouragement to others of the Lord’s people, even as you walk with Him and rejoice in Him.

1st of all – Fellowship in the gospel is a joyful recognition of God’s good work, in your remembering the saints. (verses 1-5)

You will notice that when Paul writes this letter to the Philippian church that he mentions that he and Timothy are bondservants. And he is addressing the believers in the church there, as saints. This was typical of Paul’s perspective on himself when he wrote to all the different churches that he wrote letters to. He saw himself first of all as the servant of Christ (to follow Him and to do His will in connection with His word); and then he saw himself as a servant to all of them. (That is, as an apostle, a preacher, and a teacher, and a godly example to them all) The reason for this emphasis upon servanthood is because it is of the essence of the Christian life. To become a servant of Christ you must remember the saints, and think of how you might minister to them. Paul remembered them often. And in his every remembrance of them, he always in every prayer made request for them with all joy, for their fellowship in the gospel. What does it mean practically, to remember the saints of your church? Well, first of all it means that you should remember that God, in and through Christ, has set His love upon them, just as He has set His love upon you, and so you should not see yourself as too great to have fellowship with them.

You will recall that the Lord Jesus, when He was asked by the mother of Zebedee’s sons in Matthew 20: 20 concerning whether He would grant that they might sit, one on His right hand and the other on his left hand in His kingdom, He answered – “You do not know what you ask, are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” They said that they were able. And Jesus said to them – “You will indeed be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.” “And when the ten

heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brothers.” “But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.’ “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.” “And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

What was the problem here? The problem was that in asking for the positions on the right and the left of our Lord in His kingdom, the mother of the sons of Zebedee was asking for them to receive the privilege of greatness with Christ, without really remembering the saints. They wanted to rule with him on His right and left in the eternal kingdom, and they were even willing to suffer with Him to attain to that privilege. But they did not understand that marvelous principle of servanthood yet. They were not remembering that serving the saints is the way to true greatness in Christ’s kingdom. Let me ask you this afternoon – Do you desire to serve the saints in the context of Christ’s kingdom; that is, in thinking about how His kingdom comes in our local church here? Or do you desire to live pretty much to yourself? That will never do if you want to glorify God during your time of stay here upon the earth. Fellowship in the gospel is a joyful recognition of God’s good work in remembering that the kingdom is composed of the saints, who learn to minister to one another and pray for one another and work together with one another to see His kingdom advance here, in truth and love for one another.

Paul knew that when any Christian is saved they are called by God to have fellowship with other Christians everywhere, and more specifically with those Christians of the local church that they are a part of. Paul mentions the saints before he even mentions the leaders of the church there; the bishops and the deacons. His letter is addressed to all the saints there in that church. Let me say that this is a very important and sometimes hard concept in the Christian life to grasp; that God’s good work in salvation is not simply to save you as an individual person and to make you a Christian. It is also His good work in saving you to also place you into the Universal Church (that is, Christ’s spiritual body); and to so providentially work, and to instruct you by the power of the Holy Spirit in connection with His word, that you will see where you ought to go to church and you will join that church in the prospect of having fellowship in the gospel with the other saints there.

It says in Acts chapter 2, and verse 42 – “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. The word fellowship there is Koinonia in the Greek. It means partnership in the gospel. It means participation in spiritual interaction through social interaction with other believers on the meaningful level of thinking together of what can be done to further to promote the cause and kingdom of Christ. It means thinking about what will build up, and help other believers on, to maturity. It means learning to remember to pray for these good things. Paul, in verse 2 had said that he wanted the believers in the church there in Philippi to have grace and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. He wanted them to understand that, yes, grace was God’s unmerited favor towards them as sinners; that this favor that had been shown to them was God’s mercy to them, which had led them to more carefully consider the gospel and all the saints.

You can remember, can’t you, how you believed in the gospel, and how that when you did, you then began to speak with other Christians who you didn’t really want to spend any time with, before that day. Now, suddenly, because your heart was changed, you could have real and spiritual fellowship with them in relation to the gospel of Christ. It was faith in the gospel which began your fellowship with the Father and the Son, through the power of the Holy Spirit. But now, you also wanted to have fellowship with other Christians and share together sweet interaction and participate in the truly spiritual give and take of the Christian life. Christ gave to you His very life, and God the Father drew you to Christ, and the Holy Spirit opened your heart

to respond to the truth of the gospel. And now you are able to recognize that those who believed in Jesus are saints. They have been justified by Christ's grace. They are seen by God as His holy ones by the imputed merits of Christ; what He did in His full and righteous obedience to fulfill God's law. And what He did in love to suffer, bleed, and die; to lay down His life for you the sinner. You have seen all this, but what will you go on to do to respond to what He has done for you?

If you have seen what He has done for you, and if you have seen what He is leading you into, you have also seen that it is something that He continues to bring to you; many other blessings in an on-going fashion. It is a fact that by His providential leading He is teaching you and presenting you with opportunities to serve Him. Along with His leading you, He is also giving you grace which He does not expect you to receive in vain. You, the Christian, by the power of His Holy Spirit working within you, must learn to appreciate what you have been called to. You were called to fellowship in the gospel with other Christians, both in the context of the local church which He has led you to, and also the fellowship which you will occasionally have had with other Christians in the context of larger body of Christians whom you have met and interacted with outside of the local church. Oh, I hope that you as a Christian will remember what you have been called to. You have been called to have fellowship in the gospel with the saints here in this place. From the very first day until now, you have been called to this.

A part of this is learning how to pray for the peace of other believers. Notice how Paul wishes and prays for peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus to be known in each saint's heart in the church at Philippi. When you have found peace with God through the blood of our Lord Jesus, you can now know the peace of God in your experience. And if you are studying the life of Christ in the Bible, and the life of the apostles and others saints, you begin to realize, if grace is working in your heart, that you have not been called to fight with other believers in Christ, but you have been called to see how you can serve and help other believers in the church, and even other Christians who you meet from other churches who you believe know the Lord. Let me ask you whether you pray for other believers to know grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is cultivating true fellowship. Think of how Paul describes the way that he thinks about the believers he was writing to, in the church there at Philippi and ask yourself if you think of other believers in this holy way. He says, "I thank God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now."

2nd – Fellowship in the gospel is a joyful recognition of God's good work, in your remembering God's faithfulness together .

Paul says in verse 6 – "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ." Now, I would have you to observe that if there is any verse in the whole of the Scriptures that plainly puts to rest the worries that a true Christian might have, that they might fall from grace, this is it. This is a statement of God's perfect faithfulness to Himself and His own work, and to you, dear believer. Notice Paul's confidence in God; he was confident of this very thing concerning these Philippian believers; that God had begun a good work in them. Since Paul was confident of this truth concerning them, so should we be confident in this word concerning ourselves, and others who manifest by their confession of Christ and the evidence of their having been born again in the good works that they do, that God also will continue His good work in them.

When God begins this good work, Paul says that He will continue to perform it until the Day of Christ Jesus. Your being ultimately saved rests upon God's faithfulness to yourself. Even though your own faithfulness must be cultivated in accordance with a sincere obedience to the word of God, even this takes place in accordance with His good working. Philippians 2: 12 and 13 – "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now

much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” Paul, in verse 6 of our text is speaking of the work of Christ’s redemption being applied to the heart of the believer. It begins on the day of that person’s first believing in the opening of the heart, the giving of the gift of regeneration, and the sealing of that work with the gift of the Holy Spirit. That work once begun will continue to the Day of Christ because as it says here in chapter 2, verse 13 – it is God who is at work in you both to will and to do.

The Christian life is not simply your recognition that God through Christ has done something in general for you, and now you must persevere in godliness based upon the strength of your own will, your own determination to do what God’s word says. No, your perseverance rests upon your faith in Christ. It is based upon your coming to recognize that it is God who is at work in you. It is His work to give you the wisdom and the strength, and the even the desire, to persevere in godliness. It is your work to belief in Him and to go about to make real progress in holiness and righteousness; in the love of the truth and the love of the brethren. Then you will desire to bear fruit to Him; not simply to try to prove something to people around about how supposedly spiritual you are. To make progress in holiness you must come to see this, or the glory cannot go to Christ for your salvation. It would go to you. You would say – I have done this for Christ. I have done that for Christ. And you do not recognize the fact that your whole faith and strength to do things for Him comes from Him? “I am the vine, you are the branches.” “He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

The Day of Jesus Christ will bear all this out that I am saying to you. The Day of Christ is the Day of Christ’s return when He will raise all of the righteous dead and glorify them together with Himself. All the believers in all the ages of the world will be there together, and they will all be changed to be like Christ. That will be the completion of the great work which was begun on the first day; that day when the person who was a sinner was believed in the gospel and was justified; on the day when God gave the sinner spiritual life and as New Birth, and raised them from the dead spiritually speaking, placed them into Christ’s body, and made them one of God’s saints. That was the beginning of the work. But the work continues and will continue until the day of Christ, for you, dear believer.

It is God’s good work of transformation, to take a sinner and to transform them into a person who is Christ-like. This is not the work of a moment, or a day, but it is the work of a lifetime. It is a work which is on-going throughout the rest of the life of the Christian. And it requires that its completion will be a perfect completion, for God’s work is always perfect. The perfect completion for all those saints who die before the coming of the Lord comes in two stages. They will die physically and their spirit, the spirit of a righteous person, is made perfect. Hebrews 12: 22 – “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who registered in heave, to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.”

And then the next stage is the Day of Christ; the Day of the resurrection of all of the saints, when the perfect spirit will be joined together once again with a body. But it will not be this body of corruption, but this same body raised with power. 1st Corinthians 15: 51 – “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.” “For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed.” “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” What a glorious Day that will be for all the saints! We ought to be joyfully looking forward to that Day, but all the while remembering our own work. Verse 58 – “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” May it be so for each of us.

