

Philippi is named after Philip II, King of Macedonia (359-336 BC). We might know his son better – Alexander the Great. Father and son founded the Greek empire. That empire surrounded the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. When King Philip was assassinated, Alexander continued his father's work subduing Asia Minor and Egypt. Alexander's conquests are important. Greek became the language of literature and commerce around much of the Mediterranean. And so the Greeks had an enormous effect on the spread of the Gospel in the first century AD.

Alexander died in his 33<sup>rd</sup> year. The Lord Jesus died at about the same age. It's interesting to note the similarities and differences between the two kings. In both cases sin led to their death. There was, however, a big difference. Alexander's death was caused by his own sinfulness. Suffering from malaria, his death was brought on by excessive eating and drinking. Contrast Alexander with the Lord Jesus. Jesus was without sin. Sinful men put Him to death. It was for sin that He died. Our sin, yours and mine, caused Him to be crucified at Calvary.

In Egypt, Alexander was declared to be the son of the Egyptian god, Amon-Ra. He understood this to mean that he had a divine origin. In contrast, Paul in his letter to the Philippians (2:7, 8) writes that ***Christ made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.***

These days, we don't remember Alexander the Great very well. Many of us probably only know him by name. But the Lord Jesus is known and loved by His people throughout the world. And it is to those people, to the Christians at Philippi, to you and to me, that Paul writes his letter.

Today, we'll look at the first two verses of Philippians chapter one. ***Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.***

Paul wrote Philippians while in prison, probably in Rome. Note 1:13, ***it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.*** In his opening words he speaks of his and our relationship with Christ. Paul mentions Jesus three times in 1:1, 2. In these opening verses he defines what it means to be a Christian.

Paul describes himself and Timothy as ***servants of Christ Jesus***. The word ***servant*** isn't hard to understand. It can also be translated as ***slave***. We'll come back to it later. But what is a saint? For, Paul writes to the ***saints***. Have you ever seen a saint? Well, you have. But, what about you, yourself? Are you a saint?

A small boy attended a church that had beautiful stained-glass windows. He was told that the windows contained pictures of the Saints: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and some others. One day, the boy was asked, "What is a saint?" He replied, "A saint is a person whom the light shines through." Quite a profound answer I think. For, the light of Christ shines through His people. Does Christ shine through you? Can others see Christ in you?

In the New Testament, 'saint' is often used to describe a Christian. A saint is someone who believes in Jesus. In other words 'saint' and 'Christian' convey the same idea. One describes the other. Consider Paul's greeting in 1 Corinthians 1:2. ***To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy.*** Christians are made holy (sanctified) in Christ. That word, ***holy***, gives us the word ***saints*** in Philippians. It can be translated (from the Greek) using either word.

In 1 Corinthians 1:2, we see that the church belongs to God. It is ***the church of God***. A group of saints is found wherever there are believers. We could just as easily write, "To the Church of God or (as in Philippians) to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Canterbury Presbyterian Church." The members are in the church because they are ***in Christ*** and they are ***saints*** by calling. And so the word 'saint' speaks of one who is 'holy'. Being holy conveys the idea of being separate. But separate from what? In the first place, holiness is a special description for God. He is holy.

In Isaiah 6:3 the seraphim call out, ***Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty***. When Isaiah heard this heavenly cry he was immediately convicted of his sin. He said. ***Woe to me!... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips.*** Isaiah felt unclean in God's presence. And so the Bible underlines God's holiness. It's His moral perfection in His whole being. It is His separation from sin. Holiness and perfection are really two sides of the same coin.

In 1 Peter (1:16) we read, ***Be holy, because I am holy***. But how can we be holy? It's only by God's grace. It's through the unearned favour of God Almighty. Only in Christ can we share in God's holiness and be called 'saints.' It's only through a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus that we're holy. God has called us to be saints. United to Christ by faith, God declares that that is what we are. Without the Lord we would not be saints. Without faith in Christ we cannot be saints. Romans 3:23, 24, ***for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*** (that's the bad news), ***and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus*** (that's the good news).

Are you a saint? You are if you've trusted in Christ. The gospel call is for us to turn away from sin and put our faith in the Lord Jesus. And the Lord Jesus is the key. For, your faith does not save you. Christ does. Remember the boy's words. A saint is a person whom the light shines through. That light is the light of Christ. It's the holiness of God Himself. As Christians we are to be transparently holy. You can see right through a Christian. But what do you see? You see Christ. You see a holy God. You see one who has been saved from the penalty and power of sin. You see a saint. So here's another way to define a Christian. A Christian is someone in whom you can see Christ.

I've told some of you about the Romanian pastor, Richard Wurmbrandt. The evil Romanian leader, Nicolai Ceauşescu, jailed Richard for his faith. Though persecuted, he never stopped speaking about his faith in Christ. One day a man asked him what God was like. In all humility, Richard answered, 'He is like me'. The man answered, 'In that case, I love Him'. The light of Christ shone in pastor Wurmbrandt. He lived to serve Christ.

We cannot become slaves/servants of Christ until we realize that by nature we're slaves to sin. In ancient times there were three ways you could become a slave. First, by being conquered in times of war. Second, from birth. A slave's child became a slave as well. Third, you could become a slave because of debt. Many poor people sold their children into slavery.

It's striking that the Bible teaches that all of us become slaves to sin in similar ways. We are born in sin. Psalm 51:5, ***Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me***. In addition, the Bible teaches that we are slaves by conquest. Sin rules us so that we cannot please God. Remember what Paul writes in Romans 7:21. ***When I want to do good, evil is right there with me***. Furthermore, we're slaves by debt. Romans 6:23, ***For the wages of sin is death***. So, there were several ways that a person could become a slave.

So too, there were several ways to set free from slavery. A slave could earn freedom, buy it, or someone else could pay the price. BUT, in spiritual terms, there's only one way to be set free from slavery to sin. You and I must be bought, redeemed by Christ, who alone can pay the price. You cannot buy your own salvation. No one can earn it. You and I can only receive God's grace. And God gives grace freely on the basis of Christ's sacrificial death. (Romans 6:23) ***For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord***.

Paul makes three points about our relationship with Christ. He indicates these by the use of the words *in*, *of* and *from*. A saint is in Christ Jesus; a servant of Christ Jesus; and receives grace and peace.....from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us briefly take each one in turn.

### **1) A Christian is in Christ** (1:2)

Christians are often described as being in Christ. It is in Christ that we are saved. In Philippians 3:14 we read of the call of God in Christ Jesus. Paul writes, ***I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus***. That call is to you and me too. The claims of Christ are pressed on all of us.

Now that's not an invitation merely waiting for our response. It's a call with authority. It's a royal summons to bring us into relationship with the Lord Jesus. God's call is made effective by giving us the gift of faith (1:29). The call to believe is issued in Christ. That's because all God's saving purposes are centred in Christ Jesus and are worked out in Him.

In Christ we have all that we need. Philippians 4:7, ***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus***. 4:13, ***I can do everything through him who gives me strength***. Union with Christ gives Paul hope for the future. And, the believers in Philippi were encouraged by this same hope. 1:13, ***Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly***.

Let me ask you this morning, are you in Christ? Do you know Him, personally? To be in Christ is to know that everything for our past, present and future and eternal welfare has been secured for us by God, in Christ. And they're stored up in Christ for us to share and enjoy. Through union with our living Saviour we experience the warmth and personal reality of what it means to be saved. For, Christian friends, you are *in Christ*.

## **2) A Christian is a servant of Christ (1:1)**

We've seen that in Christ you and I are saints. This demands loyalty through ownership. Both Paul and Timothy are *servants of Christ Jesus*. In fact Paul puts it a little stronger than that. He literally calls them slaves of Christ Jesus. A slave is one who has been bought for a price and is fully under the command of the purchaser. A self-willed, idle or disobedient slave is practically a contradiction in terms.

Yet as slaves we're free: Free from bondage, free from the power and the penalty of sin. (i) We are indeed truly human, in Christ, for Christ is true Man. In Christ you now possess a human nature that matches the intention of your Creator. ***If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation*** 2 Corinthians 5:17. (ii) But a saint seeks to obey Christ, for a saint is also a servant of Christ Jesus.

You and I cannot enjoy and share in God's grace and not obey the Lord. And so the Lord gives different gifts and abilities to His people so that we might serve Him. He appoints to each one different tasks - seen here in the offices of overseer (or elder) and deacon (1:1b). But all Christians have a spiritual gift for Christian service. We're all ministers of the gospel.

What gift do you use to serve Him? Carefully consider what you like to do. What you are good at? What needs to be done to serve Christ? There should be no such thing as a 'passive Christian.' That's an oxymoron. For the word Christian is almost meaningless without the word service. Don't feel threatened by what I've just said. Just ask the Lord to guide you as you seek to serve Him. For in Christ, our call is to serve Him.

## **3) A Christian receives grace and peace from God (1:3)**

An old Indian was led to Christ. Friends then asked him to explain the change in his life. Reaching down he picked up a small worm and placed it on a pile of leaves. He then set fire to the leaves and watched as they smouldered and burst into flames. The flames worked their way up to where the worm lay. Then the old chief suddenly plunged his hand into the centre of the burning pile and rescued the worm. Holding the worm gently in his hand, he gave testimony to the grace of God: "I am.....that worm." That's God's saving grace at work.

Where does the ability to serve God come from? Paul answers by pointing to the giver and the gift. ***Grace and peace... from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ***. The gift is grace and peace. Grace is God being gracious, acting in our favour when we do not deserve it. It is God coming to us in love when we have done nothing to earn His love. God, in His grace, gives us what we do not deserve. He gives us peace with God Himself.

God is His grace has rescued us and the fruit of that grace is peace with Him. Romans 5:1, 2, ***since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.***

Grace always comes before peace. That's because God is the One who takes the initiative to act on behalf of His people. Grace is God being gracious. Peace is what keeps us spiritually confident and content even in the midst of trials and trouble. Even amongst the difficulties of life, its ups and downs, its struggles and its joys, you and I can know peace. We know that peace because it comes from God when we put our faith in Him.

Have you answered that call from God to live a life in Christ? Are you a slave to Christ? Or, are you in bondage as a slave to sin? There's no sitting on the fence, no in-between. If you're not Christ's servant, then pray for the grace of God in your life. If you are, then thank and praise God for His grace.

But there's more to it than that. For if we know the grace of God in our lives then we're to demonstrate that grace in our relationships with each other. Our Lord said (John 13:34), ***Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.***

But supremely the grace of God is seen in our relationship with the Lord Himself. You and I are called into a relationship that bestows upon us the title 'saint.' And, we've seen that it's a title with responsibility, a title that requires us to serve the Lord.

As one commentator puts it, 'The mind of Christ and the mind of the believer should be one. Jesus is the pattern. We should be like Him. For Jesus, that meant emptying Himself in obedience to God the Father. For us it means centring our lives on Christ.'

Before Copernicus' time, people thought that the moon, the sun, the planets and the stars revolved around the earth. That was the Ptolemaic system. It was a good system, for among other things it could predict the hours of sunrise and sunset. But the theory was wrong. The charting of the planets was not accurate. New discoveries proved that, as a theory, it did not hold water. Eventually the system broke down.

You and I live in a spiritual solar system that is as fixed as the one that fills our heavens. And who is at the centre of that system? The Lord Jesus Christ. But many today believe they're at the centre of life. In their view the system works well. They serve themselves and the generally get what they desire.

But a human-centred system has defects, just like the Ptolemaic one had. In the first place it's not accurate. It may predict a certain measure of success, but it doesn't account for failure. Nor does it allow for progress, because we humans are limited beings.

As far as astronomy was concerned, understanding the solar system took a Copernican revolution. To know Christ, to love and serve Him, takes as big a revolution, because it means coming to Him in repentance and faith. It means taking our eyes off ourselves and looking to God in Christ to save us and to lead us in paths of holiness.

Paul's greetings to the Philippians and to us, is filled with language that speaks of our relationship with Christ Jesus. As we conclude the opening of this letter, I cannot finish with any better words than those with which Paul began. May they be real in your life - ***Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*** Amen