

A Gospel Prayer

Philippians 1:1-11

Preached at 8.15 and C@10 on 1st February 2015

Intro

Next week we're going to be launching our year together as a church with lunch together and as I say a few words about how I'd like to see our church – each of us – growing together in our love for God and serving him together for his glory.

That's what I've been praying for since I came here just over 4 years ago.

So it's good for us to start the year spending time in Paul's letter to the church in Philippi...

Because in Philippians we're reading about Paul's hopes for the people of this church.

But, of course it's not just Paul's hopes for an ancient congregation that we're reading about... we're reading about God's model for church.

And over this term we're going to be thinking together at church and in our Growth Groups about how much the gospel should form what our church and our lives as members should look like.

Remember that commercial for toothpaste with the lady with the chalk and the glass of dark liquid?

She'd dip the chalk into the glass to show how the liquid could penetrate the chalk in the same way that the toothpaste gets into your teeth to keep them healthy and strong.

In Philippians we get to see what it looks like for a church when the gospel really gets into the lives of the Christians that make it up.

And that's what I'm praying will be the case even more so this year – that the gospel will get even more deeply into each of our lives and have a major impact on the life of our church.

So I've called this series 'A Gospel Driven Life'.

We'll think about how the gospel gets in or penetrates our perspective of who we are, our lifestyle, our goals in life, what gives us happiness and contentment in life... and of course how all these will affect the life of our church.

So let me encourage us to listen actively to this important word of God to us – take notes, re-read the passages through the week, think about what God's saying to you – measure your perspectives – how you think about your life in the light of the gospel...

Think, talk together, talk to me, talk to God in prayer – be open to him challenging you to change as we begin this new year helping each other to be people who are driven by the gospel to be a church driven by the gospel to love God and want to see him glorified.

Let's pray...

Paul wrote Philippians from Rome in around the year 61AD where he was in prison. Paul had gone to Philippi to preach the gospel about 10 years earlier – we read about his time there in Acts 16.

Even though he met a lot of opposition, people heard and believed the gospel and a church came into being in that city.

And even though he was there for such a short time, Paul and this church had a deep and lasting relationship – which we see as the letter begins.

Gospel-driven Partnership (v3-8)

After greeting them with the reminder of who they are by God's free gift of grace – reconciled to a new relationship of peace and love with God – Paul expresses his thankfulness for these Christians.

In v3 he says he thanks God every time he remembers them. The phrase can actually mean that he thanks God every time they show that they remember him – as we see later in the letter, they keep showing him their love and concern for him in prayer and by continually providing for his material needs.

In v4-5 their continual remembrance of Paul is an act of partnership in the gospel with him.

The word for 'partnership' is the same word we translate as 'fellowship'. It means to participate together in something – and something more than just a chat and cuppa after church...

It's more like going into business together... if Greg and I bought a used guitar shop, we'd invest money, time and energy in it together.

That's what Christian fellowship is... it's partnership with investment.

The Philippian Christians had entered into that partnership with Paul when they heard the gospel and responded to it. And ten years later they hadn't forgotten that.

Every time Paul received a gift or a message from them it confirmed they were still partners with him in the message he preached to them – even people who heard the gospel later through people like Lydia and the Jailer in Philippi – were now in partnership with Paul too.

Friends, the gospel brings us into partnership or fellowship with each other.

How heavily invested we are in that partnership will be a sign of how deeply the gospel has driven into our lives – and how much our lives are driven by the gospel.

Let me try and explain that a bit...

This year I'm going to try and lead us to make some inroads into reaching our local community in Beverly Hills and Kingsgrove with the gospel – the good news of Jesus.

That's not something John, Stu, Myles and I can do. It needs all of us working in partnership with one another.

Most weeks we pray in church that the people of our area will hear about Jesus in the gospel and come to God like us... and prayer must always be the first thing we do.

But part of the answer to our prayer is that we – the people of the church in this area – work together to give people the opportunity to hear about Jesus.

We have some obstacles that make that more difficult than in other suburbs – like we don't have a natural community meeting area in Beverly Hills.

Another is that a fair proportion of us live outside the local area, which makes it more difficult to do local gospel ministry.

But if we are in partnership in the gospel as members of this church – Beverly Hills with Kingsgrove Anglican Church – then we need to invest in this local gospel ministry.

That might be a bigger investment for some than for others depending on where you live, or what you might have to forego in order to be around sometime during the week.

But that's the gospel partnership we're in as members of this church.

If Greg and I had that guitar shop and didn't put our time and energy into it, it would be hard to make it work.

And it's the same for our church. We're in fellowship or partnership in the gospel together as members of this church.

But that partnership isn't because we've signed a legalistic agreement that says 'this is your church so get to it!'

Our partnership is *in the gospel*.

It's the gospel that creates our partnership.

And that happens as the gospel 'gets in' to each of us and becomes the thing that drives us.

That's what gave Paul the joy in his prayers for the Philippians – for their partnership in the gospel... not coming from a sense of dreary resignation, but the result of lives changed by God through the gospel.

In v6 he says he's confident that God will carry on doing what he started doing in their lives when they received the gospel... that is that the gospel will continue to shape and direct their lives towards the goal of the gospel.

And that is to live with God and enjoy him forever.

Friends, the gospel won't shape and direct our lives unless this gets in.

God saved us through the death and resurrection of Jesus so that we can enjoy God himself, forever.

If you're a Christian, that's the goal of your life. There should be no greater goal or desire in our lives than to know God personally and love him more and more.

Having a heart that's driven by a growing desire to have and know and enjoy God through the gospel is the only thing that will drive you to share in the partnership of the gospel in this church.

It's not primarily about where we live or how much time we have (or don't have). The solutions to those problems start with our motivation.

We won't be motivated by a sense of guilt, or a sense of duty or of owing God to be involved in the gospel ministry of our church.

But if we're motivated or driven by the gospel, we'll be focussed on what God wants – because we're growing to love him more all the time – and because we want to be a part of what he's doing – in our lives and in the lives of others.

The circumstances may be against us – the Philippians kept supporting Paul and partnering with him in spreading the gospel even when he was in jail... and as we'll see later in Philippians, even that didn't stop people coming to faith!

If we're all invested in our partnership in the gospel, then circumstances and obstacles won't stand in the way of us reaching the people of this area with that gospel.

But that gospel must be getting more and more into our lives and changing us to love God more and more first if we're going to be useful to God in changing the lives of others.

Gospel-driven Prayer (v9-11)

In v9-11 Paul tells the Philippians what he prays for them.

It's good to tell someone you're praying for exactly what you have been praying for them.

Sometimes when people have told me that they've been praying for something particular for me, I can see how God's answered their prayer!

Here Paul says he's been praying for the Philippians, knowing that God is already at work answering his prayers.

And that's no surprise, because his prayers for them are also shaped and driven by the gospel.

What he prays for them isn't comfortable, happy lives here in this life.

“And this is my prayer: that your 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 until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:9–11 NIV)

Paul wants to see God growing these people in love for Him and for their neighbours.

That kind of abundant love only comes through a growing knowledge of God – not just knowing stuff about Him, but knowing Him .

And that knowledge comes with depth of insight into the gospel... that's a growing and deepening understanding of just what a priceless gift the gospel is – the gift of knowing God and being reconciled to Him through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

God grows us in the relationship with himself that he's given us in the gospel as our insight into the gospel grows.

And he gives us that insight as we read our Bibles with purpose – with the purpose of getting to know and love God more and more, reflecting on how good, great, holy, loving and gracious he is.

And as we do that we'll keep coming to a deeper understanding of the better way of life with him.

And we'll grow in our ability to discern how we should live in a way that pleases him – because pleasing him will become more and more what we want to do.

That's Paul's prayer for his gospel partners in Philippi.

That's my prayer for you, my gospel partners in Beverly Hills and Kingsgrove.

Will you pray like this for me and all your gospel partners in this church? Will you pray this gospel-driven prayer for yourself?

As we begin this new year aiming to see the lives of the people of this area changed through the good news of Jesus, that good news in the gospel needs to be continually changing us.

The gospel must get in to us if it's going to go out from us.

Let's pray for each other – pray through the names of the people on your page in the church directory... pray for each other in your Growth Groups...

Use the words of Paul's prayer... Pray that each other's love for God, each other, and the people of Beverly Hills and Kingsgrove will abound more and more in knowledge of God and depth of insight into the purpose of His incredible gift in the gospel.

And pray this so that we may be discerning and wise about the purpose of our lives as Christians and members of this church, so that we'll all freely invest our lives in partnership together in the gospel – for the glory and praise of God.