



PARTNERS IN CHRIST – Philippians 1:1-11

There is a church building in America that is now tragically a museum. The church was planted in 1887 and the building erected in 1888 but two generations later the church had died. We have all driven through country towns and seen church buildings that are no longer being used as churches but as all sorts of businesses. Church buildings that were once full of life but now the life has gone.

As a church Lakeshore has a lot to be thankful for especially God's grace to us through the commitment of faithful people. People who prayed. People who have given so we now have paid off the building and the car park and no longer have any debt. A church with no debt is a sign of life. Also people who have preached. People who have cared and loved each other. People who have dreamed, prayed, planned, acted and trusted God for the growth.

Today we start our first ever VISION SERIES called PARTNERS IN CHRIST. It is our turn. It is about ensuring that as a church we know who we are and so know where we are going. If we do know we can hope for a future not only for us, not only for our children but also for our grandchildren. We dream, plan, pray and act now not only for ourselves but for those who are not here yet.

We are going to look at the letter of Philippians to help us know who we are and so where we are going.

Philippians is a letter written by Paul to Christians in a Roman colony called Philippi. Paul writes this letter as he sits in jail in chains probably in Rome. Paul started the church in about 51-52AD and now he writes to them about 10 years later. He had a visitor from the church Epaphroditus come and tell him about the church so Paul is writing in response to what he is told. Although Paul is in prison the letter is saturated with joy because Paul is full of joy.

Firstly...

1. A Picture of Partnership

Read: 1:2-3

The deep relationship Paul and the Philippians had is expressed right throughout the letter. At every point what he says shows a knowledge and long relationship with them. The relationship is captured in the word 'Partnership'. v.5

Let's look at how that 'partnership' expressed.

Expressions

1. **Prayer** – v.3. Just by the way the word 'pray' is repeated you can tell how important it is for Paul. See also v.9. The content of Paul's prayers for them is about their relationship with God. Paul prayed for them and no doubt they prayed for Paul as an expression of their partnership in Christ.

2. **Affection** – v.7-8. It is clear that Paul has a deep affection for the Christians at Philippi. It is not a cold sterile relationship from a distant but a warm heartfelt relationship. Do we have this same affection for each other?
3. **Suffering** – v.7. The Philippians shared in the same grace of Paul. There are two parts to this. Of course there is the grace of the Gospel but also the gift of sharing in suffering for Christ. This is seen in vv.29-30.
4. **Proclamation** – v.15-18. Paul was focused on the Gospel being preached. So he calls the Philippians also to hold out the word of life in 2:16.

It is right for us to have in our PROJECTS for 2012 plans for Outreach. It is good for us to plan a new meeting on Sunday so we can reach more people with the Gospel. It is good to have a free community parenting seminar with Robi Sonderegger and to put more resources into our outdoor Christmas Carols event.

5. **Financial** – v.5 ‘partnership’

The Christians at Philippi had sent Paul gifts. The word partnership is a good word to capture their relationship because of this sharing with Paul in this way. We’ll see more of this in a few weeks when we focus on this element of partnership in chapter 4. Paul is recalling the generosity of the Philippians over the long history they had had in the Gospel. There is a definite financial component to the partnership.

I can’t help but think of the partnership with have with Roy Funu when I look at how partnership is defined in Philippians. Roy used to be the pastor of Lakeshore and he moved up to Bundaberg to start a ministry up there. We financially support Roy. We share in his suffering. Many of us hold him in our heart with deep affection. We regularly pray for him. It is a partnership. This is the partnership we are also to have with each other at Lakeshore.

Of course like today there is a social stigma that comes with going to jail. This would have been true for Paul and so easy for the Philippians to forget about him. To not associate with him. I know when a mate of mine from my old church went jail it was very hard not to forget him. It took a lot of effort to stay in touch with him let alone share with him as the Philippians did with Paul. The Philippians didn’t let this stop them expressing their partnership with Paul.

As you think about your life is it a picture of partnership?

A life of Prayer – affection – suffering – proclamation – financial partnership.

So that is the picture of partnership from Philippians now let’s look at what it means to be ‘in Christ.’

2. in CHRIST

Read v.1. Notice how Paul addresses these Christians. He says: “To all the saints in Christ Jesus.”

No doubt there were all sorts of people in this church. Young and old. Rich and poor. Jew and Gentile. Paul sees them as God sees them ie in Christ.

Read 3:8-9. This helps us know what it means to be ‘in Christ.’ Paul says it not about obeying the law or the good you do that makes you right with God. It is about receiving through faith a right standing with God through Jesus. The death of Jesus makes it possible for us to be right with God. It is not our work but the work of Christ.

There are threats to them being ‘in Christ.’

See 3:2. They are under threat from people who say Jesus is not enough you must do something as well.

The group here were saying they had to be circumcised. Paul says watch out for people who want to add to the Gospel.

See 3:17-19. They are also under threat from another group of people who are probably Christians but they are not living as Christians. They are living for the here and now instead of heaven.

I grew up in the Salvation Army. When you think of the Salvos you think of the welfare work they do. The danger with a church that has the Gospel and is also clear about the implications of the Gospel is the implication becomes the primary thing. It can be true that one generation believe the Gospel and the implications for the poor. The next assume the Gospel but identified with the implications. The following generation deny the Gospel and the implications were everything. This is thankfully not true of the Salvos.

We have to ask ourselves what is it that makes us who we are? What gives Lakeshore an identity? An identity distinct from the RSL, Surf Lifesaving Club? The Rotary Club. How is this group of friends you spend time with distinctly different to any other friends you spend time with? Is it just because you are in the habit of coming here on Sundays? Is it because there are certain things we like to do? sing and so on. We must not forget they our distinct identity comes from the fact that we are IN CHRIST.

Are you here today and IN CHRIST? If not, turn to him and know you are right with God through his death.

If you are in Christ will you commit living our your partnership in Christ? A partnership with others who are in Christ. A partnership that will leave a legacy for the next generation and the one after. For the grandchildren.

A friend of mine Justin Buzzard has just planted a church in San Jose, California. He is using the building of another church. A church what more than welcomed him to use their building. The church had gone from being one thousand twenty years ago to sixty. They welcomed Justin and his church because they want life, growth and a future. So we as a church want life, growth and a future. Let's see ourselves as God sees us – in Christ. Then live out that reality as partners in Christ.