

November 21, 2010 by Steve Brandon



Thankful For God's Work In Nepal

Philippians 1:1-11

1. Thankful For Their Participation in the Gospel (verse 5).
2. Thankful For God's Sovereign Working (verse 6).
3. Thankful For Love Among the Brethren (verses 7-8).

Jaimasi.

I just got back from two and a half weeks in Nepal. It was a great trip. I'm thankful to the Lord for having the opportunity to go and be blessed by the people in Nepal. It was a very busy time for me. I got up early, and went to bed exhausted each night. During my trip, I taught about twenty times. One of the things that I love about Nepal is the way that Christians greet one another. Throughout Nepal and India, the common greeting is "Namaste." It's the way that you say, "Hello." However, when Christians greet one another, they say, "Jaimasi," which means "Victory in the Messiah!" When Christians greet each other, they say to one another, "Jaimasi." This is the reason for beginning my message with a "Jaimasi."

My plan all along has been to be home in time for church this morning so that I could share with you from the overflow of what God taught me. I had anticipated that I would arrive home around midnight, but instead I made it home this morning around 2:00 am. I haven't slept much, but I was blessed to be able to awaken each of my children this morning. And, one family brought be a "present" for me this morning-- a case of Mountain Dew-- in the event that I need help staying awake during my message.

I also want to tell you of the delightful experience it was to awaken every single one of my children this morning after being gone for 18 days. Since I arrived at home at 2am, all of my children were sleeping. So, it wasn't until this morning that I greeted them. I awakened each of them with a kiss on the cheek. From each of my three daughters, I received a corresponding kiss on my cheek as well as with a greeting, "Hi dad!" They all responded the same. My two sons responded the same way. They both grunted and turned over and went back to sleep. It goes again to prove that boys and girls are different.

Anyway, my message this morning isn't going to be a straight exposition of this text. Rather, I'm going to use this text to help give some Biblical structure to my thoughts on my trip to Nepal. I trust that the Lord will edify you both by His Word and the stories of His people.

Philippians 1:1-11

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Paul writes these words from a prison in Rome (verse 7). He is not alone; Timothy is with him, as we see in verse 1. He writes to this church, which had given him much joy and encouragement (verse 4). The church in Philippi was one of the few churches that helped Paul financially (4:15). To them, Paul gives an opening greeting: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:2).

Beginning in verse 3, you can see the theme of thankfulness and prayer dominate this passage, ...

Philippians 1:3-4

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all,

How appropriate are these words for us this morning--the Sunday before Thanksgiving. Indeed, this has helped to shape my title this morning: "Thankful for God's Work In Nepal." I want to share with you some things for which I am thankful for God's work in Nepal. In many ways, they are the same as Paul's reasons for giving thanks in the Book of Philippians. Indeed, God is working in Nepal.

I stayed for a few days in the home of an American pastor who had left his church in Texas to serve the church in Nepal. Now, he was actually away in India during this time, so I never actually met him. However, another member of our team knew him. That's why he opened

his home to us. Anyway, my friend quoted this pastor as saying something to the effect of this, "I do not miss the pastorate in America one bit. The church has so much, and it is doing so little. But, here in Nepal, God is at work. The people here are hungry for God. When they come to know Jesus, they cast their idols away and love worshipping the Savior."

You can see this in the lives of many in Nepal. Indeed, I'm "Thankful For God's Work In Nepal." This morning, I want to share with you some ways in which I'm thankful for God's work in Nepal. Each of my points will come loosely from Philippians 1. My first point is this:

1. Thankful For Their Participation in the Gospel (verse 5).

I get this phrase from verse 5. Indeed, this was the driving reason for Paul's joy, which drove him to prayer and filled him with thanksgiving. Look at verse 5, ...

Philippians 1:5
in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

In some ways, this came from their financial support of Paul.

Philippians 4:15-16
You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.

But financially isn't the only way in which the church in Philippi participated in the gospel with Paul. They were also participating in seeing the gospel lived out and proclaimed in Philippi. Look over to chapter 1, verse 27, ...

Philippians 1:27
Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

Indeed, this is the point of the book of Philippians! Paul was writing for the sake of the gospel! He was writing with the purpose that those in Philippi would "strive together for the faith of the gospel" (verse 27). And this is what I experienced in Nepal. I experienced men who were participating together with us for the faith of the gospel.

Most of you know that the primary aim of my trip was pastoral training. I teamed up with Leadership Resources International and helped to train two groups of pastors. One was in East Nepal and one was in West Nepal. Each group had about a dozen pastors. Leadership Resources is helping to train these men in simple Bible exposition. They are helping to train them in how to read the text, understand the text, and explain the text. This is what I seek to do every week for all of you. I seek to read the Bible, understand the Bible, and explain the Bible, trusting that as I communicate God's words with you, God will do His work in your hearts.

One of the main emphases of the training that I helped to provide for these men is the concept of the "Big Idea." In other words, when coming to a text of Scripture seek for the "Big Idea" of the passage - that thought that governs why the passage was written. When you discover the original intent, go and preach that idea.

Now, as simple as this sounds for us, it is a radical thought for these pastors. Until they have begun to meet with Leadership Resources, these men have done what most pastors in Nepal do. They have preached their own ideas rather than God's ideas.

Over and over and over again, I heard these men saying, "I used to preach my own idea, but now I'm learning that I need to preach God's Big Idea." These men are also taking this training back to their areas of influence and teaching other pastors and church leaders the material they receive. When they give reports of how this is going, you hear the same thing, "Before I received this training, I used to say what I wanted to say. But now, after receiving this training, I know that I need to preach and teach what God has said to us." In this way, they are participating in the gospel with us.

Regarding our arrangement with the church in Nepal, we are on the giving end, and they are on the spreading end. We have been financially supporting the group that meets in the East. They are like Paul; we are like the church in Philippi.

I want to share with you the story of two men in particular that has touched my heart. These men live in the mountains and demonstrate what it means to participate in the gospel with us. It takes them four days of travel to come to the training--two days of walking and two days of riding a bus. Together, they oversee about 30 churches in the mountains of Nepal, travelling between them to teach and shepherd them. As they go, they are seeking to apply this method of teaching in their labors. They are reaching people that we simply cannot get to. I would have a very difficult time relating to those who live in the mountains. The cultural gap is too great.

Anyway, one of the leaders for Leadership Resources in Nepal travelled help them train the key leaders in many of their churches. His name is John, and here's what he said to me:

Because it was the rainy season, the bus couldn't go as far as it often goes. So, it took us four days to walk to their church. 16 hours walking up the mountain; 16 hours walking down the mountain. 16 hours walking up the mountain; 16 hours walking down the mountain. At one point, we were walking in a valley. It was so very hot, because the sun was out and

there was no wind. We ran out of water, but needed to drink. We were walking by the river, but the water was brown and murky from all of the dirt.

But, we had to drink. So, we filled up our water bottles with the brown water, and prayed. I drank two large bottles. God protected me.

As we went along, I needed to use a toilet, but there were none along the way. So, I asked a local about a toilet. He said, "Just go down by the river. When you are done, you can wash up using the water. It's what everyone does."

John said that this was upstream of where he had taken his drinks. But, God protected him from sickness. He also said that, being the rainy season, leaches would often attach themselves to his legs as he was walking. When he came to the church, he was dirty and stinky after four days of walking. All he could do was wash up by the river water.

Most of the men that came to this training took a good day to walk to the training. John spent three days with these people, who were very eager to receive the training. In fact, later, they said that they are simple mountain people who learn slowly. Next time, they want four days of training.

John told me that each night he was there, he slept in a wooden house with holes in the floor above the stable where the animals lived. He said that throughout the night, the ticks would come up through the floor and bite him all night long. He didn't ever get a good night's sleep.

After all of this, it was four days of walking back home to the bus, where he could take a ride home. I asked him, "Would you do it again?" He said, "Yes, I hope to. The hunger that these church leaders have for this training makes it all worth it."

Now, most of the men being trained don't live in the remote mountain villages. But, they are no less committed to using what they learned and sharing it with others. Many people are very excited about this Bible training. They all say how different it is from most of the training they receive. Usually, people come and talk to them. They sit and take notes and leave. But this training is different. With a smaller group, it's much more interactive as we are seeking to help them think about the Bible in a new way - going deep with a few who will go deep with others. All of this is for the sake of the gospel. I'm thankful to the Lord that in some small way, we all can be sharers with these people in the gospel (a bit like Philippians 1:5 says).

So, I'm Thankful For The Participation in the Gospel (verse 5). I'm also ...

2. Thankful For God's Sovereign Working (verse 6).

This is expressed in verse 6, ...

Philippians 1:6

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

This verse is obviously talking about God's sovereign working in the church in Philippi to accomplish all of His purposes in the church. God's purpose in this church started the day that Paul and Silas first arrived in Philippi, as recorded in Acts 16: "On the Sabbath day [they] went outside the gate to a riverside, where [they] were supposing that there would be a place of prayer, and [they] sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled" (Acts 16:13). One of these women was named Lydia. We read in Acts 16:14 that "the LORD opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." Soon afterwards, Lydia and her household were baptized (Acts 16:15). So began the church in Philippi.

Note the role that God played in the establishing of the church. It was the LORD who opened Lydia's heart to believe in the gospel. Paul had merely been faithful in seeking people to talk with about the gospel, and God began a work. It continued in verse 16, ...

Acts 16:16-18

It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment.

In Philippi, Paul cast a demon out of a slave girl, who had abilities in the area of fortune-telling. With the demon cast out, this slave girl could no longer do her fortune-telling. This angered her masters so much that they incited the crowds to seize Paul, to beat him with rods, and throw him into prison (Act 16:19-24).

Now, let me ask you: if you wanted to start a church in a city, would this be your place? Would you begin with a woman by the river and proceed with imprisonment? But, such was the sovereign plan of God for this city.

As Paul and Barnabas were in jail, they were, "singing hymns of praise to God" (Acts 16:25-30). The faith that they proceeded to show in the midst of trials became the catalyst for the Philippian jailor to ask them, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). To which Paul replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

Like the household of Lydia, this man's whole household believed and was baptized, as it tells us in verses 32 to 34. Soon afterwards, in verses 35 to 40, Paul and Silas were asked to leave the city, which they did. And this began God's work in Philippi. A few families, saved by the sovereign delight of God. And, Paul was forced to leave, but God didn't leave. He worked in this city to establish the people as a strong church, with overseers and deacons and enough financial ability to support the apostle Paul's work (Phil 4:15-16). Paul had seen God's working the past, and he was confident of God's continued work in the future.

Let's look again at verse 6, ...

Philippians 1:6

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Notice here that we see God's active role working in the church from the beginning until the end. Acts 16 records the beginning. Revelation 3 records the end. Jesus said to the church in Philadelphia, ...

Revelation 3:10

Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

These words were uttered some 30 to 40 years after Paul wrote of his confidence in the sovereignty of God to accomplish His purposes in Philippi until the end--until they would meet Jesus. Such was the promise of the risen savior. He would protect them through the world-wide testing that would come.

We see God's working in the beginning of the church in Philippi. We see God's working at the end of the church in Philippi. But, we know of very little in between. We know little of the other church members. We know of Epaphroditus (Phil 1:25), Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2), and Clement (Phil 4:3). We don't know the names of the overseers or the deacons. We know very little of the ways that others in Philippi care to know the Lord or of the ways God protected the church through its years. But, we do know that God was working in between to sustain the church and keep it and protect it until the end.

He who began a good work was faithful to complete it. Such is the case with the church in Nepal. God has started a work and will complete it. And this past trip enabled me to see a part of the ways that God is doing His work. In great measure, I saw the protecting hand of God in my life.

I arrived on Saturday, spoke at a church and was asked to spend the next day in Bible training with the leaders of the church. So, I spent Sunday with eight of the leaders in the church. We took about 5 hours to work through the book of Ephesians together. We spent the day marveling at the grace of God (from Ephesians 1-3). Then, we worked through the practical section of the book (chapters 4-6). It was a great time.

At one point, we took a break. Outside of where we met was a playground with a swing set. These men sat on the swings and began to swing. However, they never used swings as children. So, they didn't know how to pump and keep the swing going, like many children know how to do today. Indeed, they sort of backed up and began to swing back and forth very gently, sort of just hanging there. So, I said to myself, "These guys need to see what real swinging is all about!" So, I proceeded to jump on the swing and pump really hard and swing as high as I could. I was really going, and I heard the men say, "Ah! Ah!" and laugh with joy as they saw me swinging. But, pride comes before the fall! On one of my down-swings, one of the chains of the swing broke, and sent me flying off the swing.

In God's provision, the swing broke just as I was moving horizontally, parallel to the ground. I was thrown away from the swing set, scuffing up my arms and a very little bit on my leg. Had the swing broken at any other point, I could have been seriously injured. By God's grace, I didn't break any bones and I was able to walk away with only a few wounds to my skin. I view this as God's sovereign protection of me, so that I might do my little part to be God's work in perfecting the church in Nepal. And for this, I am thankful.

God also protected us in several other ways as well. Our first week was spent in Chitwan, near the south where it is flat and borders on being tropical. Anyway, after we arrived, we were told of the dangers of Dengue fever, which is transmitted by mosquito bites. The symptoms of Dengue fever are a sudden, high fever of over 104 degrees coupled with extreme weakness. There is no treatment for it except to drink lots of fluids and take Tylenol to control the fever. Over the past few weeks before we arrived in Nepal, there had been an outbreak there of Dengue fever among the foreigners who were visiting the area. Apparently, the locals are mostly immune to the fever. So, we wore our mosquito repellent and also purchased some slow-burning repellent that you plug into the wall to keep the mosquitoes away. I'm thankful that God is sovereign over mosquitoes.

On top of that, we saw the sovereign protection of God in our travels. A week after we arrived, we drove across the Terai, which was about an 8 hour drive. We were weaving in and out of traffic, looking out for the cows and goats and dogs and chickens that wander onto the roads. We were also trying to avoid the pedestrians that merely walk across the road, as we were also trying to avoid the bikes and motor cycles and buses and trucks and tractors that are packed with people and stuff. Anyway, about midway through our drive, we had a problem with our right, front axle.

In God's sovereignty, there was a mechanic about five miles up the road. Much of our travel in the Terai was countryside. So, we limped up to his shop. By God's grace, the mechanic was able to drop what he was doing and devote his full attention to our vehicle. By God's grace, he was able to get the part that he needed to fix the car. By God's grace, he was a Muslim. Had he been Hindu, he would not have been working that day, because the Hindus were celebrating Chhath Puja, a holiday where they worship the sun, the moon and the river.

Furthermore, God's sovereignty allowed us to drive safely the rest of the way, as the delay had put us to travelling in the dark along the roads of chaos. One of the members of our team said that it was a miracle that we didn't hit anybody or any animal.

In God's sovereignty, He protected us and allowed us to do our part in building up the body of Christ. I'm Thankful For The Participation in the Gospel (verse 5). I'm Thankful For God's Sovereign Working in Nepal (verse 6). Thirdly, I'm, ...

3. Thankful For Love Among The Brethren (verses 7-8).

Look at verse 7, ...

Philippians 1:7

For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me.

Here we see the great love that Paul had for those in Philippi. He said, "I have you in my heart" (verse 7). And, I know that this is the case with many of you. Many of you support a child (or a widow) in Nepal. And as Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). Many of you have a portion of your heart in Nepal. You are making a difference in the lives of these children in Nepal.

I saw some of the children at the children's home. The kids are happy and obedient. They know full well what their life would be like apart from the children's home. And, they are thankful to be there.

But, the binding of hearts really struck me when I had the chance to see two sick children, Shristi and Anand. In recent days, we have been getting emails about these children. About a year ago, Shristi contracted encephalitis--an inflammation of the brain. As a result, she was in a coma for more than a month. Slowly, she has been getting better. She has begun to eat solid food again. Just last week, she said, "Mama." Her recovery has been slow, but it has continued to progress. I do not know what her future holds.

Many of you also know the story of Anand. About a year ago, he was diagnosed with brain cancer. He went to India and had some of the tumor removed. He also received chemotherapy to combat the cancer. For a season, things were going well. But, recently, the tumor has come back. He is experiencing some leg pain because of his illness. Currently, arrangements are being made for him to have some precise radiation treatment in India, but things aren't looking great for Anand. Yet, he still has the joy of the Lord in his heart.

Now, when I was taken to see Shristi and Anand, I was overwhelmed in my heart. He asked me, "Would you like to pray for Shristi?" I said, "Sure," and knelt by her bed. And there, upon my knees, I began to cry like a baby. I did the best that I could do to pray for her through my tears and sobbing.

The reason for my tears is because she is on my heart. Many, many times over this past year, I have knelt down before my daughter's bed and prayed for Shristi and Anand. But, at that moment, Shristi was right there in front of me. And I couldn't contain myself. A flood of emotion came over me.

A few minutes later, I had the opportunity to pray for Anand. Tears flowed through that prayer as well. Why? Because I have these precious children in my heart. I know that many of you have prayed for these precious children as well. I'm thankful that I could go there to pray with them. Perhaps you might want to come some time as well.

Such was the heart of Paul for those in Philippi. They were on his heart. Look at verse 8, ...

Philippians 1:8

For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

This is Christian love. It loves and longs for others, even if they are far away. Do you want to experience this sort of longing? Invest your lives in the lives of others. Invest your lives in the lives of those in Nepal. Give your time to those in Nepal. Send money to support those in need. And, pray for them. If you don't know what to pray, try verses 9-11, ...

Philippians 1:9-11

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

This is a prayer of love. It is what people need. They need to love one another in full knowledge. They need God's help in the process.

I had a wonderful time in Nepal. I was mostly met with smiles and happiness. But, I know enough about church and people to know that all is not well in the Nepali churches. In fact, I spoke in one church in Nepal which recently split. This was the second-largest church in the city. I don't know the details, but I know enough that there was a lack of love in the process. We need to pray verses 9-11 for the church in Nepal.

Jaimasi.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 21, 2010 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
