

June 15, 2014 by Steve Brandon



Saying Goodbye

Philippians 4:20-23

1. Glorify God (verse 20)
2. Greet the Saints (verses 21-22)
3. Long for Grace (verse 23)

From time to time in this life, we must say goodbye to a good friend. That's just how life is. It is filled with transition. Perhaps it's a friend that you met at summer camp that you have known for a week, and you say goodbye. Perhaps it's a friend that you met at college, and you say goodbye after four years of shared experiences. Perhaps it's a friend you have known at church, who is moving away because of a new job in a different state. Perhaps it's a son or daughter, who moves away from home. Perhaps it's a parent, who lies on the death bed. Circumstances of saying goodbye vary greatly. But, it's something that we all experience.

This morning, we say goodbye to a dear friend. We say goodbye to the book of Philippians. This is my 32nd, and final message on the book of Philippians, as we will look at the last four verses: chapter 4, verses 20-23.

Now, certainly, the book of Philippians is not going away. It is in all of your Bibles. You can read it any time that you want. But, in terms of preaching, it will be some time before we come back to this book again. Oh, I'm sure that there will be some visits over the years; I'm sure that we will come back to the book again. But not with the depth that we have enjoyed over this past year.

I have considered the book to be a dear friend of mine. I am saddened to be done. But, I'm not the only one saying goodbye. And in some measure, these were the emotions that Paul was experiencing as he penned the last few verses of the book of Philippians. Because, shortly after finishing his writing, Paul will say goodbye to his good friend, Epaphroditus, as he will be the one to deliver the letter to the church in Philippi. In chapter 2:25, Paul called him, "my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier." Not only did Paul have affection for him (calling him "my brother"), but he was also appreciative of the work that he did for the cause of Christ (calling him "my fellow worker and fellow soldier.") Paul may never see him again. He says in chapter 2, verse 30, that he "came close to death" at one point. And soon, Paul will say goodbye to this dear friend, Epaphroditus.

But, before he says goodbye to his dear friend, he writes down some parting counsel to the Philippians.

Philippians 4:20-23

Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

I see three lines of thought in these words. Here's the first.

1. Glorify God (verse 20)

I trust that you can see this in verse 20, ...

Philippians 4:20

Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

This is a fitting end to a great letter. It is a doxology of praise to God. He is identified here as "our God and Father." God, the creator and ruler of the universe. Father, the one who loves us and cares for our souls. Paul says that His praise is to be unending, "forever and ever."

You survey the Psalms and you see that the Lord is praised like this. Psalm 34:1 says, "I will bless the LORD at all times, His praise shall continually be in my mouth." And Psalm 71:6 says, "My praise is continually of You." And the call comes to us in Psalm 70:4. "Let all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; And let those who love Your salvation say continually, 'Let God be magnified.'" And such is the call of our lives from this text: to praise the Lord at all times! Right?

When Paul says, "Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen." How is God going to be praised at all times, unless we are the ones bringing it about? And so, the admonition comes to us: "Glorify God."

So, I ask, "Are you doing this?" Is your life giving glory to God?

Now, we might easily think that glorifying God is simply singing songs on Sunday enthusiastically and with good volume. But, it's so much

more than this. The glorification of God is accomplished whenever you live for God and for His glory. This is accomplished whether it be singing in church, or praying in your home, or preaching the gospel to your neighbor, or confessing your sin, or letting the fruit of the Spirit on display in your life, or reading the Bible or other Christian literature to direct your hearts to the Lord, or working a long hard day to provide for your family, or serving at Vacation Bible School, or obeying any command in the Bible, or believing in the gospel, or loving your wife, or serving your husband, or submitting to the government, or training your children in the ways of the Lord, or countless other ways that you could easily think of.

Glorifying God is living a life, such that God is put on display. Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Did you ever think of this? Your Christian life can lead others to glorify the Lord.

This definitely took place in the lives of those in Philippi. Right at the beginning of this letter, Paul writes, "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" (Philippians 1:3-5). Paul is thanking (and praising) God, because those in Philippi were participating with him in the gospel. They were mission-minded.

In chapter 4 (what we have been looking at in recent days), we see that they were supportive of the gospel financially, having sent a gift to Paul to be used for his ministry. But, they weren't supportive of the gospel simply financially. They were also supportive with their own lives. The church in Philippi began with Lydia, a seller of purple fabrics (Acts 16:14). It grew through the conversion of the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:31-40). And soon, it spread to others. We know this, because by the time Paul wrote, the church was developed enough that there were overseers (or elders) and deacons established in the church. This means that the church was bigger than Lydia and the Philippian jailor. There were enough people that they needed to establish some formal leadership in the church.

And how did that happen? Through people sharing the gospel with others in the city. They were sharing with their neighbors. They were sharing with their family. They were sharing with those they knew in the public places, whether at work, in the marketplace, along the road, wherever there were people. They were mission-minded, giving financially to Paul. They were spreading the message of the gospel to others they knew. And as they were missions minded, it gave Paul reason to praise God for their heart for the gospel.

And so, it comes back to you. Is your life continually giving glory to God? Do you want His glory above your own? Are you missions-minded, having a heart for outreach? It may be giving out tracts, or simply loving your neighbors.

Do you remember Paul's debate with himself in the latter half of chapter 1? He's in prison, and awaiting trial. He doesn't know if he will be set free or whether he would lose his head. He was content with either way. He said, "to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Can you say this? Are you living for Christ? Are you willing to die for Christ?

The life of the believer is one that will continually give glory to God; when you acknowledge your sin before God; and when you cry out to Him for mercy, trusting in Christ, then, "there is joy in the presence of the angels" (Luke 15:10). And when you live for Christ, there is glory that you bring to Him. And in eternity, there is still opportunity to give Him glory. You will be able to join in the chorus of the four living creatures of Revelation 4, who "day and night do not cease to say, ... Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and is and who is to come" (Revelation 4:8). You will be there in heaven when Jesus Christ assumes full reign over earth and heaven and the fourfold hallelujah breaks out. Four times we hear the praise ascend, "Hallelujah! ... Hallelujah! ... Hallelujah! ... Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns" (Revelation 19:6).

You will be there then if you live now for the glory of God. "Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (verse 20).

There's my first point, "Glorify God." Here's my second point, ...

2. Greet the Saints (verses 21-22)

Philippians 4:21-22

Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

On the one hand, Paul is simply extending His greetings to every believer in the church in Philippi. Don't we do this when we say goodbye to one another? "Greet your father for me, will you?" "Greet your daughter for me, will you?" But, it's bigger than that. This isn't a call for one person to greet the saints. This letter wasn't written to one person. It was written to an entire church. "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, Including the overseers and deacons" (Philippians 1:1).

Saints is a common Biblical term for "Christians." At its root, it means, "holy one." "In Christ Jesus" by faith, we are made holy. We are cleansed from our sins, because He took our sins in His body on the cross. As a result, we seek a life of holiness. The book of Philippians was written to all those in Philippi who believed in Jesus.

So, catch the command of verse 21, "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus." "Every believer in Jesus, greet every other believer in Jesus." "Every one of you, greet every one of you." This is a call for everyone in the church to greet everyone else in the church. That's why I said in my second point, "Greet the Saints."

Now, in a church our size (and we aren't a large church), it's difficult to do that on any given Sunday -- everybody greet everybody? But, it can be done.

One of the things that I appreciated about the college I attended is that they did this every year. Everyone in the school greeted everyone else in the school. Now, there were a thousand students who attended Knox College. And on the day before the Fall term began, everyone assembled on the lawn in front of Old Main. Everyone in the college was invited: students, professors, staff and even friends of the college. It was an event that everyone sought to attend. It was highly popular. It was called, "Pumphandle."

It was a big event. I'm guessing that the majority of the students were involved. We are talking 1,000 people involved. It was a very enjoyable event. In fact, some would even come dressed up in some fun costume.

It began with the college president, in my days, President McCall. He would lead the welcoming line. The second person in line would shake his hand and stand beside the president. The third person in line shakes president McCall's hand and the second person's hand and then stand beside the second person in line. The fourth person then shakes all three hands and takes his place in line. And this goes on until everyone has greeted everyone in the college.

This happened every Fall. And in my four years at Knox College, I never missed it. I would never miss it. It was the one opportunity that you had to greet everyone in the college. Now, there were many people that I didn't even know. But I still had a chance to greet them. Everyone wore name tags, so you could greet everyone by name. There were also people I hadn't seen in quite some time. I was able to reconnect with them.

One Knox student said this of her first Pumphandle, "I think it's a really awesome experience that says a lot about what Knox is about. It's a community, and it brings everybody together." [\[1\]](#)

And if a secular college of a thousand students can do this--everyone greeting everyone--then, I think that a church our size can certainly do it. Perhaps you can't greet everybody every Sunday. But, over the course of a month, I know that you would be able to do so. So, how are you doing? Do you Greet the Saints (verses 21-22)?

Everybody greeting everybody. Perhaps there are people here that you don't even know. Perhaps you have seen them for a long time, but you really don't know them. You might not even know their names. Well, I have a solution for that. It's called the photo-directory. It has a picture of everyone in our church family that calls Rock Valley Bible Church their church home. You can look up anyone in the church, learn their name, and greet them next Sunday.

Now, since we first put out the photo directory, we have a few families that are newer to the church. And we would encourage you, if you call Rock Valley Bible Church your home church, this is where you are calling home, and this is where you are committed to serve, then please send Tina a picture of your family. And we will publish it in the directory. As you may have noticed, the idea of the directory isn't to have such nice, professional looking pictures. Rather, it's totally functional: to put a name with a face. So, if you want, I would be willing to take a picture of you and your family right after church.

And, the reason why we do this is so that you can Greet the Saints (verses 21-22). I would encourage you, on the authority of God's word, to make efforts to know the people of this church. And to greet the people of this church. And I would encourage you, as well, to make yourself available so that you can be greeted by others. If at all possible, I would encourage you to linger after the service completes. That's why we offer snacks: to help the kids with staying around church a bit longer. And if you notice, the older kids are often playing some games, like Frisbee or dodge ball or "run up the picnic table and jump over the fence."

But notice here in verse 22 that the call is even bigger than this. It's not just the church in Philippi greeting the church in Philippi. The saints in Rome are getting into the action as well.

Philippians 4:21

... The brethren who are with me greet you.

Paul, if you remember, is in Rome under house arrest. Those who were with him knew that Paul was writing this letter to the church in Philippi. And to a man (or woman), they sent their greetings to the church in Philippi. Lest Paul miss anybody, he says in verse 22, ...

Philippians 4:22

All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

Everyone in Paul's company sent their greetings to Philippi. This was church to church. Now, there were many in Rome who had never met many of the people in Philippi. Yet, through the gospel, they felt an attachment to each other that they would greet one another.

In some ways, this greeting was like the greeting that I often extend when I go on a missions trip to India or Nepal. I stand before a congregation, having been asked to give a testimony. I say, "I have travelled a long way to be here with all of you. It's good to be here. Rock Valley Bible Church sends its greetings. They are praying for you." This is what those in Rome were feeling for those in Philippi. There is this attachment of believers across the world, whenever we cross paths. It may be far from home. It may be near home.

I know that you all have experienced this. You are somewhere far from home, on a business trip, on vacation, or visiting relatives in a distant state. You meet some people and begin talking with them. It's apparent that they are fellow believers. And so, instantly, you feel a sort of bond. And you rejoice in the work that God is doing around this country.

Or, perhaps even here in Rockford, you meet fellow believers who attend a different church. And you come to know them and love them. And you realize that the church in the Rockford area is much bigger than Rock Valley Bible Church. And you rejoice in the work that God is doing

around this city. For indeed, God is working in this world. God was certainly working in Paul's day.

You can see this in the little phrase at the end of verse 22, "... especially those of Caesar's household." When Paul came to Rome, the gospel had not been preached there. You can see this at the end of Acts 28, when Paul first reached Rome as a prisoner. His first order of business was to call the Jews together to preach the gospel to them. He said to them, "I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20). And they were excited to hear about this hope that he proclaimed. They said, "We desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect [i.e. Christianity] it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere" (Acts 28:22). In other words, they had heard about Jesus and His claims and the claims of his followers, and they heard that many had rejected Him, but they had never heard about it first-hand.

And so, on the day appointed, the Jews came "in large number" to hear Paul out. He "solemnly testified about the kingdom of God and tried to persuade them concerning Jesus ... from morning to evening" (Acts 28:23). As was so often the case, the Jews rejected the gospel. And so, Paul turned to the Gentiles. He said, "They will also listen" (Acts 28:28).

Indeed they did listen. Indeed they did believe. And there were some pagan Romans from Caesar's household, who embraced the gospel, and sent their greetings to Philippi. God is at work in this world. And when you send your Christian greetings to one another, you are acknowledging that work.

So, let's move on quickly to my last point. We find it in verse 23, ...

3. Long for Grace (verse 23)

I get this from verse 23.

Philippians 4:23
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

This is Paul's final greeting. This is Paul's final prayer. It's a prayer for grace. And if Paul prays for grace, I believe that we ought to "Long for Grace" (verse 23).

Grace is the most beautiful thing in the world. It is God giving to us what we don't deserve. One acronym says it this way, ...

God's
Riches
At
Christ's
Expense.

That's a great way to say it. God has given to us riches, because Jesus died on the cross. We, who deserved judgment for our sins, have come to know God's grace, because Jesus paid for our sins. There's no better way to illustrate this than by looking at Philippians, chapter 2.

Philippians 2:6-8
[Jesus Christ] although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus Christ knew and experienced glory with God, the Father. And yet, for our sake, He didn't remain in heaven. Rather, He came to earth. In order to do so, He essentially made Himself a nothing, a nobody, born of a virgin from Nazareth in the little town of Bethlehem. He grew up as a carpenter's son, but God was with Him.

And just as had been prophesied of Him, He was, "despised and forsaken of men." He was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." And, "we did not esteem Him." (Isaiah 53:3). Although Jesus lived the perfect life, doing good and teaching righteousness in the kingdom of God, at the urging of the Jews, He was condemned to death by Pontius Pilate. He died the worst death imaginable, death on a cross.

But, His death wasn't simply any death. No, His death was truly unjust. And He died with a purpose. When Jesus died, He died for our sin. "He was pierced through for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The LORD caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him (Isaiah 53:5-6). He died that we might live.

Through faith in Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have a righteousness that we could never earn. This is what Paul talked about in Philippians 3. After putting forth how, of anyone, Paul might have confidence to trust in His own righteousness, all was loss.

Philippians 3:7-9
But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis

of faith,

This is grace, that we have a righteousness that is not our own! We have a righteousness not derived from the law! We have a righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. And the fact that we gain that righteousness is all by grace. We don't have to earn it in anyway. We simply need to believe. Because, it comes by faith ("the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith"). It is faith in Jesus Christ, It comes by trusting in His work on your behalf.

This is "good news." That's what "gospel" means. It means "good news." And this is the best news in the world, that Christ died for our sins. And in this we can rejoice. We can "rejoice in the gospel."

Paul's desire is that this grace penetrates deep within us. That His grace might "be with your spirit" (verse 23). That in the deepest recesses of our hearts, God's grace would be known and experienced and loved. And note here, that it isn't the "knowledge of God's grace" that Paul wants to be in our spirits. It is God's grace in our spirit.

See, it isn't merely about God that we know. It's God's grace that we experience. And, in accordance with the application of my third point, I ask, do you long for this grace? Do you desire to know it more deeply. Do you long as in Philippians 3:10, "That I may know Him." Verse 23 calls us to cry out, "That I may know His grace!" (Philippians 4:23).

Paul wants for this grace to be deep in our spirits. May the Lord bring His grace into our spirit, so that indeed, we will "Rejoice in the Gospel."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 15, 2014 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] <http://www.knox.edu/news-and-events/news-archive/pumphandle-2011.html>