

## PHILIPPIANS: Picture Joy

Sept 1: So Good of You

Philippians 4:14-23 *Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. 17 Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

*20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

*21 Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings.*

*22 All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.*

*23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*

**COMMUNION:** Reflect on the solitary assignment of the Savior who died not only beyond the help of his human friends but beyond the view of his Father.

**Intro:** I have heard this phrase many times, "So good of you to come." It is the honest expression of a troubled heart. It is often uttered accompanied by a warm hug or a tender kiss.

The phrase acknowledges that coming is not easy, that it is costly. The trip is long and the expense is substantial. I felt this way when I saw so many familiar faces all the way from New Orleans at the funeral of my father: "So good of you to come."

The phrase makes a moral judgment. It calls something good or beautiful. It is an adverb that modifies the verb "to do." "You have done beautifully in coming" or "You have done well by coming."

The phrase also recognizes a coming alongside or beside. It is a joining, a sharing, an effort to reduce the sorrow by shouldering some of it yourself.

\*\*\*I think this is why Bessie Murphy loved me so much, and I loved her. She was bedridden for several years, and I was her pastor as a mere boy of 21 years. I went to her mobile home in a park near the church. I knocked on the back door that was near her bed. She would let me know it was open, and I would step in to her home.

She could creep around on a walker sometimes. But usually she was in such pain that she remained in bed. At first I went to share with her in her suffering. Then I began to actually share with her the challenges of my pastoral ministry. Before long Bessie was one of my best friends and a vital support to me in prayer. "It was good of you to come" turned into "it was good for me to go."

The people in the church at Philippi hold a special place in the heart of the Apostle Paul. They are distinguished in many ways as his most caring, supportive congregation. They came to him when he was in chains, facing possible execution, sending one of their members to stay with him and providing for his need.

### **I. Share the Love: *Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles (Phil. 4:14).***

A. Suffering alone is tough. Paul has an intense need for the fellowship of believers. When he is alone and under duress, his thoughts get darker. This is true for most of us.

\*\*\*I have been to prison several times recently to visit various prisoners. I can tell you that they struggle with discouragement and despair, just as I know the Apostle Paul must have. A visit from someone who cares about them makes all the difference.

B. Sharing the burden is beautiful (good).

1. The sharing is *sugkoinoneo*. This is the word for fellowship. The Philippians initiated with Paul a very special sharing.

2. The troubles are "the pressure, the oppression, the distress." Paul was experiencing all the stress that comes from caring for the churches, facing a trial, and contemplating his own death. Coming alongside of a sufferer is beautiful.

3. Love is sharing in its essence. It has to be shared.

C. You make something beautiful in the world when you share with another person in need.

1. The Philippians went beyond words and even presence. They sent financial support to Paul back in the early days of their acquaintance with the gospel and in these recent days they renewed that practical concern. They participated with him “in this matter of giving and receiving.” The giving is their financial support. The receiving is the reward that was credited to their account.

2. You express your concern and support in a beautiful way when you give financially to support the work of Christ and his church.

## **II. Send the Aid: *You sent me aid more than once when I was in need (Phil. 4:16).***

A. Remember the early days. Paul remembers vividly each time that he was surprised, delighted, and relieved by the gifts that his friends in Philippi sent to support him.

1. These friends remembered, too. It was a big thing for them.

B. Paul acknowledges that he was in need. He does not deny his need. He wants them to realize that he has learned to do without, that he can do without things and not be upset.

I am acknowledging today what Paul acknowledges here. We have a real financial need at First Baptist New Orleans. My salary is set by our personnel committee, and I am receiving my paycheck. But I am also seeking to be responsible and manage the affairs of this congregation within the limits of our gifts. And friends, we are way behind now, \$160,000 behind, and we really need to make this up this month. We are doing our budget for 2014. We are looking at the configuration of the ministry. I am prepared to downsize if the level of our support for First Baptist requires me to do so. But today I am telling you that we have a need. Based on your response this month, I will make decisions, along with our leadership team, about what we can continue to do and what we must stop doing.

C. Paul has received “full payment,” “more than enough.” The word “payment” indicates that these Philippians feel a spiritual obligation in relation to the Apostle Paul. And he understands that obligation and agrees. Even though it is a gift of grace, freely given, it is still a payment that should be made.

1. Most pastors are not rich or independently wealthy. They live on the gifts of God’s people. This was true for Paul. It has been true for me most of my adult life.

2. Some things are truly wonderful about living on the gifts of God’s people. You see God supply your needs day by day. You feel the love of God’s people when all the needs are met.

3. Sometimes living on those gifts is challenging. The supply runs low and ministry has to be reduced. We all want to do more, not less, and it is hard to downsize when you are addressing so much need. We face that right now as a congregation. And I face it as a pastor.

D. Now Paul is “amply supplied.” He has received the gifts they sent, along with the companionship of Epaphroditus.

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it feels like to be amply supplied.

\*\*\*I will never forget the time this friend in the church came to me and asked me to make a list of everything I needed to accomplish our work. “Everything?” I asked, and he confirmed, “Everything.”

So I made a list and gave it to him. It was long, a dozen items or more from things that cost several thousand dollars to less expensive items that we had simply not chosen to buy because other things were more pressing.

I was going about my work a week or two later when I heard a truck pull up in front of the church office. That in itself was not unusual. But soon they were unloading all the things that were on that list, rolling them one by one into our work space and to other parts of the building. It was years ago this happened, but I remember well.

E. For a lot of us, our vocation, our calling, is our life. We are doing what we have been directed by God to do with our days and years, the substance of our lives. When we have ample supply, we have a great sense of well-being.

**III. Please the Lord: *I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God (Phil. 4:18).***

A. Fragrant Offering calls to mind the offerings that they made in the Old Testament. They had a Table of Incense where they made these fragrant offerings. When we give to God, we make a fragrant offering to him.

B. Acceptable sacrifice. The gifts from the Philippians were a sacrifice. That means that they did without some things in order to supply the needs of the Apostle Paul.

1. I know that funds are limited for all of us. We cannot buy anything and everything we see or want. We make choices.

2. I know that you have a lot of choices about your charitable giving as well as what you spend on your own needs and wants.

3. I know it's your money, too, although it also is God's money.

C. Pleasing to God.

1. Paul has the audacity to announce that their gifts to support his work were "pleasing to God."

2. I believe that I can say the same thing about the gifts you give to support the work of this family of faith. We are a house of worship. We are a gospel ministry. We are showing and sharing the love of Christ in as many ways as we can.

3. We are doing Bible studies and children's work and youth work and prison work and Care Effect because we believe these ministries please the Lord. If you agree, then I ask you to give above and beyond, to choose this work over other places where you might spend your money, to make it a priority. Conclusion: When Jesus died on the cross he was making an offering of his life, an acceptable sacrifice. And the Father in heaven was pleased. I am asking you to follow Christ in giving of yourself and of your substance to the Lord, making this gospel work a priority, part of your personal budget, and helping us put this ministry on its feet.