

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **The Saints of God**

Scripture: Philippians 4:20-23

Code: 50-46

This particular Sunday morning is, in some ways, an historical moment because we come to the last message on the great epistle of Paul to the Philippians. About a year and a half ago we embarked upon this book and God has taken us through many marvelous truths and applications. We now bring to a close this great, great letter. And my prayer is that though we cease to preach on this, it does not cease to be warm in your hearts, fresh in your minds, active in your living.

We come to the final four verses of Philippians, chapter 4 verses 20 through 23. There is one word that is repeated twice in these four verses to which I would like to draw your attention and which will provide for us the substance of the message this morning. That is the word "saint." It appears in verse 21. It appears again in verse 22. That little word saint is going to be the hook on which we hang the truths of these four verses. It is a familiar word to us but admittedly somewhat understood wrongly or improperly by most people.

For example, if someone were to ask you if you were a saint, what would you say? Well you might think about it for a moment because you might be a little bit afraid to answer the question because the term "saint" has been loaded with so much that is not representative of its biblical meaning. The word "saint" has come very far from its original New Testament sense. And for some of us we would be reluctant to say I'm a saint because we live under the assumption that someone who is a saint lives at a much higher spiritual level than we do and we would be thinking ourselves somewhat egotistical, boastful, proud to even say I'm a saint because we reserve that term for people who spiritual are much, much more like Jesus Christ than we assume ourselves to be, and so humility in one sense might cause us to be a bit afraid to answer in the affirmative.

And then looking at it from the opposite extreme we might not want to say that we are saints because people might misunderstand what we mean by that. Most people, I suppose, would assess a saint as a sort of angular figure long dead, a sort of ecclesiastical relic crystallized in stained glass or in a statue form in some Catholic Church someplace. And since we are neither ecclesiastical relics or long dead and certainly not worthy of stained glass windows, nor desirous of being turned into statues, we're a bit reluctant. Maybe we think of a saint like the little boy who said they are multi-colored people who block out the sunlight, and we really don't care to be a multi-colored person who blocks out the sunlight.

It could be very unacceptable to us to be identified as a saint if we assess sainthood like the Roman Catholic Church does. In Roman Catholic theology which, of course, has tended to dominate the definition of the term "saint," a saint is a super-person. In fact, Catholic theology says, and I quote, "A saint is one who has exhibited unsurpassable devotion to Christ." And if you take that definition that a saint is someone who has demonstrated unsurpassable devotion to Christ, you might well be reluctant to call yourself a saint because it would be hard for you to say...Well, my devotion to Christ has no capability of being surpassed by anyone anyplace. That too sounds a bit much.

The Roman Catholic Church says that people, however, who have lived lives of unsurpassable devotion to Jesus Christ are worthy to be called saints, to be canonized which word means to be made the spiritual standard, or lifted up as the spiritual models, and so these canonized unsurpassably devoted people are called saints. Statues and stained-glass windows are made of them and they are to be venerated, they are to be prayed to, appealed to, praised, exalted and honored. And that whole thing makes us uncomfortable with the term saint. These statues of saints are placed in churches. The statue itself then becomes in whatever form, whether it's a small statue or a large one, the focal point of veneration. You might see, for example, people kissing those saints. You might see many people bowing their knees before those saints. You will see some people bringing flowers and gifts to the saints. Others will be burning candles or lighting lights in more sophisticated cathedrals. Some people will be offering incense and some people will be just there meditating upon the virtues of the life of that individual.

Now this is done because the Roman Catholic Church teaches that because of the unsurpassable devotion to Christ these people exhibited in their earthly life, they have been exalted in their heavenly life to a position of special clout with God. And the reason we appeal to them and the reason we honor them and extol them and venerate them is so that they in receiving our honor and our prayers will intercede with God for our needs. They become intermediaries, intercessors for us and we want to stay in their good graces and since they by holy life on earth have special clout with God can gain things for us, we want to do all we can to acknowledge their greatness.

Another thing Roman Catholic theology teaches is that they have special work of interceding with God for the souls of people which are captive to the pain of purgatory. And so as you pray to the saint, in a sense you are pleading with that saint to appeal to God to release the one that you love from the pain of purgatory. In fact, you will frequently see in a Roman Catholic Church candles at the feet of the saints, which candles are lighted and as long as the candle is still burning, the prayer is perpetual to the saint to plead with the saint, to plead with God to get that soul out of purgatory.

These things make us feel very uncomfortable with being called a saint. We do not care to be etched in stained glass, we do not care to be a statue that somebody kisses. We do not care to be thought of as somebody who is supposed to be getting people out of a place that doesn't even exist. So the whole idea of sainthood can be a bit uncomfortable for us.

However, notwithstanding all of that misinformation about what sainthood is, you might be interested to know that Paul's favorite word for Christians is the word "saint." He uses it over sixty times in his epistles. And when he speaks of saints, the majority of times his reference is to very ordinary Christians...very ordinary Christians. You will notice that in verse 21 he says, "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus." In verse 22 he says, "All the saints greet you." And you can see by both of those references that the term is very commonly used. It is very broad. It is very encompassing. In fact, he identifies all of the people in the Philippian church as saints back in chapter 1 verse 1. He says, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons." It isn't just deacons who become saints, it isn't just elders, overseers who become saints, or pastors, it is everybody in the congregation who is a saint.

One little boy said that saints are stained-glass figures who block out the sunlight. And another answered him. No, saints are people who let the light shine through them. And that, in effect, is the true definition of a saint. Any saint could be defined as one in whom the light of Christ exists and from whom the light of Christ shines.

Now Paul comes to the end of his letter to the Philippians, he reminds them of the identification he gave them at the very beginning, that they in fact are saints. And as he says this final little farewell here, when he introduces the term saint he gives us a good hook on which to hang this whole text so that we can pull it together and comprehend its richness and its implications for our own lives.

Now, if someone asks you if you're a saint, by the time we get done with our message this morning I hope you'll be able to give happily the right answer. You should know what to say.

Let's talk first of all about the character of saints...the character of saints, or the nature of saints, or the definition of saints. Just looking at that word, saint, in the singular, saints in the plural in verse 22, inherent in the term is the definition or the character or the nature of a saint. The word hagios or hagioi(?) in plural, simply means "set apart ones, separated ones, sanctified ones or perhaps best, holy ones." That's just a list of synonyms for the word "saint." The concept is "being set apart, being separated." Now we know that the Bible says that God is holy. The word can be translated holy, is often translated holy in Scripture, it means the same thing. We know that God is holy, or God is saintly or God is separated. And from what is God separated? God is separated from sin, that is in fact the purest definition of God's nature. That is why it is the only attribute of God repeated three times, He is holy, holy, holy. Why? Because it defines God's utter otherness. It defines Him as utterly unlike us because we are sinful He is separated from sin...utterly distinct from sin, set apart from sin. What is a saint then? A saint is one...listen carefully...who has been separated from sin unto God for holy purposes. That's all inherent in the word. Separated from sin to God for holy purposes...that's a saint. Anyone who is separated from sin unto God is a saint.

Now there's a further insight into this definition in verse 21 because he says, "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus." And in the sphere of being "in Christ Jesus" is where sainthood takes place. That little phrase "in Christ Jesus" is a very common one to the Apostle Paul because it defines the Christian's identity. We are in Christ. We do not just believe Christ. We do not just believe that He lived and died and rose. We do not just believe that He provided salvation. We do not just believe that He is coming again. We are not only believing Christ, believing in Christ, but we are in Christ in a union of life. We are bonded to Christ.

Now this has been on the mind of Paul in the Philippian letter. It is not the first time the thought has crossed his mind. Chapter 1 verse 21 simply sums it up, "For to me to live is Christ." And a number of other times in this epistle he uses the term "in Christ" or "in the Lord." For him his very life was in Christ. There's a sense in which the believer has been separated from sin unto God. And that separation is accomplished when we cease to be in the darkness, in sin and we become in the light, in holiness, in Christ. That obviously is not completed yet until the day of our glorification. But already we have received the righteousness of God in Christ imputed to us. We have received the indwelling Holy Spirit and with Him the life of God within us which is a righteous nature. We have...Peter says it as well as anyone in 2 Peter 1...we have by having received the righteousness and godliness of Christ been delivered from the corruption of the lust that is in the world. A believer then is a saint because every believer is in Christ, separated from sin unto God for holy purposes. That is true of all of us.

So, the definition of the saint, the nature of the saint, the character of the saint...very simple, one who is separated from sin unto God for holy purposes which separation has occurred by that individual becoming in Christ through faith. In Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death and resurrection we become in Christ. Paul says to the Roman church, we are joined with Christ, we die with Christ, we rise with Christ, we walk in the newness of the life of Christ. To the Galatians he says, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live...implied with Christ...and the life I live I live in the flesh, but it is not I...he says...it is Christ living in me." So I am in Christ. That's not true of other world religions. People aren't in Buddha, they just believe in the teachings of Buddha. They aren't in Mohammed, they just believe the teachings of Mohammed. They aren't in Mary Baker Eddy, they aren't in their religious leader. They aren't in the swamis and the yogi leaders and occult leaders. That kind of union of life is distinctively Christian. And we are therefore distinctively the separated ones who are the saints. There should be no reluctance in your heart and mind in calling yourself a saint. The only reluctance should be that you might feel embarrassed to say it because someone knows you're not living as a saint ought to live. But the title you deserve.

Just to make it as clear as possible who the saints are, if you were to identify the most troublesome sinful church to which a New Testament letter is written, what church would it be? Corinth, right? Listen to these encouraging words, 1 Corinthians 1:1 and 2, "Paul, called an Apostle of Jesus Christ

by the will of God and Sosthenes, our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling." Even the Corinthians were saints. With all of our failures and foibles and problems, we are saints.

What is the character of a saint? One who has been separated from sin unto God, set apart for holy purpose. That occurs because that person by faith in the person and work of Christ is in Christ. And so we possess the righteousness of Christ, are separated from sin and its dominion, some day separated sin and its presence. So Paul is glad to remind the Philippians that they are saints. And I think inherent in this reminder in the beginning of the epistle and at the end, and he really circles back and picks up the term, inherent in that reminder is that sort of insidious message underneath it that if you're going to call yourself a saint, you better get serious about living up to your title. There's that implication clearly in the very term.

So as the dear Apostle Paul watches the candle flicker, probably at night, and realizes that the darkness of night is soon to fall and waits the morning dawn when he hands the scroll, as it were, to Epaphroditus and he says, "Epaphroditus, the letter is done, you can now return to Philippi and give it to the leaders of the church," as he waits to send off that dictated letter which an amanuensis or secretary has taken down, just before he is finished in the flickering of that last evening, he picks the stylus up himself and with his own hand it is very likely that verses 20, 21, 22 and 23 were written.

You say, "Well what makes you think that? The word of the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians. The Apostle Paul in writing the final words of 2 Thessalonians said this, "I, Paul," chapter 3 verse 17, "write this greeting with my own hand and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter, this is the way I write." You wouldn't write a letter without signing it to authenticate it, neither would Paul. And he says in that verse, "In all the letters I write, I always take up the pen and authenticate this." You can understand how important that would be, right? People could be sending all kinds of letters and saying they were from Paul, it was vital that the true Word of God through that instrument be validated by his own inimitable inscription. And we know from Galatians 6:11 that he wrote with large letters. There's reason to assume a rather large clumsy letters were his common way to sign off which would be very difficult to counterfeit. And so he picks up the stylus from his secretary, or amanuensis, and pens this final word. And as he does he introduces to us this lovely theme of sainthood.

Now having understood the character of saints, let's move secondly to the worship of saints...the worship of saints. Verse 20, "Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Now let me give you a point that I want to emphasize. Saints are not to be worshiped. Saints are to worship. Saints are not only known by their relationship to sin and to God through Christ, but saints are known by their worship. This, by the way, in verse 20, is a great doxology. Doxology comes from a Greek word doxaw which means glory. A doxology is simply a word about glory. It is ascribing glory

to God. It is a doxology.

Let me tell you something about doxologies. As in this case, doxologies are responses of praise to great truth. Did you hear that? A doxology is the fitting response to doctrine, to truth. And this outburst of doxology in verse 20, this outburst of praise flows from the Apostle's exuberant joy over the whole letter which has literally expounded the heretofore unheard truth of God. And I believe though Paul wrote it with his own pen, writing it under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, he probably experienced an exhilaration that could exceed any exhilaration that we could even feel. What we learn here is that worship as always is the fitting response to doctrine. Truth should produce joyous praise, glory to God.

Now the heart of the doxology is that little phrase "be the glory...be the glory." That simply means divine honor, divine praise, divine adoration. That's what a doxology is. It gives glory to God. It adores Him, honors Him, respects Him, fears Him, worships Him, praises Him. It is a fitting response to truth. And all the marvelous truth that has been flowing through this epistle is culminated in verse 19, isn't it? "And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Just the overwhelming realization that all your needs are met in Christ releases, as it were, the pent up thrill and out comes the exuberant Spirit-inspired praise of verse 20.

A similar outburst of doxological praise occurs at another high point in Paul's letters. Turn with me to Romans chapter 11, Romans chapters 1 through 11 provide for us the greatest doctrinal treatise in all of Scripture, the monumental discussion of the significance of the coming, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And as Paul has gone through 11 chapters of this doctrine, 11 chapters of this profound truth, he can no longer contain himself. And in verse 33 of chapter 11 as he comes to the end of the doctrinal section of Romans, it's as if the lid blows off and he just exuberantly pours out these words, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways, for who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor, or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Him be the glory forever. Amen."

And after bursting at the seams, as it were, he then settles down to write the last part of his book. And even after the last part of Romans, which is practical instruction, he can't close the epistle without praise and so the last verse of Romans 16 says "To the only wise God through Jesus Christ be the glory forever. Amen."

Listen, praise is always the fitting response to truth. Listen to me, that is why when you worship God you worship Him in spirit and in...what?...truth. People will say to me, "Well, you know, at the worship service, you call it a worship service but there's too much preaching, there's too much reading of Scripture, discussing of Scripture, we need more time for worship." And my response to that is...that the time for worship is when you are responding to truth. And so how can we worship God if we do

not know truth about Him?

The Apostle Paul then tells us about the worship of saints. We are the worshipers, not the worshiped. We worship. Notice, please, it says, "Be the glory forever and ever." That marvelous Greek phrase translated forever and ever basically means cycles...cycles and cycles and cycles and cycles, it's ad infinitum, it's unending. Saints worship unendingly, cycling and cycling and cycling and cycling, worshiping and worshiping forever, forever, forever and ever. That is the very definition of our existence.

Would you go back to chapter 3 verse 3 and remember with me what is my favorite definition of Christian. "We are the true circumcision," that is we have the true mark, what is it? "We worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh." That's...that's what a Christian is. A Christian is a worshiper who worships in the power of the Spirit, gives the glory to Christ, puts no confidence in the flesh. We are worshipers.

This should not surprise us. Go with me to John chapter 4, that marvelous discussion with the woman at the well in Samaria. And Jesus gives us a tremendous insight. In verse 23 He says to this woman in John 4, "An hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth...listen to this...for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers." Marvelous statement.

Listen to me, salvation is all about the Father seeking worshipers. You are saved to worship. I was saved to worship. It's the Father seeking worshipers. And, those who worship Him, it says in verse 24, must worship in spirit...that is with all our inner being...but also in truth according to fact, according to truth. The object of redemption, beloved, was to make worshipers. And when we worship we are to worship in truth, that is we are to worship God truly as He is. So we are worshipers, to worship God forever and ever and ever and ever and ever.

Paul to the Philippians even identifies and to us this God. He says, "Now to our God and Father." Our God, what do you mean our God? The God of Christians, the only God, the only true God, the God of all saints. And the term "our" simply personalizes...our own personal God and the true God is implied in the term theos, the true God, the one God, the God who made heaven and earth and all that is in them.

So we are to worship the true God in a personal way because He is our God. Beloved, you can't worship the true God unless you know who He is. That's why Hosea says in chapter 6 verse 6 that God delights in the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings. God does not want ignorant sacrifices, He wants worship out of the knowledge of who He is. You cannot truly worship God if you do not understand who God is.

When we think about idolatry, we usually think about a primitive pagan in a mud hut, bowing down to some little god on the ground, or we imagine some gross pagan temple with elaborate ornate idols and burning incense. But listen, that is creating a false god and worshiping him. It is equally idolatrous to identify the true God but not understand the truth about Him. Idolatry goes beyond the idea of creating a false god, fundamentally, listen to this, idolatry is thinking thoughts about God that are untrue of Him. Or entertaining thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. That's equally idolatrous. And I submit to you that the blasphemy of the sanctuary far exceeds the blasphemy of the street. A.W. Tozer summed it up well. He wrote, "The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever reason above its religion. And man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God."

Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. Then he says, "For this reason the gravest question before the church is always God Himself. And the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like," end quote. Exactly right.

You cannot worship unless you worship the true God in the true way. Worship is always a response to truth and doctrine. And the doxologies of the Scripture...go through the New Testament and find the doxologies and they are outbursts of praise in response to great truth about God, truth which settles the issues of the heart. The only way to know God and understand all that is revealed about God is to make the knowledge of God the primary pursuit of your life, it must be the primary pursuit of the church. You cannot have a man-centered theology and be a true worshiper.

Furthermore, not only is doxological praise the response to the truth about God, but to the truth about God that God is the resource of His people. If I am not overwhelmed alone by who He is, I certainly can be overwhelmed by what He has done in providing His bounty for me, and that lies in the heart of Paul as well. He is not only praising God because God is a God who can supply everything, He is praising God for God is a God who has supplied everything. It is not only who He is and what He is capable of, it is who He is, what He is capable of and what He has already done. So wonderfully do we praise God in truth and truth alone.

But Paul doesn't stop there. He says, "Now to our God and Father." That's a wonderful addition. There is a sense in which throughout the New Testament God is called Father, related to being the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Frequently the New Testament writers speak of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that is intended to lead us to understand that He and God are equal...God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, equal in essence, bearing the same deity, the same common life.



But Paul's point here is that God is our Father in a filial way, in a family way. Unlike the pagans, we don't go fearfully, shamefully, threateningly before some deity. We go to one who loves us and is our Father, we go as little children. That's different than the worship of the world. That, by the way, is even different than the worship of the Old Testament where God is never identified as the personal Father to an individual Jew. If He's called Father at all in the Old Testament and it's very infrequent, it is only insofar as He fathered the nation Israel. Now all of a sudden, God is so personal that He is our God and our Father. And we go to Him to worship one who is personally attuned, sensitive to our needs.

Back in chapter 1 verse 2 it's the way he started, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father." God our Father, and he has that same thing in mind here. What a joy it is to realize that the God we worship we don't worship out of fear, we worship one who is related to us in a family way as our loving Father. And because of that Paul said of the Galatians, we can cry Daddy, Abba Father, we can go without fear to that great God.

Why does he add that? Because to contemplate our God would be lost in the wonder of His majesty, and might leave us a bit at distance, might lead us to conclude we better not approach such an infinitely wondrous majestic and holy God. And so when adding the word "Father" he immediately closes that gap between the sinner and the awesome holiness of his God.

Sainthood involves a proper worship...a proper worship, a worship in response to who God is and what He is able to do and what He has done for us. Beloved, you cannot worship any other way rightly, you must worship the true God according to the truth about Him revealed in Scripture. The pursuit of your life then, to be a true worshiper. In order to be a true worshiper, you must pursue the knowledge of the revelation of God so that you can worship Him in truth. The focus of the church must therefore be Godward, Godward, Godward, Godward, always looking at God, always looking at God. You say, "How do you best understand God?" Who came into the world to reveal God? Christ...to know Christ, to know Christ is to know God. And so we will teach and preach on the character of God which character is marvelously, perfectly, holy manifest in Jesus Christ.

And to that doxology Paul adds "amen." Amen, that is a confessional endorsement, a confessional affirmation, it underlines the truth, it's saying "so let it be." That's the worship of saints. We aren't worshiped, we worship. That's a way of life.

The third thing that I would say Paul opens up to us about sainthood is the fellowship of saints...the fellowship of saints. Would you notice verse 21. "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus, the brethren who are with me greet you, all the saints greet you..." Stop at that point.

There's a lot of greeting there. Three times the word is used, it's the verb in each of those three statements, it's all about saluting each other...the old way to translate it. But what does it mean? Is it

a simple "hello," a simple sort of mundane common "how are you?" What's implied in this greeting?

Well a bond of fellowship is certainly implied in the terms here. Let's look a little deeply and see if we can't see it. The simple verb translated "greet" or "salute," although that has so many military connotations we don't use it anymore, the simple verb means to say "hello" but not just in a vacuum, it implies a note of affection and a desire for one's well being. And here we could assume that Paul is saying affectionately, "I want you to express to all the saints how much I desire their spiritual well being. Share my love and passion for their spiritual development." That's really what's on his heart. It says I care, I care about you.

Would you notice he says "greet every saint." He doesn't say greet all the saints in sort of the collective way. Instead of using the collective "all" he uses the individualistic word "every." And here he is noting for us that every saint is worthy of Paul's concern, Paul's care, Paul's affection and Paul's wishes for spiritual well being.

Now this is a monumental and unique element of the Christian faith that we are to love one another the same. We are to consider others better than ourselves. There is no stratification in the body of Christ. There are to be no favorites. God is not a respecter of...what?...of persons. We are not to elevate some over the other. And what Paul shows us here that is...in his affectionate desire for the spiritual well being of the saints he included everybody. This is his heart. This is what he was after in chapter 2 when he said to them, "If there's any encouragement in Christ, any comfort of love, any fellowship of the Spirit, any affection and compassion, please make my joy complete." Why? "By having the same mind, loving everyone the same way, being united in Spirit, having one purpose, not being proud but humble, regarding one another as more important than yourself and not looking on your own things but the things of other," namely, having the mind of Christ, the mind of humility. That's fellowship.

The fellowship of the saints is that we're not elevated above each other. A saint is not one who has lived an unsurpassable devotion to Christ. A saint is not a super-person. We're all saints and we're all worthy to be called saints. And listen, if we are worthy to be called saints by God, then we are worthy of the affection and the love of each other, true? And any stratification or isolation or separation from other saints is contrary to the intention of the Spirit of God, unless we are following instruction with regard to avoiding them because they are sinful.

Now the injunction here in verse 21 is directed at the church leaders who will get the letter. And when he says, "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus," he is telling the pastors and elders and deacons to go greet the people on his behalf individually, assuring them of his love and his desire for their spiritual well being.

This is the way it is with Christ. He had a heart for the individual. I remember Mark 5:31 where out of the midst of the multitude He felt the little lady who touched His garment. He always had that sense of being touchable. So it is in the church. There's no stratification, there's no elevation. We're all commonly saints. None of us is superior to or inferior to the other, we are what we are by the grace of God, 1 Corinthians 15:10 says, and only because of His grace.

This is further elucidated in the second sentence in verse 21. He says, "The brethren who are with me greet you." Now I want you to know that while he was a prisoner in Rome for this time writing this letter, he had some pretty formidable folks coming to see him. He calls them the brethren who are with me and they send you the same desire for spiritual well being and affection and they're the ones with me. These are his specific coworkers, as opposed to all the rest that he mentions in verse 22. And doing a little bit of background on this you find out who they were...quite an amazing group of people.

For example, we know that during his imprisonment Timothy was with him because he refers to him in the letter clear back in chapter 1 verse 1, then in chapter 2 verse 19. Timothy was his protege, his son in the faith, a very gifted, great, godly man, thirty years the junior of Paul but nonetheless a very unique and gifted man. There was also Epaphroditus, that godly saint who had come from Philippi, he too was with Paul, and you know the character of that man, it's mentioned at the end of chapter 2. He was such a devout Christian that he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his own life just to serve Paul. That is a sacrificial man.

So Timothy was there, and Epaphroditus was there. Chapter 1 and verse 14 also indicates to us that there were some other brethren who were courageously preaching the Word of God without fear, so there were a group of other preachers there, evangelizers. In addition to that it's very likely that Tychicus and Aristarchus were there, well known and noble Christians. There are many who would tell us that Luke was there and Mark was there. If we compare all the data we have, and that's a formidable duo, namely the two who wrote the two gospels, Mark and Luke. And some have suggested it's very likely Onesimus was there, the runaway slave who ran into Paul and was converted to Christ, who went back then to serve Philemon. Others would say a man named Jesus Justus was there. And then there are some unnamed brethren who were there with him.

The point that I want you to see is very interesting, it's this. That as high up the ladders of stratification as they might be, these gentlemen are only described as the brethren. And again we pull them down from any supposed rank and we talk again about the commonality of sainthood. Timothy may have been unusually gifted, and certainly was. Epaphroditus may have been a noble Christian soul, and certainly he was. And among the preachers at Rome, there were unquestionably some extremely gifted men. And no one would argue about the spiritual qualifications of Tychicus and Aristarchus, given that they had spent a lot of time with Paul. And who would question Mark and Luke's character?

But as formidable as they were, they need only be associated with such sort of non-descript and troublesome characters as Onesimus. And they are all pulled together in one term "brethren." You see, the fellowship of saints is a common bond without strata. There weren't any backward collars in Paul's group. There wasn't any...any liturgical, clerical priesthood. There isn't any stratification here. This is the common identity, the brethren who are saints, those others who love Christ. The fact that they were gifted in different ways doesn't make them any superior at all. In fact, Paul when identifying himself said, "I am the least of all Apostles," and in another epistle he said, "I am the chief of sinners."

Is it any wonder that Jesus Himself in Matthew 23 said to the Jewish leaders and to the Apostles, "Don't call any man father?" Don't let any man pass himself off as superior to the brotherhood. You're brothers. And then further opening up to us the window on fellowship, in verse 22 he says, "All the saints greet you," and he just wraps his arms around the whole Roman church, all the people in Rome that were Christians...the wider circle of Christians, they send their love and their affection and their wishes for spiritual well being and growth.

Beloved, that's the heart of Christian fellowship. We're all saints, none superior to the other, though differently gifted and at points in our life differently faithful. But we are all one brotherhood, we are all one fellowship, we are all one body in Christ. And the less comely members, Paul says to the Corinthians, are not less significant, but are perhaps in many cases more significant, as the less beautiful members of your body are more significant than those ones which receive all the kudos. And so we find here that the fellowship of saints is a very simple thing, it is the sharing of common love and the desire for spiritual well being.

The Christian singer is not a soloist, he's a member of a choir. The Christian soldier is not solitary figure, he's a member of an army. The Christian scholar is not a privately tutored learner, he's a part of a class and a school. The Christian son is not just a lonely child, he's a member of a family. The Christian runner is not an individual performer, he is a part of a team. That's the fellowship. Saints are not some group of people exist in isolation, as cold as the stone that marks them out. They're common possessors of the eternal life of God who share their love with each other.

So sainthood is characterized then by being separated from sin unto God for holy purposes through faith in Christ. The worship of saints is godward praise in response to truth and blessing. The fellowship of saints is a loving and non-discriminating mutual care.

Number four, the joy of saints. Paul opens a window to that for us in verse 22 and I think he must have had a gleam in his eye as he penned this with his own stylus. He says in verse 22, "All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household." And I just think he loved to say that. Why? Well this is the joy of the saints.

You say, "What is the joy of the saints?" I'll tell you what the joy of the saints is. In Luke 15 Jesus told a story about a lady who lost a coin, looked all day, found the coin, called her friends and rejoiced.

Then He told a story about a man who had sheep, lost a sheep, found the sheep, called his friends and they rejoiced. Then He told a story about a man who lost a son, found the son, called his friends, had a feast, they rejoiced.

And through that fifteenth chapter of Luke the Scripture says that when a soul is saved there is joy in heaven. The theme of Luke 15 is the joy of heaven over the salvation of a soul. And may I say to you that that's not the only place where there's joy when a soul is saved. What is the joy of the saints on earth? The greatest, highest joy we have, isn't it, is to see someone come to Christ. In Acts chapter 15, we rejoice on earth as heaven rejoices in the salvation of a soul. Listen to Acts 15:3, speaking of Paul and Barnabas, it says, "They went on their way passing through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles...listen to this...and they were bringing great joy to all the brethren." Why? Because it is always the joy of the brethren to see souls saved. And now Paul knows what joy this will bring when he says, "Especially those of Caesar's household."

Why so? Because Nero was the Caesar and everybody knows what Nero thought about Christ and Christians. Nero had fancied himself a god, a competing deity, a competing lord and demanded that the people in the Roman Empire worship him. Now the household of Caesar would not just have been his own family, the household of Caesar is a word to indicate all who were in his direct employ. And if you study history you find it's a very interesting group. You can do reading on it yourself. You will find it included courtiers, princes and higher ups in his personal court, judges. It included cooks, food preparers, tasters who tasted the food to make sure he didn't get poisoned. Musicians, custodians, builders, people who attended to his stables, it included soldiers and those who led them, it included people who managed his financial affairs. All of those people who were in any sense a part of the direct system, they would have been by our definition today government workers, a large group of people. And I believe that because Caesar and his whole enterprise was the direct counterpart to Christ, that there was some special exhilaration in the heart of Paul when somebody in Caesar's household became a Christian...when they turned their backs on emperor worship and embraced the true Christ.

Now to whom is he referring? Who are these who got saved? Well, two groups. First of all, those who had come to Christ in Caesar's household since Paul had become a prisoner. Paul being the instrument of God that he was, you can be sure that the Roman soldiers who had been chained to him heard the gospel. In fact, if you have any question about it, I remind you of chapter 1 verse 13 which says that since his imprisonment, the gospel of Christ had become known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard and to everybody else. The Praetorian Guard or the Roman soldiers were

exposed to Paul...it's one thing to be chained to Paul, to guard him, it's something else to have Paul chained to you. Talk about not being able to get away. And the result was people were coming to Christ in the Praetorian Guard. So some of those in Caesar's household that you can rejoice over are converted soldiers and others who heard the Word, too, who were part of serving the Caesar.

But there's something else here as well. There's no reason to assume that it doesn't also include people who were Christians before Paul's imprisonment. The gospel had already come to Rome and many had come to know Christ. J.B. Lightfoot, that great New Testament scholar, has a marvelous treatment of this whole idea of the Christians in Caesar's household. And studying all kinds of lists that have been discovered archaeologically that give us names of Caesar's household, and they've found them in archaeological digs, he has taken all the names on all those lists that have been discovered, gone over those names to see if he can recognize any of them, and found amazingly many parallels on the list of government workers with the list of names in Romans chapter 16. You remember when Paul was writing the epistle to the Romans and the sixteenth chapter he commends many, many people who helped him. Many of those names appear on the lists of Caesar's household. In fact, Lightfoot concludes that Romans 16 should be studied that way and that it's pretty clear that people like Ampliatus, Apelles, Stachys, Rufus, Hermes, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, at least, and maybe others, were very, very much a part of Caesar's household.

So you have some people being converted out of Caesar's household while Paul was a prisoner. You have some who were already Christians before that. And now Paul just loves to say, gathering up both groups, all the Christians in Caesar's house send their love. How wonderful, how thrilling that the household of Caesar, the enemy of Christ had yielded up many souls to the conquering Christ. The crucified Galilean had already begun to rule the governments of the world spiritually. Surprising joy, surprising joy.

What is the joy of saints, beloved? The joy of saints is to add to the ranks, is it not? The joy of saints is to see someone else come to Christ. The joy of saints is to see one won to the cause of Christ. And when they are won from the pits of darkness and the depths of sin, our joy is great. John Calvin wrote, "This is a matter worthy of notice. For it is no common evidence of divine mercy that the gospel had penetrated that sink of all crimes and iniquities. It is also the more wonderful because it is a rare thing for holiness to reign in courts," end quote. We are thrilled with the joy of the saints when someone comes to Christ.

Finally, the resource of saints, verse 23. Listen very carefully to this, this is the last word. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." There is something we need, saints, something we definitely, desperately need. What is it? Grace. You say, "Now wait a minute, I already had that. I had grace when I was saved. Grace was the unmerited favor or better the undeserved beneficent love of God to me in Christ that redeemed me. Grace was the starting point of my redemption when God in Christ forgave my sin." Yes, but it's not the end of grace. That's the beginning of grace, and

you are still in need of grace as much as you were then.

You want to hear something, you didn't deserve to be saved and you don't deserve to be kept saved. Do you understand that? You are no more worthy of your salvation now than you were then. And so you are sustained by grace just as you were saved by grace. It is grace by which our whole life exists. That's why Paul says in Romans 5:2, "This grace in which we stand." We live in it. Our life is governed by grace, guided by grace, kept by grace, strengthened by grace, sanctified by grace, enabled by grace. Listen, if God only gave us now that we're Christians what we deserve, we'd still be damned to hell. It is the constant grace of forgiveness, the grace of enabling strength, the grace of comfort, the grace of peace, the grace of joy, the grace of boldness, the grace of revelation and instruction. We are dependent on all of it all the time.

He started out in chapter 1 verse 2 wishing them grace. He ends up wishing them grace and again comes full circle. He says the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. What do you mean by that? Your spirit, your person, your inner man, the real you...may you know the fullness of grace, that purifying, beautifying, sanctifying grace.

Can I give you an interesting footnote? Every single epistle Paul wrote ends the same way...every one of them. First Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, every single one ends with a wish for the grace of Christ to be theirs. Why? Because when the letter is over the life goes on and the life is dependent on grace...undeserved beneficent love from God to an unworthy sinner. And you never cease to be what you are by the grace of God. Paul says my longing for you is that you might experience the fullness of this grace. That's the resource of saints, unending grace.

And who's grace? We end with this, listen very carefully. It is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh what a statement. Listen, He's the theme of this whole letter, did you get that? The name of Christ is mentioned 40 times in these four chapters, one every couple of verses, He's the heart of the whole thing. He is central to it. Paul began by describing himself as a slave of Jesus Christ. He addresses the Christians as saints in Jesus Christ. When referring to his imprisonment he says my bonds are in Jesus Christ. When he speaks about life he says for to me to live is Christ. When he speaks about death he says for me to die is Christ. When he exhorts people to godly conduct, it is to be like Christ. When he calls for proper attitudes, it is to have the mind of Christ. When he speaks of choices and desires and hopes, he says they are to be built on trust in Christ. When he speaks about joy it is the joy of Christ. When he speaks about strength it is the strength of Christ. When he calls for power and knowledge and fellowship, it is the knowledge of Christ, the power of Christ, the fellowship of His sufferings that he longs for. And when he looks for eternal hope and glory, he says I am looking for Christ. And when it's spiritual steadfastness he needs, it is in Christ. And when it is sufficiency he wants, it is in Christ. It is Christ, Christ, Christ, Christ. And he says greet every saint in Christ and remember you're dependent on the grace of Christ.

Our whole life is Christ, beloved. If you get nothing else, get that out of Philippians. Called by Christ, saved by Christ, to have the mind of Christ, to serve the way Christ served, to become like Christ. That's the message. To be like the beloved Redeemer. We are saints, not yet all we should be, but moving to become like the one who called us saints. Let's pray together.

Thank You, Father, for our time this morning, for this clear Word reminding us of who we are in Christ. We pray in His dear name. Amen.

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