

Place: Lurgan Baptist 26:10:2014

Reading: Philippians 1:1-8

THE JOURNEY TO JOY

2. PRECIOUS MEMORIES HOW THEY LINGER

At the age of 30 years of age John Bunyan started preaching. But because he lacked government approval to preach, he was hauled off to jail and tossed into a prison for preaching without a licence. Finally, after three months of confinement he was brought before the local magistrate and offered a full pardon on one condition. "*Stop preaching the gospel.*" But that was something John Bunyan could not do. So back to jail he went this time for 12 years in Bedford jail. Yet it was during those 12 years in that cell that Bunyan wrote the classic work "*Pilgrim's Progress.*" His small cell had one window through which he could see only the outer stone wall. And so each day, Bunyan would preach through a barred window to anyone who could hear his voice.

Day in and out passers-by would hear the sound of Bunyan's voice. Indeed they would stop their shopping to gather outside the prison to hear the message of the gospel. During his long imprisonment he carved a flute out of the leg of the only stool he had. With that flute from a lonely prison cell John Bunyan played melodies of praise and worship to God. Like Bunyan Paul was imprisoned for preaching the gospel. He was under house arrest in Rome which meant he was constantly

chained at the wrist to a Roman guard. (Acts 28:16) While imprisoned awaiting trial, he thought much of the believers at Philippi. The memories Paul had of these believers were indeed precious memories. Do you recall the words of that old song ?

Precious memories

How they linger

How they ever flood my soul

In the stillness of the midnight

Precious sacred, scenes unfold

My ... as Paul was incarcerated at Rome he thought of the events that unfolded in (Acts Ch 16) He thought of the conversion of Lydia and her household, the poor slave girl that had been demon possessed, and the Philippian jailor. He thought of their fellowship and partnership down through the years. It had been ten years since he has seen them and in his dark and difficult surroundings, precious memories flooded his soul. Robert Louis Stevenson said, "*Like a bird singing in the rain, let grateful memories survive in time of sorrow.*" In the stillness of Paul's midnight of sorrow and trial, Paul found comfort and joy as precious memories lingered, flooding his soul with sacred scenes.

These believers were special to his heart. The relationship between a pastor and a congregation is inevitably one of the most important features in the life of a church. That is certainly true of the founding pastor. Sometimes sadly, the relationship turns sour. Perhaps the congregation discovers that their leader

has faults they had not noticed before, at other times the fault lies with certain members of the congregation who cannot tolerate the leadership of others over a long period. Now Paul's relationships with the churches he had founded were varied. Think of the problems he had at Corinth, think of the struggles he had to keep the Galatians committed to the grace of God. But thankfully there was one church with which Paul enjoyed an especially harmonious relationship. Philippi. They were his crowning joy. (4:1) They were special to his heart, and as precious memories flooded his soul in that prison in Rome, he expressed his feelings for them. Will you notice here, that

(1) PAUL IS GRATEFUL FOR THEIR FELLOWSHIP

Do you see what he says in (3-5) ? In (1:5) he talks about their "*fellowship in the gospel*," in (1:12) he talks about "*the furtherance of the gospel*," in (1:27) he speaks of the "*faith of the gospel*." "*How about coming over to the house for some fellowship ?*" "*What a game of golf; man did we have great fellowship ?*" Do you know what I have been hearing for the last 40 years ? "*That church is so unfriendly there is no fellowship.*" Now what does the word fellowship mean ? Is fellowship going with some Christians to the rugby match, the football match or the cricket match ? Is that fellowship ? Is it fellowship when we stay behind and have tea in the hall here ? Is that fellowship ? The word "*fellowship*," is the Greek word *koinonia*. It speaks of much more than in what we think in terms of fellowship. It spoke a covenant

between 2 people. In ancient times, it spoke of a marriage contract. The idea is that of a working partnership. It is an agreement between two parties who are committed to a common task. Paul is happy because these believers in Philippi share in the fellowship of the gospel of Jesus Christ together. (1) You see,

(a) They were in Paul's Thoughts:

He was Thoughtful of them: You can feel the depth of his affection as he says, "*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.*" The word "*remembrance*," speaks of recollecting, being mindful, thinking of someone or something. The word "*every*," implies that he thought of them often. They were ever on his mind and in his thoughts. Like a husband and wife, parent and child, pastor and people. Paul thought of them continually and every remembrance of them brought joy to this servant of God. My one of the failures in our life is how forgetful we are. We are a lot like the couple that was sitting in church when the wife suddenly said, "*Oh, honey, I forgot to turn off the electric iron before we left home.*" He looked at her and smiled, "*Don't worry dear, it won't burn long. I just remembered I forgot to turn off the tap in the bath.*"

How forgetful we are of what God has done in our life. How forgetful we are of those God has put in our life. My there are some things and some people we should never forget. These should be on our minds continually. Paul remembered the saints at Philippi.

He was Thankful for them: Do you see what he says ? " *I thank of you.* " (1:3) The word translated " *thank*" here is first used in the New Testament in connection with the feeding of the four thousand. The Lord Jesus " *took the seven loaves and the fishes and gave thanks.*" (Matt 15:36) Paul was as thankful for the Philippians as he was for his daily bread. As Paul was thoughtful of them, he was thankful for them. My Paul could not say this of every church. To the church at Galatia he wrote, " *0 foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you ?*" (Gal 3:1) To the church at Corinth he wrote, "*I could not speak unto you as spiritual, but as unto carnal.*" (1 Cor 3:1) To be honest, there are some cases, when we think of others, it brings sadness. We think of those who have hurt us. We think of those who have disappointed us. We think of those who are no longer serving God.

To remember certain ones brings back dreadful memories rather than delightful memories. Just the thought of some people will bring different kinds of emotions. Some will bring fear. Others will bring anxiety. Some will bring happiness. Some will bring disgust. Some will bring joy. I've often wondered what people think when they think about you and me ? Does our lives drive them to the Lord in gratitude ? Moreover, when was the last time that you gave thanks to God for those who have been a blessing to you ? The people that God has used in your life to instruct and inspire you ? Do we need to pray what William Shakespeare wrote, " *0 Lord, that lends me life, lend me a heart replete with thankfulness.*" (a)

(b) They were in Paul's Prayers:

" *Always in every joy.*" (1:4) Paul prayed for them ***Continually:*** " *always,*" he prayed for them ***Specifically:*** " *making request,*" he prayed for them ***Joyfully:*** " *with joy.* " As he thought of Philippi he remembered the uproar in the city over his preaching. Now that he was gone, persecution against the Christians might be renewed so he presented to God a petition for *their protection.* News had reached Paul about a conflict between two of the sisters in the assembly, so he prayed for *their peace.* They were generous in supporting the Lord's work with their money so he prayed for *their prosperity.* My can you imagine Paul indulging in vague wishes that God would bless this, or that, or the other ? No

He's offering specific petitions with joy. A little child travelled alone from Scotland to London to have a series of operations from her twisted body. Because of the distance she had to leave her family behind. A sympathetic nurse tried to condition the child to the routine of the hospital, introducing her to the doctor and different ones. When everything was explained the nurse asked, "*Do you have any questions ?*" The child answered, " *Yes, who is going to pray for me ?*" Have you failed to pray for others ? Christians with needs are not much more than a name in the church bulletin. Their needs are heard about, but seldom prayed for.

(c) They were in Paul's Efforts:

" *For your fellowship now.* " (1:5) Remember the idea of fellowship is that of a working partnership. It is an agreement between two parties who are committed to a common task. Do you see what the common task is ? " *the defense and confirmation of the gospel,*" (1:7) Paul was grateful for the Philippians and their partnership with the gospel. He did not have to pump, prime, or prod them to share the gospel. But, they were partners "from the first day until now For approximately 10 years, the Philippian believers had been Paul's partners in the gospel. Now Paul was in Rome, his friends were miles away in Philippi, but their spiritual fellowship was real and satisfying. These Philippian believers had stood by Paul, supported him and followed him with their prayers.

They had become his partners in the gospel. They had done for him what Jonathan had done for David, " *strengthened his hand in God.*" (1 Sam 23:16) They had let him know, " *We are with you, Paul, all the way. You can count on us.*" A pastor in a small town went down to the train station every day and watched the train come roaring through. One of his deacons asked him why he followed that same ritual every day. Do you know what he said ? " ***That's the only in this town that I don't have to push.***" My Paul didn't have to push the Philippians. They were self-starters. They had initiative. They were committed partners to the common task of proclaiming the gospel. My can the servants of God count on you ? To stand by them, to pray for them, to encourage them in the things of God ? Do you know what it is to " *strengthen their hand in God ?*"

Listen, if Heaven is real, and it is. If Hell is real, and it is. If the Bible is true, and it is. If God is love, and He is. If Christ died to save, and, He did. Then, the greatest thing we can ever do is to bring sinners to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Billy Sunday was right when he said "***Let's quite fiddling with religion and do something to bring this world to Jesus Christ.***" My what are we doing to bring Lurgan to Jesus Christ ? What are you doing to bring your family to Jesus Christ ? " *Oh,*" you say " *I am having fellowship, I am drinking coffee with other Christians, we were watching the game together.* " Is this " *fellowship,*" in the Biblical sense of the word ? Not according to Paul as he thanks these Philippian believers "*for your fellowship in the gospel.* " (1)

(2) PAUL IS HOPEFUL ABOUT THEIR DISCIPLESHIP

Did you notice the conviction Paul has for them ? " *Being confident Christ.*" (1:6) Paul's abounding assurance in these believers is based on the evidence of grace in their lives. He knows that the "good work," was begun because of the good works it begat. "*From the first day,*" the grace of God was revealed in them and continued to show itself. (1:7 4:18) Do you notice the three reference points here ? " *The first day*" " *until now,*" and " *the day of Jesus Christ.*" You see, salvation is described here as the work of God from start to finish. Notice this work of salvation,

(a) HAS A COMMENCEMENT

" *The first day,* " " *He which hath begun*," The first day was the day that the Lord opened Lydia's heart to the Gospel. It was then that she had opened her home for the missionaries (Acts 16:14-15) In fact, she opened it so wide that it became the place of assembly for all the early converts at Philippi (16:40) My can you imagine the jailor sitting in the congregation and as he listened to these words how his heart would leap for joy at the recollection of that never to be forgotten night. "*He which hath begun*," It's God who begins the good work. It's God who takes the initiative in salvation. All of them had a first day. There was a day when God initiated that great work. There was a beginning day. Can you imagine Lydia saying ? " *I remember that day. It was the day I met Christ down by the riverside.*" That slave girl might have said, " *I remember that day, it 's that day that Paul cast the demons out of me in the name of Christ.*"

I can imagine that jailer saying, " *I remember the first day, it's that day I met Jesus Christ in the jailhouse.*" My have you had a beginning day ? Can you point to your beginning day ? That day when He " *begun a good work in you ?* " Can you say,

*I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking
me It was not I that found, O Saviour
true No, I was found of thee*

(b) HAS A CONTINUANCE:

Paul talks about their fellowship in the gospel from

" *the first day until now,*" he says, " *he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it*," (1:6) The word translated "*perform,*" (epiteleo) means " *to finish, to bring through to an end.* " (Lk 13:31-32) Handley Moule puts it like this " *will evermore put His finishing touches to it.* " What God began, He will persevere with, He will go on perfecting. Do you recall that on his second missionary journey Paul had reached the city of Thessalonica ? And this assembly had once and again sent gifts to him to further the work of the Gospel. "*For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.*" (4:16) And when they sent Epaphroditus to check on Paul in prison in Rome, Epaphroditus exhibited the spirit of the church from which he had come. He risked his very life for Paul as a demonstration that the fellowship " *in the gospel,*" had continued from the first day until " *now.* "

The story is told of a sculptor whose statue of a horse fascinated and caught the admiration of everyone. One day he was asked " *how do you take such an ugly piece of stone and make such a beautiful image of a horse ?* " His answer, " *I simply knocked away everything that did not look like a horse.*" My is this not what the Lord is doing with us ? He's knocking away everything from our lives that does not look like Christ. "*He's still working on me: to make me what I ought to be.*"

(c) HAS A CONSUMMATION:

Paul knew that this good work that God was doing in and through the Philippian believers would continue until still a third day " *the day of Jesus Christ,*" the

day when Christ would come and they would be caught away to stand before the Lord to give an account. You see by their continued support of Paul, these Christians were simply working out through their acts of love (2:12-13) what God had worked in through the gospel of His Son. My Gods work will not end until He has made us just like Jesus. Oh, we may fail along the way and indeed we often do, but He never does, and what He commences He will complete. The souls He saves He never forsakes. My are you fearful this ? Do you feel that you will never hold out or hold on ? Do you feel that you will be lost along the way ? Never ! For the God who begins the work of salvation, continues the work of salvation, and will complete the work of salvation. (1) (2)

(3) PAUL IS JOYFUL IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP

For Paul says "*Even as it is meet heart.*" (1:7) Not only had Paul these believers in his thoughts, in his prayers but in his heart. Look at,

(a) THE DEEP LOVE PAUL HAD FOR THEM:

For he says, "*I have you in my heart.*" (1:7)

1. Paul had these believers in his heart:

Why, to many of them he was a spiritual father, and so it was only right to that he carry his spiritual children in his heart. After the battle of Gettysburg a soldier was found dead upon the field of battle holding in his hand the picture of three small children. No clue to his name could be found. In the terror of battle he had comforted

himself with this picture. It was published and his children were found in the west side of New York. Here was a man who loved his family and who carried them in his heart. Do you love your family ? The family of God. My love is the evidence of salvation. John says, "*We know love the brethren.*" (1 Jn 3:14) "*I have you in my heart,*" This is better than having people on **our minds:** for our thoughts about them might be either sad or glad. This is better than having people on **our lips** to be constantly talking about them. This is better than having people on **our nerves:** though I have to confess than some believers are constantly trying. "*I have you in my heart,*" Tertullian, one of the early church fathers and leaders in (AD 192) wrote,

The heathen are wont to exclaim with wonder, see how these Christians love one another. They are more ready to die for one another, and the heathen are more ready to kill for one another. 1.

2. These believers had Paul in their hearts:

For the text here could allow for the alternative rendering, "*You have me on your heart.*" This church like no other had stood solidly with Paul. He says in (1:7) "*Insomuch grace.*" In other words, says Paul "*Whether in preaching defensively or aggressively, in apologetics or homiletics, I have an awareness that we are joint recipients of serving grace.*" (1 Cor 3:10) My this man never preached alone, but always as a man supported by a church that was united with him in every word he spoke. They had been one with him, for him and to him. C. H. Spurgeon

was asked on one occasion " *Mr Spurgeon, what is the secret of your success ?*" " *Oh,*" he said " *My people pray for me.* " Often pastors and preachers are off because of stress. Sometimes they bring problems upon themselves, at other times strife in the assembly is the cause of their stress, but my here is the relationship that ought to be fostered between pastor and people, elders and members, S.S. teachers and pupils, young and old. " *I have you in my heart,*" " *You have me on your heart.*"

All too often our love is nothing more than words. I think of the young fellow who called his girlfriend and said, " *Darling I love you. I'd climb the highest mountain for you, I'd swim the deepest river for you: I'd fight a jungle of lions for you, and if it doesn't rain, I'll be over to see you tonight.*" But my

*Love has eyes that see human needs
Love has ears that hear human needs
Love has feet that run to meet human needs
Love has hands that minister to human needs*

(b) THE DIVINE LOVE PAUL HAD FOR THEM:

For he says (1:8) "*Bowels,*" (*splanchna*) is used as a metaphor for one's deepest inner affections. My the deep love he expressed was because of the divine love he experienced. It was Christ's love in him that enabled him to, love so deeply. He loves them with a Calvary heart, a heart that expends its very life for the spiritual well-being of others. My do you have a Calvary heart ? Do you have a love that expends itself

in the service of eternity bound souls ? A heart of love instead of bitterness, a heart of tenderness instead of backbiting, a heart of compassion instead of callousness.

Dr John Fawcett was pastor of a small but very poor Baptist church at Wainsgate Yorkshire. His salary of £25-00 per year was difficult to live on. After a period of time he was invited to a large influential Baptist church in London. He accepted. He preached his last message, and when he was loading his belongings on to the transportation for removal to London, sorrowing members of his little church gathered around him and pleaded with him not to leave them. His wife was so overcome that she sat down and wept, " *Oh John,*" she said " *I cannot bear this.*" He said, " *We shall not go.*" His decision to remain with them was hailed with great joy. To commemorate the event John Fawcett wrote these words.

*Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above*

The first place I preached publicly was in a little hall in Aughlish, Scarva run by a man called Tommy Ryans. When he would meet me, he would always say, " *Whenever I think of your Father and Catherine's Mother I always have precious memories.*" " *Precious memories, how they linger.*" ***My do you have precious memories ? And what precious memories are you leaving to others ?***