

Place: Lurgan Baptist 2:11:2014

Reading: Philippians 1:1-11

## JOURNEY TO JOY

### 3. WHAT TO PRAY, FOR YOUR CHURCH

Two midgets dressed in the height of fashion boarded a street car in downtown Vancouver. They were hardly forty inches high, but their faces revealed at least 30 years of struggle for existence. As they found a seat, a hush of amazement came over the passengers. A young man who was sitting directly behind the little lady was so overcome that he turned to the person who was sitting next to him and blurted out in what was intended to be a subdued whisper, "*Dwarfs.*" The little lady quickly turned around and with a look of indignation snapped, "*Midgets, not dwarfs.*" Even a midget does not like to think that his life is dwarfed. No one likes anything that is stunted, we all want to see growth.

My .... this prayer of Paul's for the Philippian believers is **a prayer for growth**. These believers had made tremendous advance in their spiritual lives, but Paul shows that the Christian experience is not static, it cannot stand still. Constant growth must be made. Now the prayers of Paul that are given to us in the Bible are some of the high water marks in all of the Bible. You see, Paul, by his prayers, his written prayers, is opening up the door of his prayer closet and he is letting us walk in. That is a very sacred place, to walk

in where somebody else is praying. Here we see how Paul prays, what Paul prays for and why Paul prays. *I wonder what we would find if we visited your prayer closet ? Now you do have a prayer closet don't you ? I don't mean a literal closet necessarily. I mean your place of prayer might be a room in your house, it might be your car, perhaps your bedroom. But there is a place where you shut other things out and spend time in prayer with God. I wonder, what would we find if we visited your prayer closet ? Well I'll tell you what I believe we would find. We would find there either the secret of your success or the reason for your failure. I wonder, is your lack of joy, your lack of power, down to the fact that you have lost out in the place of prayer ?*

Now our prayers are largely confined to the temporal and material but Paul's prayers lift us to a much higher level. Here Paul shows us that the eternal is greater than the temporal and the spiritual than the material. Paul has been describing his fellowship with the saints. He says to them, "*I have you in my mind.*" ( 1:3 ) then he says, "*I have you in my heart.*" ( 1:7 ) Now he says, "*I have you in my prayers.*" ( 1:9 ) I mean do you ever hear any Christian praying like this for the local church ? Look at this prayer and notice,

#### (1) THE MAN AT PRAYER

Do you see how Paul begins ? "*And this I pray,*" ( 1:9 ) That shows us that, Paul is praying,

(a)**PERSONALLY:**

" *And this I pray,*" he's talking about something that is very personal to him. Now you've got to keep in mind the career of Paul and remember that Paul, before his conversion, was a Pharisee. ( 3:5 ) Do you remember that Christ told us about the prayer life of a Pharisee ? He said " *The Pharisee stood up and prayed thus with himself* " (Lk 18:11) You see, it was characteristic of the Pharisees to call attention to themselves as they lifted or said their prayers toward heaven. ( Matt 6:5 ) So Paul was known as a praying man because he was a Pharisee. Yet when Paul was converted on the road to Damascus do you recall that the Lord said to Ananias " *Arise and go into the street which is called Straight and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus for behold he prayeth.*" ( Acts 9:11 )

It's as if heaven for the first time is looking down at the life of this man who had said prayers and now says, " *Behold, he prayeth.*" My .... I wonder if heaven really says we pray ? I wonder if the things that you and I lift up as prayers to God are genuinely prayers unto the Lord ? I wonder if the Lord, when you and I kneel in our prayer closet, will really say, " *Behold, he prayeth.*" It is an intensely personal matter. Now of course people can pray for you but nobody can do your praying for you. Prayer is an intensely personal matter.

**(b)PURPOSEFULLY:**

" *For this I pray .....*" In other words he's saying, " *I am getting ready to make some specific requests in prayer.*" Prayer must get to the point if prayer is going

to be effective. ***You see, prayer in general hits nothing in particular.*** I mean if you just kind of pray around the world and you don't ever have anything definite and you don't ever come to the point then you don't ever really know if your prayers have amounted to much or not. My .... if God answered a prayer for you today would you know He had answered it ? Have you been specific with God in this matter of praying ? Do you recall Elijah ? " *He prayed earnestly that it might not rain and it rained not .... And he prayed again and the heaven gave rain and the earth brought forth her fruit.* " (Jam 5:17-18 ) You see, he was specific in his prayer. Do you specifically talk to the Lord about what's on your heart ? Do you get particular in your prayers ?

**(c) POWERFULLY:**

" *And this I pray .....*" what a picture this is. I mean here is Paul with chains on his hands, manacled to a Roman soldier 24/7, and he lifts those chained hands to God in prayer. I want to tell you, that Paul released more power than all of the Roman legions of that ancient empire. *It was like a fire bomb going off in that little jail cell there.* The prayers of Paul have had more power and have shaken this world more than all of the great power of the Roman Empire at that particular time. Listen, somewhere in Ulster this .... there is a wee woman with arthritis-aching hands, on a bedside rug somewhere, and she lifting those little arthritic hands to God in prayer. I want to tell you it has more power than all of the assembled influential people in this country combined. My .... when people pray

heaven notices, salvation miracles take place, and the work of God is energized with mighty power. Oh, how important prayer is. Someone has said that "*Satan laughs at our toiling, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.*" "*Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint on his knees.*" My .... that's why the devil will do everything in his power to keep you from praying. Now do you see (1) ?

## (2) THE MATTERS IN PRAYER

You know, it's interesting when you study these prayers of Paul to notice what he does pray for. For instance look at what he says. He says "*That your love,*" ( 1:9 ) "*That ye may approve,*" (1:10 ) "*That ye may be sincere,*" (1:10 ) What is Paul after ? He is praying that these Philippian believers,

### (a) **MIGHT BE FULL:**

Full of love. My .... love is the first and foremost of all Christian characteristics. Paul says, "*the fruit of the Spirit is love.*" ( Gal 5:22 ) He says "*And now abideth faith, hope, love but the greatest of these is love.*" ( 1 Cor 13:13 ) Do you recall the command the Lord Jesus gave to his disciples ere He went to Calvary ? "*Love one another, as I have loved you.*" ( Jn 13:34 ) But what do we mean by love ? What is Paul talking about here ? Scholars talk about agape love. What's that ? Well, is Biblical love ? Well, "*God is love.*" ( 1 Jn 4:8 ) **Love is that selfless quality that seeks the good of its object even at personal cost.** Christian love is an act of the will. **Christian love means we**

**treat each other the way God treats us.** ( Jn 3:16 ) When Paul uses the word "*abound,*" he is referring to the **extent** of their love. It needs to overflow ( *perisseuo* ) and when he uses the phrase "*more and more,*" he is referring to the **effect** of their love. He wanted them to learn how to love more people and love them all better. A little girl named Nan writes this letter. "*Dear Lord, I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in our family and I have trouble loving them.*" I wonder is that how you feel ? Or is your love abounding ? When I was growing up in Banbridge one of my favourite places to be was the River Bann. Not far from where we lived, there used to be what we called, "*The Falls,*" where the water would cascade over the falls into the river below.

My .... that's the picture that Paul is painting here. *Abounding love.* Oh, Paul had received ample proof of their love for him, but what about their love for each other ? What about their love for a whole world of lost sinners in Philippi ? You see, abounding love cannot be bound and yet it must be regulated, "*in knowledge and in all judgment,*" or as A.T. puts it "*A love that is full of knowledge and wise insight.*" Someone has described this as the banks that contain a rising river. Will we ever forget those scenes in England where rivers in village after village burst their banks and brought destruction and devastation ?

You see, Christian love is not to be blind. Now in ( 1 Cor 13 ) we have an example of *knowledge without love.* Paul says, "*And though I understand all*

*knowledge .... and have not love, I am nothing."* In ( Rom 10 ) we have an example of *love without knowledge*. Paul says concerning Israel, "*For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.* " (Rom 10:2 ) But here in ( Phil Ch 1) we have *love and knowledge*, the heart and the head working together so that we have *discerning love and loving discernment*. D.L. Moody said of Henry Drummond whose sharp mind impressed all who heard him speak, "*I have never known a man who lived nearer to His Master and who sought to do His will more fully*"

My .... that's heart and head working together in perfect harmony. Now some believers are *all heart, they are emotional*. Some are *all head, they are intellectual*, but the Biblical Christians develops emotionally, intellectually, and volitionally. He not only loves the Lord with all his heart, but with all his mind as well. ( Matt 22:37) So Paul is praying (a)

**(b) MIGHT BE FAITHFUL:**

Consistently reliable. He wants them to be faithful,

**1. In relation to Choices:**

The word "*approve*," here means "*discriminate, to test and set the seal of approval on one thing rather than on the other*" Now while it requires no keen insight to discriminate between what is good and what is bad, it's a different matter when we have to choose between what is good and what is best. Let me ask you

a question. Will you serve the Lord or will you not serve the Lord ? Why, you say the answer is simple, "*I will serve the Lord.*" Alright, let me ask you another question. *Will you serve the Lord at home or abroad ?* Now that's a little bit more difficult is it not ? Of course you can serve the Lord anywhere, but my .... you can serve Him best, only in one place, the place of His appointment. That's why you need to be discriminating, to choose between what is good and what is best. On his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday someone asked Herbert Welch the secret of his serene spirit. He replied, "*As I grow older, life becomes simpler, because I see the essentials more clearly in the evening light.*" In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a department store owner in Philadelphia by the name of John Wanamaker. Within a few years his business became one of the most successful businesses in the country.

He was also named Postmaster General of the United States. He also served as the Sunday School Superintendent of the Bethany Presbyterian Church, which at that time was the largest Sunday School in the world. He was once asked, how he could hold all the positions at once. he replied, "*Early in life I read, ' Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. ' The Sunday School is my business. All the rest are things.*" My .... what are choosing in life ? What is earthly or what is eternal ? What is trivial or what is essential ? What is good or what is best ? Paul wants them to be faithful in relation to choices.

**2. In relation to Character:**

"That ye may be sincere .... till the day of Christ." (1:10 ) Do you see that word "sincere?" It means "without wax," or "to be tested by the sunlight." Let me give you the background. In ancient times the biggest industry in the world was the pottery industry. And pottery varied in quality just as cars, and household goods vary today. The cheapest pottery was thick and solid and did not require much skill to make. But the finest pottery was thin. It had a clear colour and bought at a high price. Now fine pottery was very fragile both before and after firing. It was often the case that this pottery would crack in the oven. It should have been thrown out, but dishonest dealers were in the habit of filling the cracks with a wax that would blend in with the colour of the pottery. This meant that the cracks could not be detected in the shops.

But if you brought the pottery outside and help it up to the light of the sun, the cracks would show up darker. Honest dealers would often mark their products with the words, "without wax." This is what it means to be "sincere." As the poet put it,

**Be who you is  
Because if you is who you ain't  
You ain't who you is**

One day some fellows came to see Charles H. Spurgeon. They were trying to blackmail him. They walked into his office and threatened him saying if he didn't meet their demands they would publish things that would ruin his reputation. Do you know what he said? "Write all you know about me, across the

heavens I have nothing to hide." A life without wax. Dr. James Stalker preached one time on "**The Four Men.**" 1. The Man the world sees: 2. The Man our friends see: 3. The Man we ourselves see: The Man God sees: The same man, but only the last is the real man. My .... what does God see as He looks at that life of yours? Is it a life without wax? Is it free from pretence or hypocrisy? Are you actually as you appear? (1) (2)

### **3. In relation to Company:**

"Without offence till the day of Christ," or if you prefer "with a view to the Rapture." (1:10 1 Cor 10:32) You see, we are responsible down here and we are accountable over there. What are we responsible for? "To be without offence." Some translate the word "blameless." Paul is praying that these Philippian believers will so walk that they will leave no stumbling block in the way of others. My .... are you a stumbling block or a stepping stone in relation to others finding Christ? Have you never heard the world say, "I would not become a Christian because of so and so?" Now do you see what Paul is praying for? (a) (b)

### **(c) MIGHT BE FRUITFUL:**

"Being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ," (1:11) Do you recall what the Saviour says in (Jn Ch 15)? "I am the vine ye are the branches, he that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit for without me ye can do



nothing." (Jn 15:5 ) What He's saying is you just abide in the Lord Jesus, you stay in communion and in fellowship with Jesus Christ, and the natural outflow of your life will be the fruits of righteousness. Righteous thinking, righteous dealings, and righteous living. Certainly God wants the "*fruit of the Spirit*," Christian character that glorifies God. ( Gal 5:22 ) Paul compares winning lost souls to Christ to bearing fruit. ( Rom 1:13 ) He names holiness as a spiritual fruit. ( Rom 6:22 ) He exhorts us to be fruitful in every good work ( Col 1:10 ) and that includes the sacrifice of praise which is the fruit of our lives. ( Heb 13:15 )

My .... why has God chosen you ? Why has Christ redeemed you ? Why does the Holy Spirit indwell you ? " *To bring forth fruit.*" (Jn 15:16 ) My .... the Lord is not interested simply in our round of " *church activities*," but in the kind of spiritual fruit that is produced when we " *abide in Christ.* " (Jn 15:4 )

When Lawrence of Arabia was in Paris after World War I with some of his Arab friends, he took some time to show them the sights of the city, the Arch of Triumph, Napoleon's tomb etc.; but they found little of interest in these things. ***The thing that really interested them was the tap in the bath of their hotel room.*** They spent much time there turning it on and off, they thought it was wonderful. All they had to do was turn the tap, and they could get all the water they wanted. Sometime later when they were ready to leave Paris and return to the East, Lawrence found them in the bathroom with wrenches trying to detach the taps. You see, they said " ***it is very dry in Arabia. What we***

***need are taps. If we have them, we will have all the water we want.***" Lawrence had to explain that the effectiveness of the taps did not lie in themselves, but in the immense system of water works to which they were attached. And he had to point out that behind this lay the rain and the snowfall on the Alps. My .... is your Christian life as dry as the deserts of Arabia ? Oh, you have the taps, the machinery, but there is no connection to the pipeline. Perhaps you're barren for another reason, could it be that impurities have choked the line ? That you are not living in fellowship with Christ, that you are not abiding in Him ? Oh, Paul is praying for these believers that they might be full, faithful and fruitful. Can you see here, (1) (2) and finally,

### **(3)THE MOTIVE FOR PRAYER**

" *Unto the glory and praise of God,* " (1:11 ) Is this not the goal in prayer ? The motive for prayer ? Here it is. " *Unto the glory and praise of God.* " Is this not what prayer is all about ? The whole purpose of prayer, is that we become full, faithful and fruitful Christians that God might get the glory, that He might get the praise.

#### **(a) THAT GOD MIGHT GET THE ATTENTION:**

Is this not what this word "*glory,* " is all about ? When it says unto the "*glory of God,*" that means that God might get the honor, God might get the credit. Do you recall what the Lord Jesus said ? " *Let your light so*

*shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."*

( Matt 5:16) My .... if you live for the Lord and if you're the kind of Christian He wants you to be God will get the credit. A sweet, beautiful Christian life brings great honour to God just like a sweet, young person bring great honour to his parents. So if you live a full life, a faithful life and a fruitful life, God gets the credit. By the way, if we don't live the life we ought to live He gets the blame. So Paul is saying " *I am just praying that God will get the glory in your life, attention.*" Then he says " *Unto the praise of God.*" You see, he is praying that God will not only get the attention. He is praying,

***(b) THAT GOD MIGHT GET THE ADORATION:***

That He might get the praise. You know, praise and prayer really go together, these two commodities tie together. *For instance, praise without prayer is presumption, prayer without praise is ingratitude, but prayer and praise are mighty unto the honour and the glory and the praise of God.* My .... is this not what our lives ought to be like ? Is this not what we ought to be praying for our fellow believers ? Is this not what we ought to be praying for our church fellowship ? Paul is not merely coming before the Lord and praying " *Lord will you bless the saints at Philippi.* " He knows that there are a few undercurrents in the fellowship and so he is praying for abounding love, for discerning wisdom, and for fruitful lives. For such living will glorify the Lord.

Dr. Jerry Vines tells the story of a very talented, gifted organist whose mother died. This lady was a sweet, wonderful Christian, whose life brought great praise and honour and glory to God. Her son played the organ during her funeral service and he just put all of the love and all of the appreciation he had for his dear Christian mother in all of the music he played at her funeral service. When the service was completed and her coffin was being carried out of the building suddenly he burst into playing the magnificent strain's of the " **Hallelujah Chorus.**"

Do you know something ? You and I ought to so live that when it is all over it can truly be said, "*His life was to " the glory and praise of God.*" That when they are carrying our coffin down the church aisle the testimony will arise " **To God be the glory, great things He has done.**"