

**Sermon**  
**17<sup>th</sup> Dec 2017**

**Phil 1:3-14**

**“I thank God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**

**It is right for me to feel this way about all of you since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.**

**And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.**

**Now I want you to know brothers that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.”**

**This Scripture is one that I have come to empathise with more and more as my ministry has developed over the last twenty five years and more particularly over the last twelve since I have been the full time minister here at NCF. I do pray regularly for all of you, I do have a joy in my Spirit as I think of you, and we will be hearing more about joy this evening. And I certainly, with the help of John now, and all the other excellent speakers we have week by week pray that you will grow in your knowledge and relationship with Christ.**

**I am not so keen on the last part! But even so, I can look back on my life and see times of trouble when I, and Lynne have had to draw really close to God for His guidance, peace and love, and through that had opportunity to share our faith with others over the years.**

**So this passage is very close to my heart and I want to share briefly this morning three points:**

**Three points:**

**1. Thank God for you the congregation of NCF whether you are here for the first time or have been coming since its inception – Lynne and I do regularly. Without your prayers, love and support we would have failed long ago.**

**2. He who began a good work...**

**God is faithful & trustworthy  
If He says He will He will**

**3. Whatever your circumstances God can use you.**

**We cannot always be on the mountain top.  
We are told in the Bible that because Christ suffered  
We must expect to share in his suffering as brothers and sisters in Christ.**

**We chose to join so cannot blame God!**

**He will sustain us and NEVER place a burden on us greater than we can bear.**

**Because we are co-heirs with Christ – what a fantastic thought, we are adopted Sons and daughters of the living God- but because we are co –heirs we will share in His inheritance- eternal life in heaven praising God with a brand new body, no pain, no suffering, no tears.**

**Revelation tells us that there is no sun in heaven because the radiant light of the Lord illuminates heaven. It must be a place way beyond our greatest imaginings.**

**But, as Paul clearly shows us here we need to use the opportunities God gives us to draw others to Him so that they can enjoy the joys of eternal life and heaven as well. We see that although Paul was in prison and in chains; did he sulk with God and say “Why me?”; no he used the opportunity to evangelise the palace guard. Note it doesn’t tell us they all became Christians. That wasn’t Paul’s job then and isn’t ours now. Our job as Paul’s was to make people aware of the Good News of Christ and salvation through faith. The Holy Spirit then gives opportunity for them to accept or reject.**

**Also note the final sentence. As Paul spoke out even chained and suffering in prison, it encouraged his brothers (and sisters) in Christ to become bolder in their speaking out the word of God.**

So we have a choice when we are in not so good circumstances, whatever they may be, we can sit and sulk with God and give up on Him, or we can accept the opportunities presented through those circumstances to make Christ known. Not only will we feel better and blessed by God as we do so but we will also encourage our Christian brothers and sisters around us as we do so. As I'm in a bit of a reflective mood I think of Iris and Odette, two ladies who were in our fellowship for a time before their home calls to God. Both had some pretty trying times in their lives but did they dwell on them and sulk? Well if we're honest, probably for a while, but God wasn't finished with them although they were both in their 80's and those of you that knew them will I agree I'm sure when I say they were both an inspiration and a blessing to us as a church as they reflected Christ in their lives to those around them and took every opportunity to proclaim God's gospel to those who did not know it.

So to summarise:

God encourages to join together for a reason; to love, pray for and encourage one another in our faith and our relationship with God. As we do that our love for each other in Christ will grow and God will be able to use us better as a church to bring about His plans and purposes for as we're told in Psalm 133: **“ How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity.....for there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life forevermore”**

My prayer is that the unity of NCF as a fellowship will grow and multiply.

**“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”**

God doesn't do things by half measures. When you give your life to Him, He starts to work on your relationship with Him from day one. If you continue to be willing to submit to His Kingship then He will continue building you up until Jesus returns or you are called home to glory. That's His promise and God doesn't break His promises.

God can and will use you in whatever circumstances you are in, you only have to look at some of the people in the Bible and the circumstances they were in, some I'm sure far worse than any you've been in, Paul himself was one of the most zealous of the people who were persecuting the Christian church and its people and had the power and authority to inflict pain and suffering on them and yet God chose to use him. So don't let your circumstances dictate how you work for God. Rather look to God to lead and equip you to serve Him despite your circumstances and your rewards will be in heaven.

One of God's greatest promises if we submit to Him is found in 1 Corinthians 10:13

**“And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.  
BUT when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up  
under it.”**

**As the hymn writer says:  
God will make a way where there seems to be no way  
He works in ways we cannot see  
He will make a way .**

**As we celebrate the birth of Christ this year let’s think about who Christ really is  
and the amazing things that He has done, does now, and will do for us in the future,  
both as individuals, as a church as a nation and as a world. A world that He created  
and rules over still despite all the attempts mankind has made to destroy it.**

**AMEN**