

Think On These Things

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We are going to begin today's sermon with what I had originally intended to be the anchor scriptures for this message. And I would like you to place a marker in the book of Philippians because we will be going back there throughout the sermon. But please turn with me first to Philippians 4 and we will start in verse 8.

Philippians 4:8-9 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Please go back to the chapter of Philippians 3 and following Paul's remarks of his pedigree and all those things that physically qualified him to be a righteous teacher and leader physically. We will start in verse 7. Paul said,

Philippians 3:7-16 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, and the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that which Christ Jesus has also laid

hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

Now I would like to read those same verses from the New Living Translation because I think it may add a little bit of emphasis to what an emotionally charged plea the apostle Paul is actually making to a group of people he was especially fond of.

Philippians 3:7-16 (NLT) I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared to the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.

I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.

I found it very interesting that Martin spent such a good deal of time during his last sermon in Philippians because this sermon had been on my mind since shortly before the Feast. It most certainly became larger in my mind during the Feast, as so many were in the midst of difficulties. And it had become even more the focus of study and meditation over the last four to six weeks as the sufferings of God's people have increased at a rate I have never seen.

Of all the many epistles the apostle Paul wrote, in my personal opinion, after thinking on and praying about everything that is in here over the last couple of months as we have all been going through this particular period of trials within scattered churches of God, this particular book may contain some of the most valuable direction pertinent to the end time church in the midst of almost unprecedented personal trials across the scattered churches of God.

This may be quite a presumptuous piece of speculation on my part, but as I have considered the words of the apostle Paul in this book over this difficult period of time within all the churches of God, I think Jesus Christ's tender love and care for His church and the unity that can only come through Him, shouts out from this tenderhearted letter to those who are deeply committed to Him and the work of the Body of Christ and the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

My initial intention when I began to prepare this sermon before the Feast of Tabernacles this year, was to stay completely focused on those verses we read a few minutes ago. However, as the individual suffering of God's people grew and grew from before the Feast, through the Feast, and to this day, even to the point of death for some across all the scattered churches of God, the whole book of Philippians began to come alive to me with a single most important key to unity within the Body of Christ, no matter where we are, our very personal intimate relationship with Jesus Christ that transcends any trial as we become one with Him in suffering.

As the apostle Paul proclaims in Philippians 4:13, as he himself anticipates his soon-ending lifetime of personal growth in an intimate relationship with Him, with Jesus Christ, he writes, "I can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens me."

Brethren, please hang on to that throughout this sermon because God has begun to do something within the churches of God through the suffering we seem to share that I believe is the very beginning of the real unity before God's throne through Jesus Christ, if we keep our focus on the only source of that unity with an earnest desire together to be just like Him.

Perhaps we have only begun to experience what lies ahead. But over the last couple of months, God has been driving us together through the suffering we have all shared. And to me it is becoming more obvious by the day that if we are to be one with Jesus Christ, we must—we must—suffer as He suffered.

I would like us to turn to a scripture that is not directly speaking of suffering from disease and sickness, but from learning to live like Christ by suffering at the hands of others for holding on to the truth of His Word. However, I would like you to consider this just from the point of the unity in Jesus Christ that can only come when we suffer together with Him, no matter what is the source of our suffering, if it leads to unity, if we keep our focus on Him.

I Peter 2:21-25 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseers of your souls.

Here, within Peter's exhortation to God's elect to learn to suffer as Christ suffered, even at the hands of the unjust and the unrighteous, he quotes Isaiah 53 (which we will get to in a minute). But first I want to give you a quote that John Ritenbaugh said in the sermon on "Justice and Grace" regarding I Peter 2:24-25 that I would like you just to keep in the back of your mind as we continue through this sermon. John said,

The most brutal example of divine justice is found in the New Testament, not the Old. We see the most violent expression of

God's wrath and justice in the crucifixion of His own Son. If anybody had room to complain that He was not being treated fairly, it was Jesus Christ, who was not guilty of even one sin. He was the only innocent person who ever lived, yet He suffered a horrible, cruel death. If we were to become upset or offended at something that seems to be unjust, this would be it.

Now please turn with me to the verses that Peter cited in Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53:4-6 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

There are two points I would like us to consider here, both of which I think are critical to this message. Both were not included directly by Peter when he quoted the scripture, even though they were implied. The first is in Isaiah 53: 5 where it says, "The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."

In his commentary on this verse, Adam Clarke writes, "The chastisement of our peace, the chastisement by which our peace is affected: 21 manuscripts and six editions have the word fully and regularly expressed [??] in Latin, which means 'our pacification.'" Clarke says, "that by which we are brought into a state of peace and favor with God."

The second point I want to make is in Isaiah 53:6 where it says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Although Peter does not mention directly the state of peace and favor, nor that every man had turned to his own way, it is clearly implied. The state of peace and favor with God can only be restored when one is dead to sin and living, as Clyde [Finklea] said, in true righteousness through Jesus Christ, returning to the Shepherd and Guardian of our lives. It is only through the

suffering of Jesus Christ and our own willingness to do the same, are we restored to the state of peace and favor with God, and no longer walking each His own way, but through an intimate unity with Jesus Christ and learning to suffer as He suffered, do we begin walking as one united body in the same direction, toward our ultimate goal of single-minded unity in the Family of God for eternity.

Perhaps the recent suffering that so many of God's elect, scattered across the churches of God, has been a very significant reminder by our Great God of the unity that we can only have through Jesus Christ, as He prepares us to suffer as He suffered in the days that lay ahead.

Although I do not think most of us have considered the recent suffering and deaths we have endured as unfair, they certainly have given us all pause to reflect on what God is trying to get through to us personally, and as part of the whole body of Christ.

At this point, I would like to give a bit of background regarding the church at Philippi and the apostle Paul's tender relationship with those members of the body of Christ in that city. Within the circumstances and this relationship, it may help us to understand why I think this letter may be an important key for us today in understanding what God is trying to get through to us within our own circumstances that seem to be a prelude to what is ahead.

Most of the commentators agree this letter to the Philippians, along with Paul's letter to Philemon regarding the slave Onesimus (that Richard spoke about in the sermon last week), are Paul's most intimate and personal letters. Both Philippians and Philemon are very personal appeals to learn to live in unity through a growing sacrificial relationship with Jesus Christ, walking as He walked. The only way to real unity within the Body is through Jesus Christ and zealously living following in His footsteps as a single sacrificial offering with eyes focused on what is ahead and not what is behind.

I am going to quote a description of Philippi at the time of Paul directly from the *NIV Study Bible*, because it is a fairly distinct description of Philippi's history and current condition during Paul's day. Agreeing for the most part

with all the much longer accounts that I researched under the heading of "Philippi in the time of Paul," the NIV's Study Bible has the following description.

The Roman colony at Philippi was an important city in Macedonia, located on the main highway leading from the eastern provinces to Rome. This road, the Ignacia, bisected the city's forum and was the chief cause of its prosperity and political importance. Ten miles distant on the coast was Neapolis, the place where Paul landed after sailing from Troas in response to the Macedonian vision. As a prominent city of the gold producing region of Macedonia, Philippi had a proud history. Named originally for Philip the Second, the father of Alexander the Great, the city was honored later with the name of Julius Caesar and Augustus. Many Italian settlers from the legion swelled the ranks of the city and made Philippi vigorous and polyglot.

Let me add here that we might say it was quite cosmopolitan. Bustling with people who were fluent in many languages and from many different cultures and backgrounds. The NIV continues,

It grew from a small settlement to a city of dignity and privilege. Among its highest honors was it was the *Italicum*[?] by which it enjoyed rights legally equivalent to those of Italian cities.

I would like to add something here in an explanation of just what the *Italicum* [?] meant in order to help us understand. Not only that those called into the church at Philippi represented a broad range from different backgrounds, but the privilege they enjoyed that could be a very strong pull back into this world. Here again, is a piece that gives us a pretty good but succinct picture of the physical privilege that could be as distracting as the privilege we have enjoyed all these years within God's blessings in the Israelitish nations that can often distract us from our true focus and the ultimate goal as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

This is a description of what the *Italicous*[?] meant at the time of Paul and when he was dealing with the church at Philippi that had been called out of this world. It is from Wikipedia.

Iatolicum[?] is Latin for the Italian law. It was a law in the early Roman Empire that allowed the emperors to grant cities outside of Italy the legal fiction [remember that word, legal fiction. They were not really on Roman territory, but according to the Roman emperors, they were as good as there.] According to that fiction, they were on Italian soil. This meant that the city would be governed under Roman law rather than local law, would have a greater degree of autonomy in their relations with provincial governors, and that people born in the city automatically gained Roman citizenship. As Roman citizens, people were able to buy and sell property, were exempt from land tax and the poll tax, and were entitled to protection under Roman law. Iatolicum[?] was the highest liberty a municipality or province could obtain and was considered very favorable.

The NIV study Bible on the description of Philippi then continues:

The ruins of the theater, the acropolis, the Forum, the baths, and the western commemorative arch mentioned as the gate of the city, have been found. A little farther behind the arch at the Ganges River is the place where Paul addressed some God-fearing women and where Lydia was converted.

Brethren, I want us to see that the Philippian church was made up of God's elect that were called out of a society that was similar to our own. The Body of Christ at Philippi was chosen by God to be in unity and focus on what lay ahead rather than a multitude of cultural differences from which they were called in the privileged, prosperous physical lifestyle that most of them have enjoyed.

Though not exactly the same, we too have been brought together by God through a variety of cultural, political, and diverse backgrounds to be of one mind within the Body of Christ. We also, in spite of what may be considered meager circumstances within the nations of Israel, are in circumstances of more privilege and prosperity than have been the lot of most of the world. These same circumstances, the cultural differences that drove human opinions, and of physical privilege and prosperity, were the issues

underlying Paul's tenderhearted letter to those just like us who had been devoted to supporting their leadership but were letting the world creep into their relationship with Jesus Christ and one another.

So with all this in mind, as well as one other point that I want to add here, it is not in my notes, I mentioned in the Iatalicum[?], they were given the fiction of being on Italian soil. Hold on to that because the fiction means they were not really there literally, but they were as good as being on Italian soil. Keep that in your mind as we go through this sermon because we have been given, not the fiction, but the reality that our citizenship is in the Kingdom of God.

So with this in mind, I would like us to take a look at a few of the major points that Paul is making to bring those who were so dear to Him into unity and a more sincere effort to keep their focus on the only source of that unity, and the all-out effort to keep focused on the goal. To me, giving us a clear picture of what Jesus Christ was trying to get across to the beloved members of the church of Philippi through the apostle Paul and by extension to us, living within very similar circumstances, has been quite difficult to prepare within this sermon. But I sincerely believe we need this message right now, in whatever way God wants it to be said, so that we realize in this time of trials and testing, His beloved elect can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens us together as we face the more difficult road ahead.

With that in mind, we are going to do a very limited overview of Philippians, but with our main focus on Philippians 1 and on Acts 16. (So if you have another marker, you might want to put it in Acts 16 because we will be flipping back there.) Acts 16 is Paul's first journey into Macedonia and specifically to the city of Philippi. It is the time of the God-directed founding of the church there in about 52 AD. Between then and this letter to the Philippian church in about 62 AD, most of the commentators agree that the book of Acts gives indications that, in the intervening years, Paul had made two other trips to these beloved brethren. And though now in prison in Rome, he expresses his desire that God would give him another opportunity to come to them.

However, in the meantime, he had been alerted that although this beloved group was still united in outgoing concern for others and particularly for

taking care of his needs like no other church of God had done, there was interpersonal disunity within their God-given positions that was breaking their bonds of peace with God.

We will now be turning to Paul's very succinct analysis of the problem and its ultimate effect and the solution to the issue of our focus is right, a focus and solution that runs throughout the whole book.

Philippians 3:17-21 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship [our real citizenship] is in the heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able to even subdue all things to Himself.

Philippians 4:1-7 Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved. I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

In verses 17 through 19, Paul shows us what the problem is going to do if we let carnal nature continue to be the driving force in our lives. It is going to send us away into destruction. In verses 20 through 21, Paul shows us what is the reality that needs to be our focus through Jesus Christ. And in chapter 4, verses 1 through 3, Paul shows us, he pleads to the beloved brethren, to

stand fast, and the reality is absolutely theirs if their focus on their first love remains what it is and not jockeying for position. And in chapter 4, verses 4 through 7, he then focuses on rejoicing in the Lord who gives us the unity we seek through thankful petitions for the careful work God has done to put together the Body of Christ through Jesus.

The problem then was typical of the problems we could very well face now within the beloved members of the Body of Christ and is good for us to consider, especially during these times of unrest that is all around us, when everyone in the nations has an opinion. Lockyer, in his book on *All the Women of the Bible*, speculates on the problem here in his commentary on Euodia and Syntyche. He said,

These two women both may have been among the women resorted to prayer at the river's bank found in Act 16:13-15 and among the honorable women who believe (Acts 17:12). Scripture is silent on the genealogy and family association of these two women who, after their conversion, became co-laborers with Paul in the gospel. Belonging to a class bespeaking prosperity, they doubtless ministered unto Paul from their substance.

At Philippi the women were the first hearers of the gospel and Lydia the first convert. If these women were also brought to the Lord at the river, they naturally took a leading part in teaching the gospel to other women in a private sphere of labor once the church had been formed. When Paul exhorted these two prominent workers to be of the same mind in the Lord, he implied that they had been previously at variance. What caused the breach between these two deaconesses in the Philippians church, we are not told. Perhaps one had a more dominant personality than the other and received more attention. Whatever the dispute was, it became serious and hindered the work of the Lord. So Paul besought the two women to give up their differences and live at peace in the Lord.

The lack of harmony between these two women disturbed the Apostle, so he urged reconciliation. Those professing to be redeemed, their whole life should be lived in peace and in an

endeavor to please him would save them. It is sad that there was a difference of opinion and more tragic still that divisions have still kept Christians apart down the ages. How can two walk together, he said, except they be agreed is an old adage we have lost sight of. We like to believe that Paul did not plead in vain and that these two women were completely reconciled and went on unitedly to serve the God of peace.

One more piece of information that we need here, brethren, is Lydia. Though she is not mentioned in the letter of the Philippians, she played a very significant role in God's forming of the church at Philippi. (We will get back to that in a moment.)

My speculation here is that Paul's plea to help these women resolve their conflict could very well have been a direct plea to Lydia, who, as we will see in a moment in Acts 16, seems to have been a Proverbs 31 woman, diligent in her work at hand and devoted to God, using the profits from her work in hospitality those who preach the gospel and those who were following the truth of God's Word. She also had been courageously unashamed to welcome those who were being persecuted and treated with contempt by the world into her home when others would have avoided the world's guilt by association stigma. Acts 16 presents her as a true servant in Jesus Christ and most certainly someone Paul would have turned to for help to faithfully bring younger women back into this proper service before God, according to the instructions like Paul had given to the older women in faith, as recorded in Titus 2:1-5.

With this background, please go back a few chapters there in Philippians to Paul's introductory comments to this beloved group of people as written in Philippians 1. And I think we will find in the first two verses Paul's very first hint at the solution to the problem.

Philippians 1:1-2 Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, please and turn him back a few pages to Ephesians 4. In my Bible, under Ephesians 4 the top of the heading is Walk in Unity.

Ephesians 1:1-16 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord [remember this is Paul in his letter to the Ephesians], beseech you to walk worthy of the calling which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and He gave gifts to men." (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that he also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

As Herbert Lockyer speculates, the problem within the beloved and converted brethren at the Philippian church stemmed from where people might have thought they stood in the pecking order. Paul's opening paragraph points directly to Ephesians 1 and the fact that all the saints who

had been called out of this world are slaves to Jesus Christ, just as Paul and Timothy. We are all set within the Body of Christ according to God's direction. There should not be any notion of carnal-minded who vie for political position. God has placed everyone within the Body as it pleases Him and we must walk in the faith that God has set the church exactly in the order that He knows will produce the most unity in faith, the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and the unbreakable bond through the peace of God.

Paul then goes on to remind the Philippian church of the great affection he has for them. From the first time they became his dedicated coworkers in preaching the gospel, or reminding them in verse 6 that they needed to be confident that they are the work of God in progress, and God will finish the work He has begun in them.

In verses 8 through 11, he tells them that as God is his witness, his affection for them is with the same affection and concern as Jesus Christ, who offered Himself for all of us so that we could abound in righteousness through Jesus Christ, in sincerity, without offense for the glory of God.

Philippians 2:12-18 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

Joy and rejoicing are mentioned 16 times in this short letter to the Philippians and always in the context of service, sacrifice, and suffering in unity with Jesus Christ and one another.

Now back in chapter 1, verses 12 through 28, that we will be reading again in a few minutes. But let me explain. Although he seems to be talking in these verses, 12 through 28, about his own situation in captivity in Rome, he is also very clearly reminding them of their first love in the beginning and how the gospel of the Kingdom of God was witnessed to them through rejoicing in suffering as Christ suffered.

Please turn with me back to the book of Acts, chapter 16. This is the account of Paul's initial preaching of the gospel in Philippi that was done through a powerful witness to them, to the original church when it was founded, of joyfully suffering wrongfully as Christ suffered and what is produced for the glory of God. In Acts 16, we will pick it up after the account of how he (Paul) added Timothy to his fellowship in his work and how God through a vision sent him to Macedonia and specifically to Philippi. We will be picking it up in verse 11. And as I said before, with Lydia's prominent place in the founding of the church in Philippi.

Acts 16:11-15 Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course for Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now, a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

We see here not only that Lydia was of the same ilk as the Proverbs 31 woman, she was industrious, successful in business, but also apparently of a mind from God to listen, hear, and act on the truth of the word as Paul spoke it. Again from Herbert Lockyer. He writes,

While it is not certain whether Lydia was of Jewish descent, it is evident that she was a Jewish proselyte. She worshiped God. We are told often business people are so engrossed in their affairs that they have no time for religion. But Lydia, in spite of her secular obligations, found time to worship according to Jewish faith.

A little bit further down, Lockyer writes,

Lydia's transformation of life was evidenced by her eagerness to give the missionaries the hospitality of her fine home. Truth in her heart was manifested in kindness to each each other as they ought to be. Be you kind to one another. First came Lydia's faith, then the winning of her servants to Christ, then her love and gracious hospitality, and finally her reception of Paul and Silas into her home after their discharge from prison, bruised and battered though they were. She was not ashamed of the Lord's prisoners. [And he cites I Timothy 5:10, Hebrews 13:2, and I Peter 4:9] While benefiting from Lydia's generous hospitality, Paul warned all present of the terrible trials before them. And then parting from godly Lydia, praised God for all she had meant to him and his companions.

Although this is speculative, perhaps you can see why I said when Paul addresses someone in Philippi in Philippians 4:3 as his true companion that needed to help these women in overcoming their personal conflict, to live in righteousness that is in Jesus Christ, he was most likely writing a very personal appeal to Lydia.

I spent a good deal of time here because I wanted us to see when God presents us with an opportunity to help each other along the way, we need to do it. Not as nosy busybodies but with eyes focused on Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in sacrificial service to one another, just as Paul knew Lydia was ready to do under his direction.

Let us continue to read Acts 16 before we go back to Philippians 1, where I hope we will see that in Philippians Paul has reminded the Philippians of

how they themselves had been called. It was through the living example of wrongful persecution and suffering as Christ suffered in submission to the will of God with joy. This is what binds the elect of Jesus Christ and one another into a united body, faithful to being a living witness of lives focused together on living as Christ lives.

Acts 16:16-40 Now it happened as we went [remember this is when Paul was sent there to found the church 52 AD] to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with the spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.

But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, the jailer put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly it was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awakened from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called out with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are here." Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.

And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household. Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them in the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household. And when it was day, the magistrate sent the officer saying, "Let those men go." So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace."

But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out." And the officer told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard they were Romans. Then they came, pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city. So they went out of the prison and [Paul and Silas, rather than going out of the prison, they went out of the prison] entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

By this demon possessed girl that we saw in 16 through 24—a demon possessed soothsayer there for hire—she was proclaiming a truth. Paul clearly discerned that there was a potential for this demon to impugn the whole truth of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. So by the power of Jesus Christ, he stopped it and that, of course, brought down the wrath of the carnally minded in Satan. And this in turn brought persecution and suffering.

But as we see in the rest of the chapter, it is through this very suffering with joy and submission to God's will, knowing that they were partaking in the very suffering of Jesus Christ, that the gospel was upheld and preached. And by this, God's elect, or converted, of living as He lives.

Now please turn with me back to Philippians 1, verses 12 through 30. I am going to be reading this out of the NIV because I think the translation here more clearly shows that Paul was reminding the Philippians not just of his own problems that they were witnessing at the time, but in their calling that they had witnessed that preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and unity can only come through Jesus Christ in suffering as He suffered.

Philippians 1:12-30 (NIV) Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. [Remember keep in mind he is talking about his own imprisonment where he was in Rome. But keep in mind, too, he was reminding them of how their conversion happened.] As a result, it became clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have been become confident in the lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here in the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this, I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance, I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or death.

For to me, to live as Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what I shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I

know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me. Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw that I had, and now have again.

Brethren, the book of Philippians is for us today a very important piece of work. It is a book that is filled with the zeal and joy of peace with the Father and unity with the Son that can only come through the self-sacrificial love that we were called to from the beginning of our calling as the elect of God. That love will often manifest itself in suffering as Christ suffered, but together and sincerely submitting to each other, putting behind those things that are behind as the carnal minded and putting on Jesus Christ in all aspects of our lives.

When we began this sermon, I told you my intention had been to really focus on Philippians 4:8-9 and thinking on these things. However, it ended up, because of the widespread suffering within the scattered churches of God that we have participated in together even unto death over the last year, and especially over the last two months, this whole book, to me, turned into a beacon of hope as we become more unified with Jesus Christ and one another in our trials. This is the only way to be one unified body and we need to understand this and thank God as He brings us all together to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ through sharing His trials with Him.

But as we head to the end of the sermon, we need to take a quick look at the rich advice that God gives us through the apostle Paul and how we can truly be united as one body.

Philippians 4:4-9 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

As we face the trials that continue, we must have gentleness. It is evident to all men because we know Jesus Christ is not only near at hand, but He is actually dwelling in us. And as Christ said, we are alive! Even in our darkest trials, we are to be anxious for nothing. Anxious for nothing here actually means "do not seek to promote self-interest, but look to God for the answers with thanksgiving." Just as we have been doing over these past months, as we try to see what is pleasing to God with our minds off of ourselves. This is the key to peace with God through Jesus Christ.

But it does not end there. This is only the door that opens up the ability to think on these things. To think on what is really true as opposed to false, what is in line with every part of God's creation. What is noble, honorable, venerable, awe-inspiring. This word indicates being able to consider things from the viewpoint of one whose citizenship is already in the Kingdom of God with the great reverence for God in His work with God's perspective. What is just, carefully considering always what is holy and righteous. The laws of God that ensure innocence in the actions of those who conform to God in His way of life. Think on how to keep God's laws as they conform to His intent. Think what is pure, what is free from any impurities and totally blameless as Jesus Christ who fills all these things.

Think on what is lovely. It literally means "friendly towards" and it indicates to think on what is it that makes the people within the body of Christ beloved

[?]. Practically, it means to think on those things that drew us together, not with the things that pull us apart. Think on what is of good report means "always looking for those things in each other that are good."

Finally, God tells us through the apostle Paul to meditate on what is of virtue and praiseworthy. This perhaps is one of the most important things to do as we face the suffering to come together in a world that hates God, and by extension, His people. Virtue here indicates courage, fortitude, resolution, moral excellence, and valor. The word is only used here here and in two other places: in I Peter 2:9 and II Peter 1:1-3.

I Peter 1:3-10 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesized of the grace that would come to you.

I Peter 2:4-10 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."

Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

II Peter 1:1-10 To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.

His courage, His resolve, His moral excellence, and His valor that He desires to share with us are ours to be one unified body as we face the trials today and the trials ahead. It is only by learning to suffer as He suffered, with joy and rejoicing in His moral excellence and courage and within our very

carefully chosen places within the Body of Christ, that we can be a true witness of the gospel of the Kingdom of God in unity.

Therefore, brethren, we must do as the apostle Paul said. Rejoice! I say rejoice, because as one united body in Jesus Christ, we can and will do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens us, for the preaching of the good news of the Kingdom of God to all who will come after us. He who has begun a good work in us will finish what He has started.