

Phil 1:1-11  
Confident in Christ  
*Tim Anderson 18/6/17*

Are you confident in your faith?  
If I asked you to rate on a scale from 0-10  
how sure you are that you would go to heaven if you died tonight,  
what number would you give yourself?

For much of history Christian people haven't been too sure.  
It was thought impious to be overconfident.  
Some people wait years between putting the faith in Jesus  
and experiencing that inner assurance that 'Yes' they are saved.  
The great English evangelist and founder of the Methodist movement,  
John Wesley, had to wait years after his conversion  
before he had what he called his Aldersgate experience,  
(Aldersgate was the place where it happened to him)  
At Aldersgate, he was given an experience of God's love  
that convinced him that he could be certain of his salvation.  
But should it be that way?  
Can we be confident right from day one?

We begin a new sermon series today in Paul's letter to the Philippians.  
And our passage today gives us confidence in Christ.

Who were the Philippians?  
Well Philippi was a city in modern day Greece.  
Paul visited it in Acts 16.  
He was in modern day Turkey  
and God sent him a vision of a Macedonian man.  
The man was begging,  
"Come over here and help us."  
So Paul got into a boat and sailed to Macedonia.  
And he headed up from Neapolis the sea port  
to Philippi the main city.  
Now Paul's usual practice when he went to a new city,

was to head to the synagogue and preach the gospel to the Jews.  
But Philippi was a Roman colony.  
That means more than just it was part of the Roman empire,  
the citizens of Philippi were Roman citizens  
as if they had been born in Rome.  
And because of this there were not many Jews in Philippi  
and there was no synagogue.  
So Paul took option number 2,  
and found out where the locals went to pray.  
It turned out they gathered on the banks of a river.  
So he went there and shared the gospel.  
A lady called Lydia heard the gospel,  
believed it and was converted.  
She invited Paul and his companions to stay at her place.  
And so they did, using it as a base from which to do ministry.  
And so the church in Philippi was born.

Now it's around a decade later.  
Paul is writing to the Philippian Christians.  
Partly he's letting them know how he's going.  
Partly he's wanting to thank them  
for their ongoing support of his ministry.  
Partly he's wanting to encourage them to hang in there  
and warn them against those who would lead them astray.

So what does he say?  
The letter begins with the usual introduction.  
Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,  
to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi,  
together with the overseers and deacons.  
But even though it's a standard introduction,  
there's plenty to learn.  
Paul and Timothy are not introduced as great ones.  
It's not the most reverend apostle Paul, AO.  
It's Paul, servant of Jesus.  
What makes God's apostle who he is, is nothing about Paul,

and everything about who sent him.  
And the same applies to us.  
We are Christians.  
What identifies us  
is nothing about ourselves but who we put our faith in.  
Paul and Timothy are servants of Christ Jesus.

And the Philippians are God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi.  
God's holy people in older translations was rendered 'saints'.  
I'm very thankful that we have our new translations  
because 'saints' is a very confusing word.  
In some traditions  
it has been reserved for a special class of super Christians.  
Those who live an exemplary Christian life.  
But in the Bible, a saint is a Christian.  
It means one of God's people, a follower of Jesus.  
If you follow Christ, you are a saint.  
If you follow Christ, you are one of God's holy people.  
The Philippians were not a church of super Christians.  
If you read into chapter two,  
you will discover that there was disunity in the church.  
In chapter four  
we find out that Euodia and Syntyche were fighting with each other.  
Be that as it may,  
These are God's holy people.  
They have the status of God's holy people,  
because when God looks at them,  
he sees Jesus.  
The same is true for you if you follow Jesus.  
When God looks at you,  
he sees the purity and perfection of Jesus.  
We are God's holy people.  
It is important for us to live up to the status God has given us.  
But that status is secure.  
We are God's holy people.

And so as so often happens when Paul begins a letter,  
the way he addresses his letter  
tells us what issues he is going to write about.  
He wants the Philippians to be secure in the standing as God's children.  
When they rate themselves on a scale from 0-10  
as to how sure they are that they will go to heaven,  
he wants them to give themselves 10/10.  
Absolutely sure.  
How can they be absolutely sure?  
Because it doesn't depend on them.  
It depends on Jesus and he has done the work.  
It's all done.  
He defeated death on the cross.  
You are 'in Christ'.  
When Jesus was raised you were too.

That's the opening greeting.  
Next Paul's thanksgiving for the Philippians.  
Paul's letter follow a predictable pattern.  
He greets them.  
He thanks God for them.  
He prays for them.  
"I thank my 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."  
Paul is full of joy when he prays for the Philippians.  
Why?  
Because of their partnership in the gospel.  
The word that is translated partnership  
is the word commonly translated fellowship.  
But partnership is a good word for it.  
We often think of fellowship as a cup of tea after church on a Sunday.  
But fellowship really means being united together in a cause.  
Like the first book of the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy

is called the "Fellowship of the Ring".  
The hobbits, dwarves, elves and Gandalf  
are united in a partnership to oppose evil.  
And like that the Philippians are united in a partnership with the apostle.  
On a number of occasions they have financially supported Paul  
so that he will be free to proclaim the gospel.  
They pray for him.  
He prays for them.  
Even when he can't be with them himself,  
he sends people like Timothy and Epaphroditus to visit them  
and spur them on in serving Jesus.  
It's a partnership.  
And such a partnership gives Paul much joy.

Paul's joy doesn't only come  
because it's nice to have people labouring alongside of you.  
No doubt that does gladden his heart.  
It's always good to feel that you are not a lone ranger.  
But he is also joyful  
because their striving along side of him  
makes him confident of their salvation.  
"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."  
Paul can tell that they really are Christians  
because their actions make it obvious.  
They are labouring along side of him in the cause of the gospel.  
Their labour in the gospel is the evidence  
that God is continuing the work he began.  
And what God starts, he finishes.  
Their passion for the cause of the gospel  
shows God at work in them now.  
But God will continue to work.  
He doesn't leave a job half done.

Now that should be a great encouragement to us.

If you've ever wondered,  
"How can I know that I will continue in the Christian faith?"  
If you've been worried that one day you might throw in the towel.  
God finishes what he starts.  
If God has you contending for the faith now.  
Then that's a sign he's at work in your heart.  
And he will complete his work in you.

The Philippians' partnership in the gospel  
has Paul confident in their salvation.  
It also has him feeling very deep affection for them.  
He says,  
"It is right for me to feel this way about you all of you,  
since I have you in my heart ...."  
and,  
"God can testify how I long for all of you  
with the affection of Christ Jesus."  
It really does sound like Paul loves these Philippian Christians.  
'Having you in my heart'  
'Longing for you'  
these are the kind of phrases  
that we would expect to find in some mushy pop song.  
In fact it's hard for our culture  
to separate such deep expressions of affection from a sexual context.  
I mean that's the context of 100% of pop songs  
where that kind of language is used.  
But there's nothing sexual about Paul's love for the Philippians.  
So what does he mean when he says that he longs for them?

He means that he longs for their Christian growth.  
He longs to see them becoming the people God wants them to be.  
That's the kind of deep Christian affection we want to see in the church.  
We love one another deeply.  
And the great expression of that love,  
is that we want to see one another growing in the faith.

If you see someone else in the church stumble in the Christian life,  
do you say,  
"Oh well that's their problem.  
That's none of my business."  
No not at all.  
You should be deeply grieved.  
Your deep affection for them  
should move you to feel anguish.  
In the same way, if you see spiritual growth,  
then that should be a cause for much rejoicing.

How does Paul's love for the Philippians express itself?  
Well one great example is in the prayers he prays for them.  
His prayer for the Philippians is in verses 9-11.  
He longs for them.  
He longs for their Christian growth.  
He longs for them to become the people God wants them to be.  
And so that's how he prays for them.  
"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 for the day of Christ,  
filled with the fruit of righteousness  
that comes through Jesus Christ -  
to the glory and praise of God."  
Does that sound like your prayers for your loved ones?  
Does it sound like your prayers for the other members of Holy Trinity?

Love is a wonderful thing to pray for.  
Paul loves the Philippians.  
That's why he longs for their Christian growth.  
But now he is praying for their love for God and for each other.  
But it's nothing sloppy and sentimental.  
He wants their love to abound in knowledge and depth of insight.  
Sometimes people think they can have a deep relationship with God

without any serious knowledge of God.  
The way we come to know God is through the Scriptures.  
That is where God reveals himself.  
It might feel like hard work to know God better through the Scriptures.  
But growing in love for anyone is hard work.  
If you want to love a person better,  
you have to work hard at listening to them.  
Really attending to what they are saying to you.  
Not just the words but the tone of voice.  
In the same way, if you want to love God better,  
you have to work hard at listening to him.  
And that means reading the Scriptures.  
And not just a cursory skim read.  
Meditating on the Scriptures.  
Turning them over and over in your mind throughout the day.  
If you are not doing that,  
your love won't abound more and more in knowledge.

Paul also prays for depth of insight for the Philippians.  
That is not just knowing God,  
but knowing how to put his will into practice in your life.  
Living is a tricky business.  
Life is full of choices.  
Every time you say yes to one thing,  
you are saying no to a thousand other things.  
If I choose to read one book,  
there are literally millions of books I have chosen not to read.  
If I choose to have breakfast at the High School breakfast club,  
I am saying no to going for a run.  
If I run Christianity Explored on Friday Night,  
then I'm saying no to boys at youth group.  
But in a sense these are the easy choices.  
Who are the people who I can invest time in?  
What's the best way to answer questions about tricky issues?  
How do I balance the time and energy I spend  
on building up the community in this world,



and proclaiming repentance and faith to folk for the next world?  
All these questions come down to asking,  
"What is the best way to love people?"  
To love well requires depth of insight.  
And that's why Paul prays  
that the Philippians would have depth of insight.

There's a saying in leadership and management theory,  
that the good is the enemy of the best.  
It's not doing terrible crimes that distract you from doing what is best.  
It's doing things that are objectively good in and of themselves.  
Doing housework can distract you from reading God's Word.  
Planting a beautiful flower garden can distract you from prayer.  
Spending time with friends can distract you  
from sharing the gospel with a friend who is not a believer.  
Paul prays for insight,  
so that the Philippians would know what is best.  
We need to prune some good stuff out of our lives  
to make room for the best.  
We need to pray these kind of prayers for ourselves and others.

What is the result of that kind of praying?  
Prayer changes things.  
And if we pray that our love would abound  
in knowledge and depth of insight  
then God will change us.  
How will he change us?  
In verse 10, we will be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.  
In verse 11, we will be filled with the fruit of righteousness.

Now there's a kind of pure and blameless that we are already.  
We have been made pure and blameless by the blood of Jesus.  
When God looks at us,  
he sees the purity and the blamelessness of Jesus.  
But that's not what Paul is talking about here.  
He's not talking about our status before God.

He's talking about our lives.  
He's talking about the way we live from day to day  
being true to the status we have because of the blood of Jesus.  
He's talking about real fruit in our lives.  
Godly character.  
Love, joy, peace,  
forbearance, kindness, goodness,  
faithfulness, gentleness and self control.  
Suppose you have a friend who is sick.  
Is it better to pray for their recovery?  
Or to pray that their love would abound  
so that God would work in them,  
to develop these wonderful fruit?  
Well it's not an either or.  
You can pray for both.

But my sense is that we spend our time praying for the less important.  
And we pray about what we care about.  
So that must mean that unfortunately we care about the less important.

Let's resolve to concentrate on what's really important.  
Let's pray for one another.  
That our love would abound more and more  
in knowledge and depth of insight.  
So that our hearts would know what is best.  
So that our lives would filled with the beautiful fruit that God gives.

Friends I want you to be confident in your salvation.  
I want you to know for sure that if you die tonight,  
God will take you to be with the Lord Jesus forever.  
10/10 confidence.  
But while you are waiting,  
I want your love to abound.  
Pray for it.  
Pray for each other.  
Pray for me.