

"Pressing on with the Mission" Philippians 1:1-11

Introduction

- [Slide #1] Forget about Wal-mart and Kmart. Costco and Sams Club? Those places are for chumps. For those looking for real bargains “there’s a place where Laundry Bright detergent and Black Orchid Hair Food run free. A place where egg beaters, Goya beans, plastic swords and Jackie’s Instant Rat Traps all peacefully coexist. A place where your pocket change can buy you imported cookies or some Super Jumbo Chalk Sticks. It is a bargain buyer’s bonanza where everything is a buck. Welcome to the place known as the Dollar Store.”¹
- Dollar World, Family Dollar, Dollar Express, Everything-A-Dollar, Nothing Over \$1, Dollar Giant. Dollar General. What can you buy for a buck? Everything.
- Everyone likes a bargain—even people who go to church. For bargain hunting churchgoers there’s a special place. The church of the dollar store gospel. At the dollar store everything is on sale, all day, everyday. And at the church of the dollar store gospel you will always find a cheap, piece of junk gospel on sale all the time, all day, every day. Those in search of a dollar store gospel say this...
- “I would like to buy about three dollars worth of the gospel, please. Not too much—just enough to make me happy, but not so much that I get addicted. I don’t want so much gospel that I learn to hate covetousness and lust. I certainly don’t want so much that I start to love my enemies, cherish self-denial, and contemplate missionary service in some alien culture. I want ecstasy, not repentance; I want transcendence, not transformation. I would like to be cherished by some nice, forgiving, broad-minded people, but I myself don’t want to love those from different races—especially if they smell. I would like enough gospel to make my family secure and my children well behaved, but no so much that I find my ambitions redirected or my giving too greatly enlarged. I would like about three dollars worth of gospel, please.”²
- Since summer we’ve been talking about the mission Jesus launched and how that’s different than church. What I want to suggest to you this morning is that in order for us to sustain the mission long-term, and not just talk about the mission, we are going to need to pursue something more than a cheap dollar store gospel. [Slide #2, Clicks #1 and #2]

Big Idea

- **Pressing on with the mission means putting the gospel first in all things**
- The gospel worth buying—the gospel worth you selling out for is this—that in Jesus God has lovingly reconciled us to himself, that without the cross we are still God’s enemies because of sin. Any gospel less than this, cheaper than this won’t sustain a missionary movement.
- The mission isn’t a sprint. It’s a marathon. Three dollars worth of the gospel won’t keep us in the race. If we are going to press on with the mission long-term it will mean putting

¹ © Jenna Doscher, *What Can You Buy For A Buck? Everything!*, www.suite101.com, 9-1-2000.

² D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers*, p. 12-13.

the gospel of Christ crucified first in all areas of life, which is exactly what Paul urges as he begins his letter to the Philippians.

Transition

Paul begins this letter by sharing with the Philippian church...

Organizational Sentence

- **Two areas of life in which the gospel must be put first**
- I'm indebted to my teacher **D.A. Carson** for help and insight into this passage. **Verses 1-8**, the **gospel must be first in our relationships**. And **verses 9-11**, the **gospel must be first in our prayers**. Fidelity to the gospel is what keeps you and me on the mission.

Background/Setting

- The story of the Philippian church and their partnership with Paul for the sake of the gospel begins long before Paul writes this letter. The story of the Philippian church begins in the book of Acts. Turn in your Bible to **Acts 16:11-40**.
- About twenty years after Christ was crucified and rose from the grave, some time between 49 and 52 AD, and because of Paul being compelled by love to be on mission with Jesus, the good news of Christ, the gospel, arrives in the city of Philippi. Philippi was the first major town in ancient Macedonia to be visited by Paul and Silas when they crossed into Europe from Asia. You know the story. Paul is on his second missionary journey. **Acts 16:11-40**.
- *Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. 11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. 12 From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.*
- *13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. 15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.*
- *16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." 18 She kept this up*

for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

- *19 When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20 They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21 by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice." 22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.*
- *25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"*
- *29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God--he and his whole family. 35 When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." 36 The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."*
- *37 But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out." 38 The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. 39 They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. 40 After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.*
- *First Lydia. Then her household. Then a slave girl. Next the Philippian jailer and his whole family. The church in Philippi springs to life through Paul and Silas continuing the mission Jesus launched.*
- *And when Paul and Silas move on, the mission doesn't leave with them. That baby church becomes partners with Paul in the spread of the good news of Christ crucified for sins all over Europe.*
- *By the time Paul writes this letter, roughly ten to twelve years after his visit, he's on his way out. His time is almost up. Paul is imprisoned, in chains because of Christ. He knows he might die because of the mission Jesus launched. Look at **Philippians 1:20**. *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 by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

- Which is why Paul says elsewhere in the letter things like *whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.*³ Or this, *whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice.*⁴
- Knowing that he might not be with them much longer Paul writes to the Philippians encouraging them to press on with the mission. Paul may leave them but they must continue the mission.

Transition

And that means putting the gospel front and center. Fidelity to the gospel is what keeps us on the mission. The **first area** of life in which the gospel must be put first? [Slide #2, Click #3] **Our relationships.**

Main Points

- As I reread **verses 1-8** I want you to notice all of the different relational connections. Paul models what he wants the Philippians to put into practice. Listen. **Philippians 1:1-8.**
- *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 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. 7 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. 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*
- How many different relational pairs did you count? I counted six. There's this relationship between *Paul and Timothy*, co-laborers together in the gospel. There's a relationship these two have with Christ as *servants of Christ*. There's the relationship between Paul and the church at Philippi; *to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi*. Within the church there's a relationship between the leadership, *overseers and deacons*, and all the saints. There's a connection within the leadership of the church itself as *overseers and deacons* relate to one another. Finally there's the bond between God and this church; *grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*.
- The bond that holds all of these connections together is the gospel. Without the gospel, *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*, as the bond—none of these relationships exist.
- Do you know what the strongest glue in the world is? It's not Titebond or Rhino Glue or Gorilla Glue. It's the gunk that helps the bacterium *Caulobacter crescentus* stick to river

³ Philippians 1:27

⁴ Philippians 4:9

rocks. According to scientists the bond can withstand the stress “equal to the force felt by a quarter with more than three cars piled on top of it.”⁵ Pretty strong stuff.

- The gospel is the glue that holds the church on the mission. The reason churches and believers, over time, become separated from the mission Jesus launched is because they allow themselves to be bonded to each other and to causes with less superior glues. If you are serious about pressing on with the mission you are going to have to **put the gospel first in your personal relationships**.
- What does that mean? It means that the most prominent connection between you and another follower of Jesus isn’t the weather or your love for a team or a hobby or anything else but the connection you have together in Christ. Christ is what you talk about. His mission is the reason for lunch and a Coke. **Verse 6**, the spiritual progress God is making in your life, as he who began a good work in you carries that work of salvation on to completion; that is the cherished subject of conversation. If you try to press on with the mission with other followers of Jesus or as a church with a bond less than or different than this gospel, you won’t make it.
- The kind of connection we are to shoot for is modeled by Paul and his relationship to the Philippian church in **verse 4**. Notice the glue that holds them together. *In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.* That word *partnership* is the word *koinonia*, fellowship. They are glued together by the gospel.
- Let me say a brief word about fellowship. Because we love to talk about it as Christians but in reality I think we have a slightly misguided understanding of what it really is.
- Our thinking goes something like this. If you invite your neighbor over for pie and ice cream—it’s called friendship. If you invite a Christian believer over for pie and ice cream we call that fellowship. So in modern use, then, fellowship for us has come to mean something like warm friendship with believers.⁶ But if that’s what we settle for, we’re missing out.
- In the first century, the word fellowship meant partnership—as it’s translated here. If Pete and Tom buy a skid loader together and start a business they have entered into a fellowship, a partnership.⁷ Think Frodo and Sam and Gandalf and Gimli and Aragorn and Legolas. The Fellowship of the Ring; the partnership for the sake of destroying this ring. The idea of partnership for a shared vision is absolutely central to the New Testament understanding of this thing called fellowship. Are you with me? Let’s take it one step further and talk about Christian fellowship.
- Christian fellowship then is partnership for the sake of the gospel. As one commentator puts it, “Christian fellowship is self-sacrificing conformity to the gospel. There may be overtones of warmth and intimacy, but the heart of the matter is this shared vision of transcendent importance, a vision that calls forth our commitment. So when Paul gives thanks, with joy, because of the Philippians’ *partnership in the gospel* or *fellowship in the gospel*, he is thanking God that these brothers and sisters in Christ—from the moment of their conversion,

⁵ Corey Binns, *World's Strongest Glue! Available Only From Nature!*, www.livescience.com, 10 April 2006.

⁶ D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers*, p. 16.

⁷ D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers*, p. 16.

from the first day until now, Paul writes—rolled up their sleeves and got involved in the advance of the gospel.”⁸ When that happens, fellowship has just happened. Too frequently because the bond that unites us is less than the gospel—we never get to the point of experiencing real and genuine fellowship.

- Do you see the difference? Don’t settle for anything less. And don’t water down the meaning by calling something less than fellowship, fellowship.
- The gospel is the glue that holds the church on the mission. And it all starts in the arena of personal relationships. The reason churches and believers, over time, become separated from the mission Jesus launched is because they allow themselves to be bonded to each other and to causes with less superior glues.
- “What ties us together? What do we talk about when we meet, even after a church service? Mere civilities? The weather? Sports? Our careers and our children? Our aches and pains? None of these topics should be excluded from the conversation of Christians, of course. In sharing all of life, these things will inevitably come up. But what must tie us together as Christians is this passion for the gospel, this fellowship in the gospel. It is the gospel, the good news that in Jesus, God himself has reconciled us to himself.”⁹
- If you are serious about pressing on with the mission long-term you are going to have to become serious about **putting the gospel first in your personal relationships**.

Transition

Next week we’ll get to [verses 9-11](#) and the importance of putting the gospel first in our prayers.

Conclusion

- I want us to end our time this morning by reflecting on some of the different relationships we have and how the gospel is to those relationships.
- Think about your marriage. What is the bond that holds your marriage together? A mutually beneficial financial arrangement? Children? How much more rich and vibrant would marriage be if husband and wife came together for the purpose of advancing the gospel—cultivating the kingdom while sharing life together?
- What about your relationship with your kids? Or kids, what about you with your parents? What is the bond between you? Is it the fact that you’ve been to every single one of the games? Is it the fact that mom and dad buy you things? Just think how rich and satisfying your relationship parent to child, child to parent could be if the strongest bond between you was the bond of Christ. If you want it you have to work toward it.
- Think about your LifeGroup. What bonds a LifeGroup together? Hopefully not just a common place but a common purpose—to see more and more people experience the blessing of living under God’s rule. Is that why you gather together? Is that the connection you have?
- And lastly, the most important relationship of all, what about you and God? What is the bond, the glue between you and God? Is it a cultural bond? You believe because we’re

⁸ D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers*, p. 16-7.

⁹ D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers*, p. 19.

Americans and it's what we do? What's the bond? Is it because your parents believe so you do to? Is it that he gets you out of messes? To all these we can say, "I would like to buy about three dollars worth of the gospel, please."

- Or is the bond the cross? That through the cross of Christ God has reconciled you to himself—made your spirit alive to him. Is the bond the fact that he owns you now; God bought you for a price—the death of his son. Is the bond that now through the Spirit of Christ living in you God partners with you helping you carry on the mission his Son launched? Is the bond the promise of him sticking with you to carry on to completion his work of making you like Jesus? Or are you not sure if he's for you or against you? What is the bond between you and God? And if it's not the cross of Christ, what are you waiting for? Put the gospel first in your personal relationships—especially the one between you and God.