

Sermon preached by Rev. Tom Halls at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral,
Sydney on Wednesday 1st November 2006. Reading: Phillipians 1:1-11
Topic: "You Make Me Thankful:

When Miss Edith Payne died at the age of 90 in Wollongong, where she spent all her life, her executor was amazed at the the insignificance of her wealth, the volume of numbers in her teledex and the size of her address book. Christians, and especially missionaries and preachers, all over the world have been encouraged by her letters and telephone calls. Paul had a similar ministry in the First Century AD.

This is a letter from the Capital of the Empire, Rome to the Macedonian soldier settlement, Philippi. It comes from two servants of God in chains to all followers of Jesus [saints] in church.

1 THE GREETING [1:1-2]

[i] from Paul and Timothy

As in the Thessalonian correspondence Paul omits the term 'apostle' because his authority was not questioned in Macedonia. Timothy was there when the Church was founded at Philippi [Acts 16:1,15]. He visited twice on the Third Missionary Journey [Acts 19:22; 20:3-4] and Paul was about to send again [2:19] this brother who loved them as he did [2:20].

[ii] to

"all the saints" This is not personal and secret. It applies to Christians everywhere. Those who are the Covenant people of God [Exodus 19:5-6]. " Overseers and deacons" need to note that this is a Revelation from God as well as a letter from Paul and Timothy.

"in Christ Jesus" Those who are led by the Holy Spirit and who are described as "new creatures" [John 15:1-6 2 Corinthians 5:17]

"in Philippi" This is the first recorded preaching of the Gospel in Europe. The fruit of that proclamation included Lydia [Hebrew], the Gaoler [Roman] and a slave girl [Greek]. The focus is on key people not large numbers.

2 THE GRATITUDE [1:3 - 8]

Paul was thankful to God and confident in God because of what he had done for them and through them.

"I thank my God" for every remembrance of you [1:3]. There is a special bond of fellowship here. Paul did not find praying for them a burden, but a joy and made request with joy, whenever he prayed for them [1:4]. He felt this way about the Philippians because of their fellowship in the Gospel [1:5]. They working together for a common goal "from the first day until now ". Lasting loyalty was still current. Gratitude for such goodness is the highest form of pleasure and honour.

"Being confident of this" [1:6] Paul's confidence is not in himself or the Philippians, but in the Lord.

- He who commenced a good work in you will complete it until Christ comes

- He "opened" Lydia's heart [Acts 16:14]

- He crushed the gaoler's hardness [Acts 16:29-31]. This was the event where salvation was clearly demonstrated and defined at Philippi. The gaoler asked: "What must I do to be saved?". Paul replied: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved"

The pastor's priority

"I have you in my heart" [1:7] Not professionalism, but personal commitment. This was Paul's attitude, whether sitting in prison "in chains" or standing in court making his "defence and confirmation of the Gospel". Wherever he was involved in Gospel work Paul knew that the Philippian believers were "sharers of grace " with him. Their faith was independent of circumstances.

The pastor's intensity

"I long after you all" [1:8] There is an intensely personal fellowship. He longs for them with the tenderness Christ gives, because their working relationship is based on mutual love from and for Christ.

Gratitude to the Saviour ennobles character and elevates the quality of fellowship shared.

3 THE GLORY [1:9 - 11]

This is what I pray

[i] That you may experience a dynamic love

That is, one that is growing better because it is based on solid fact ["knowledge"] and an all embracing capacity ["discernment"] to understand its foundations and grasp its implications. This love does not ebb and flow with the tides of emotion. It is not dependent on feelings, and rises above selfishness so that each one is willing to be 'put out' for the other.

[ii] That you may rise above the ordinary

That is, transcend mere appetite and instinct to a level of existence in which you "approve what is excellent". Though you will not be perfect in Christ you can be pure [untainted] and inoffensive until our Lord comes again. You will not be sinless, but you should sin less.

[iii] That you may be filled with the fruit of righteousness

[Proverbs 11:30 Amos 6:12]

Such an outcome can only be found in Christ Jesus who has a right to expect such fruit among his followers. We were created and saved to live "unto the praise and glory of God ". This is the valid outworking of that righteousness which comes through faith in Jesus Christ.