

Philippians 1:3-11. 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. ⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Prepare for the day of Christ Jesus.

1. Confident in Christ

2. United for mutual encouragement

Are you all prepared and ready for Christmas? That seems almost like an unfair question at this point. We are still a few weeks out and some things can't be done until the final days before the holiday, so nobody can truly be ready and completely prepared already. The tree may be up, some of the presents purchased (maybe even wrapped), cookies may be baked (a few eaten), the lights are perhaps all hung with cheer, cards sent out - or maybe not. Whatever you have had the time or energy or desire to do the preparations are gradually being made. But the last-minute items of house cleaning and food preparation and final touches are all of course still days away. And we know that and yet still we ask the question, "Are you ready?" in large part because we care. We often use this question around this time of year as a friendly way to check in, to say hello, and if we pause and give adequate time for people to answer, the question may serve to let friends and family open up and let out some of the pressure that's building up. We ask the question, because it can also serve as a good reminder for ourselves, to start checking those things off our list. Perhaps we can say that the question serves as a type of mutual encouragement. Are you prepared? Are you ready for Christmas? I know that each day I should be preparing for the day that is coming, are you?

If such a question is important and true for the Day of Christmas, is it not even more important as we prepare for the day of Christ Jesus - for the day when he comes again to judge the living and the dead? So dear friends with care and concern I ask you. **Are you ready for the day of Christ Jesus? Confident in Christ, we are united for mutual encouragement; prepare for the day of Christ Jesus.**

In many of his letters Paul expresses gratitude and love for God's people, but there seemed to be a special place in Paul's heart for the Christians in Philippi. What a joy to

consider how God did his saving work among these people. What blessed memories Paul had of God working faith in the hearts of people like: Lydia, the slave girl once possessed by a demon, the jailer and his whole household! What a blessed memory Paul had of the love that they had shown as a fruit of their newfound faith. They had shown unique hospitality, rejoiced in their unity of faith, and had sent support of Paul's ministry even after he had left. What joyous family-like fellowship Paul had so thoroughly enjoyed with these brothers and sisters in Christ. Therefore, as the apostle writes to these dear friends in Christ, he prays that they would continue to grow and increase in knowledge, depth of insight; that they would know more and more about Christ and Christian living. With a deep and genuine love and concern he expresses both his sincere wish for spiritual growth and his confidence in Christ, as he prays. ***³I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*** Ultimately, with these words Paul expresses his joyful and confident prayer that the LORD who called these believers to faith would preserve them in the faith until the end, and that Christ would preserve these believers as a blessed source of encouragement for Christians of every age

Are you prepared for the day of Christ Jesus? As sinners we could never perfectly prepare ourselves for the day of the LORD. To get ready to meet and stand before a holy God by our own efforts is a hopeless endeavor. The law of God shines this painfully honest light on our hearts which are revealed to be seriously soiled by sin and severely lacking righteousness. However, the gospel shows us sinners once sentenced to hell for all eternity are loved and saved and spared by the mercies of our eternal God. By the grace of Christ, our sins are paid for, we are cleansed and healed. He has declared us his forgiven and redeemed children, heirs of eternal life. Through the very faith that he bestows on us, he gives us this blessed status. Christ Jesus has prepared a place for us in his heaven. Out of his endearing affection for us he carried out all the preparations necessary for our salvation. In his great compassion he came to earth for us, he laid down his life so that we might be rescued from eternal death. He sent out his Word of grace and gives us baptism to cleanse us and make us alive and ready to meet our LORD and live with God forever. Draped with his holiness, filled with his righteousness, we are thus prepared to meet our Lord and to stand in his presence forever. And that status is held firmly in place as God also promises in his word that he will hold us safely in his arms. He even promises that he will preserve us in the faith through the power of his word and sacraments. You are prepared for the day of Christ by Christ himself.

However, Scripture makes it clear that is not a message that ought to breed overconfidence and apathy, but it is a message that overflows our hearts with confident joy as we live to the glory of God and as mutual encouragement for each other. You are prepared through faith in Christ. May we each live in perpetual gratitude for the tremendous gift of faith. Christ has prepared us to meet our holy God and dwell in his presence for all eternity.

Think for a moment of the alternative. Think of the ultimate shame and the embarrassment in not being ready for the day when Jesus comes again. Worse than being unprepared for the traditions of Christmas morning or Christmas company; no dream, no nightmare could fully envision the shame that is waiting on those that did not see it as important to prepare for the day that Christ will come again as judge. Think of the embarrassment, the shame, that will be heaped upon those who discarded his warnings and lived a life of self-indulgent unbelief, who rejected his invitation, who rejected his gift of forgiveness and life, and who may have also knocked those precious gifts out of the hands of their children and grandchildren as they wandered and sprinted from the faith. Oh the embarrassment and shame that is waiting for those who had no time for Christ in this life, who ignored his call, who pushed him out of their plans and preparations, they will be pushed out of God's presence for all eternity – far away from any hint of joy or happiness, surrounded not by gladness and light, but instead swallowed up by darkness, guilt, fear and grief.

In his great love, Christ chases away this cold and dreadful darkness from those who are his. He drives away such a fearful reality as he warms our hearts in the light of a confident and living faith. He places the enduring gifts of forgiveness and life firmly in our hands, and he fills us with purpose and peace as he gives us a nourishing taste of the joyful reality that will last forever and is fully ours through Christ alone. We will be with the Lord and all his holy people celebrating in the halls of heaven for all time. What a joy it is that we have been given confidence in Christ and that we have been connected to the fellowship of believers. Because of the work that Christ has done for us we have the blessed status that we are his children and we are therefore heirs of eternal life. Heaven is ours. We could never fully prepare and cleanse ourselves, but he has made us ready. He has washed us clean and declared us blameless through the blood of Christ. He makes his home with us. He comes near and takes residence in our hearts as his kingdom comes to us. He even promises that he will preserve us in the faith through word and sacrament, until the day when he will welcome us unto eternal life. Each day until then is an opportunity to learn of his love and grow in our love, with depth and insight. Each day until then is an opportunity to encourage one another in the faith until we stand together in Christ's glory.

Paul was encouraged in *his* faith by the faith and love that the Philippians had shown, and so he prayed that they would continue to be a source encouragement for him and for others. What a marvelous work that God had done in bringing them to faith! What beautiful fruits of faith and mutual encouragement God had brought about through their faith, which served as a shining example of the power of the love of God. The Philippians believers welcomed the gospel, they rejoiced in the fellowship they shared, they supported the mission and ministers of Christ. Now it was Paul's prayer that they would shine even more to the glory of God.

That is the same type of joyous purpose that God has given to all of us as believers: *To live for him who died for us and was raised again. To grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. To increase and abound in love so that we ourselves may be*

strengthened in the faith. To encourage one another. To support the spread the spread of the gospel. To attract others to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a purpose that God gives us until the day that we are called to our Savior's side in heaven. We are called to be the light of the world and God wants us to shine brighter and brighter as he enables us.

But in our sinful weakness it doesn't always happen that way. We handle with dull and cold indifference the gifts of fellowship and faith. We say and confess and pray and sing certain things on Sunday morning and we may live a completely different way on Sunday afternoon and the rest of the week through. We see our connection to church, to our congregation, to mission work, as a meaningless burden, as a joyless obligation, as a tiresome inconvenience. Brothers and sisters this should not be.

The Lord in his love has brought us into his family of believers. He has spared us from eternal death and he given us abundant life. He has connected each one of you to a living hope and the confidence of eternal life. He has given us peace and purpose. He has made us into a planting for the LORD for the display of his splendor. Rooted in Christ he has called us to bring forth brilliant fruits of faith: to grow in his love, to encourage one another in Christian living so that we may publicly stand firm against false teachings and privately flee temptation. Rooted in Christ we are called to apply the word to our lives and share and spread the light of Christ. How can we encourage each other to live in this abundant love that God has shown us as we wait and prepare for the day of the LORD? Let us consider each day the question, Are you ready for the day of Christ Jesus? May the Lord come and help us, encourage us, kindle in us the fire of your love!

Last week we talked about the importance of staying connected to God's Word. Being connected to Word doesn't simply mean a superficial reading and listening as church attendance was all that was expected of us, but it will mean taking that spiritual nourishment in and being strengthened and continually being built up in our faith each day, each year. And God may even use us to serve as a source of encouragement as we live out that faith. We don't easily forget that Christian grandmother that had such an impact on us, or that fellow believer that was so encouraging to us and our faith. We don't easily forget the impression and the impact of a member of this congregation who demonstrated their faith daily, or who dealt with a particular grief, suffering, or challenge with the faith and confidence that comes through faith in Christ. Who knows, Christ may have used the faith that he has planted in you and the fruits of faith that he has produced in your life to be a source of encouragement for others as well. Praise and glory be to God alone!

So dear friends, it is with loving concern I ask you, "Are you ready for the day of Christ?" With the confidence that comes from our Savior we can say yes. With the joy that comes from our Savior it is also the grateful response a living faith to learn more and more of his love and to grow in our love for one another. Beloved in the LORD, prepare for the day of Christ each day knowing that he will bring to completion the good work that he has started in you. You are an heir of eternal life. May you grow and be strengthened in Christ, and may you abound in his love and in your love for one another. Amen.