

Living In The Here And Now

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[0:00] Well, folks, if you have a Bible, please turn back to the passage that we read just a moment ago. This was Philippians chapter 1. And I'd like to think with you a little bit tonight about living in the here and now.

For every single one of us, living in the here and now, or we could say living in the present, is inevitable. We haven't got a choice, have we? We kind of have to live in the here and now. It's all we've got.

Except we could say sometimes we prefer to live in the past or in the future. Maybe that's just human nature. We remember times that were good and the present isn't so.

Or we look ahead to things that we'd like to happen in life. And again, we're impatient to get there because the present isn't so good. So you can just feel that at different times in your life as a human being.

Sports fans are particularly bad for this. Or maybe it's just me. My team's no good. So sports fans can live in the past. In the glory days, when everything was right with the world, because you won.

[1:07] Or maybe you live in the future when you hope to get back to winning ways. Because then everything will be right with the world. The problem with that, of course, the problem with that is that the present can be a bit miserable.

Because Saturdays come and go and disappointment reigns. I'm a football fan. My brother's a big football fan. He's a bigger football fan than I am. He's a better football fan than I am.

He's more loyal. But for him, I think often I can see the excitement beginning to build as the Saturday comes. And then every way the Saturday passes and the result doesn't go.

So that's a trivial example. But we can feel that for life, can't we? What to do with the here and now? How to feel positive about the here and now? How to flourish and grow?

All kinds of people talk about that. You don't have to be a Christian or to come to church to think about how to flourish as a human being. And aren't there just so many different ways in which people think they can flourish as human beings?

[2:06] There are many different programs you can attach yourself to to live a better life. Well, I say all of this because Christianity is very concerned with living in the here and now. And Paul, the apostle who wrote this book, was very concerned for the lives of the people to whom he was writing.

And he was very concerned that they would learn what it would mean for them to be Christians, applying Christianity and, shall we say, the gospel, the good news of Jesus, precisely so that their lives in the moment were what they could be, what they were called to be.

Jesus came to bring us life to the full. So often we may be as Christians, not feeling like life is very full. Now, even as Christians, let's just go back to an example of the past and the present.

Christianity helps us live in the present because of what's happened in the past, because the basis for our faith is Jesus' life and death and resurrection and ascension and the fact that he has now sent his spirit to be with us.

And, of course, the fact that we live in time, we live in space and time, conscious that Jesus will come again. I don't know if you noticed when we were reading through the passage, but a couple of times in the passage in verse 6 and in verse 10, there's reference to what's called the day of the Lord, the day of Christ.

[3:35] And what that means is that Jesus has come into the world, of course, and he lived and died, etc., as I said, and he's coming again. He's coming again, and he's coming in such a way that everybody who sees him will recognize him for who he really is.

And in many ways, that brackets our lives, doesn't it? Or maybe we forget, or maybe you don't know. And if this is something that you're learning tonight, then I hope it helps you. Think about how you can live in the here and now.

It makes a difference. The history happens within God's activity. Jesus Christ came into the world to be our Savior, and he is coming again to take his people to be with himself and to administer justice in the world.

So all of that brackets our lives, as I said. These are kind of headline things that we can think about that surely give us some kind of orientation as to the way in which we think about ourselves in the here and now.

But what I'd like to do on just now is go on and look at a few points from the short-ish passage that help us think more about living in the here and now.

[4:43] What are the benefits, if I can put it like that, of being a Christian, of believing the gospel that actually make a difference? Or, if I can put it like this, that inform how you think about yourself, the way in which you live your life individually and as a church family.

The first one is in verses 1 and 2, and it is grace. Grace is the first thing that I'd like to think about with you. Paul writes, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

First thing I'd like to say about grace is just to remind ourselves of exactly how valuable and necessary this is for us. Remember I mentioned talk about the day of Christ.

Verse 6, He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Verse 10, So that you may approve what is excellent, be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

So there, Paul's quite clear that Jesus is coming again. Jesus himself, if you were to go to the gospels, spoke about the day that he was so conscious of, the day when he would return.

[6:08] And often when he did that, Jesus spoke about it in terms that warned people about it. So actually quite often when you go to the gospels and you read some of the parables, he's trying to prepare people so that they're prepared, so that they're ready, so that their faith is in him.

And that prepares them for the day when he will come again and judge the world. For example, you could go to Matthew chapter 24. Let me just turn very briefly with you.

Matthew chapter 24 and verse 48. If, and he's telling a story here about a wicked servant who is heedless of his master returning.

Like I said, Jesus tells parables, stories to illustrate these points. He says, if the wicked servant says to himself, my master is delayed and he's careless of the return of the master.

And he begins to beat his fellow servants and he eats and drinks with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he doesn't expect him. And an hour he doesn't know.

[7:14] And he'll cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. And in that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. These are the words of Jesus. And he speaks to warn people so that they are quite aware of the fact that they stand before a holy God who judges our hearts and who will come again to judge the living and the dead.

And what we deserve if we ignore him is the judgment of God. We all long for justice in the world. If you see something wrong in your community, if somebody gets robbed, you want justice.

That isn't fair. That shouldn't have happened. And the person deserves to be held to account for that. And God says to us as well, we'll be held to account for our lives. And in actual fact, we're found wanting.

Because in all of our hearts, there's sin. So to come back to grace, why exactly is grace so necessary? Well, it's because God treats us in a way that we don't deserve.

And we can think about that in two ways. When you put your faith in Jesus, not only do you not receive the punishment of God for your sin, but you receive the blessing of God, the warm embrace of God as he forgives your sin and adopts you into his family and lavishes his love on you.

[8:40] That's grace. He doesn't say to you, if you, we were thinking about how to better yourself at the start, if you work really hard and do these 10 things really well, or this six-point plan, or you get an attendance mark that's over 95%, then you may have earned my favor.

It doesn't say that. He says if you believe with your heart, confess with your mouth, you'll be saved. That's grace. It's grace. He offers you the gift of salvation.

And so Paul, right at the outset, reminds these people, who are you, Christians in Philippi? And who are you, any church of God that hears this letter read, or any individual?

You can read this when you're walking the hills or on the beach, or you can read it at home again tonight. And you can say to yourself, do I deserve this grace? The answer is no.

Can I receive this grace? Yes, you can. Yes, you must. For without it, you still stand bearing the guilt of your sin before God.

[9:45] So every human has that, if I can put it like this, this existential situation. As we stand created by God before Him as our Maker, what to do with the sin of our hearts?

And here Paul writes and reminds these people, grace to you. And then he says, grace and peace. And peace. Because you're now no longer enmity with forgiveness.

And He sees you as His beloved child, the one who's received His grace, and His forgiveness, and His love. Now, one more thing about this grace, written by this man Paul.

If you don't know anything about Paul, he was a man brought up in the Jewish tradition, whose initial reaction to this Jesus figure and Jesus' followers, the Christians, those who followed the way in the early church, was that he hated them and he wanted rid of them.

He thought they were wrong. He thought they were dangerous. And he tried to kill them. Now, he was met by Jesus in a very distinct way. If you don't know anything about his conversion story, Jesus supernaturally appeared to him in power, in a very vivid display of his presence and his power, Paul was stopped in his tracks.

[10:58] Paul, a powerful man, was stopped in his tracks. And he realized that he was standing before a greater power than him. And it was the Jesus whose name he was persecuting.

If anybody deserved the immediate judgment of God, it was Paul in that moment. What did he receive? Grace. Jesus totally changed Paul's life around to the extent that now Paul writes to Christians to commend Jesus to them.

And he says, I love you people. You're my family. I am a recipient of grace. It's the only leg I've got to stand on. And you are too.

Don't ever forget it. Don't ever forget that you are people of grace. And what that means is that however you feel about yourself, sometimes we're very aware of the weight of guilt and the shame or things, maybe even historical tensions we have, the perspective of others.

You feel your self-esteem isn't good. Or you feel excluded. And you feel all kinds of things about yourself. You're a recipient of the grace of God. And he has lavished his love upon you.

[12:11] You remember that. He tells you that. And he wants you to remember his love. Secondly, grace.

First, grace. Secondly, partnership. So again, what does it mean to live in the present? Well, you can't avoid people. Sometimes we wish we could. But we live in communities.

We live in families. We live in friendships. There's all kinds of ways in which there's intersections.

You can draw the lines, even in this room, probably between family and friends and old acquaintances and all the rest of it. But Paul says to the Christians to whom he's writing, you know, we're more than just passing acquaintances.

We don't just meet once a week to talk about this thing that we believe in. And then we go our separate ways. Not really got much to do with each other. He says you're partners. You're deeply united.

What is it that makes us feel united as a church? We talk about close fellowship sometimes. We talk about not just churches, maybe social groups that you're a part of as a really good fellowship. Why?

[13:15] Why is that a close fellowship? Why is that a close church? Well, here he says that their partnership becomes evident. He talks in verse 5.

He says, I'm always giving thanks to you. I'm always making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until night. So there's a reason for Paul's thanksgiving. And he goes on in verse 7.

It's right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in your heart for you're all partakers with me of grace. There's grace again. And he's saying, we're partners in receiving the gospel.

The root of these words, partakers and partners, the root is the same. It has to do with things in common or shared. Things that we share. Things that we receive.

And again, Paul just goes on to say, well, it's grace. We're recipients of grace. Therefore, we're inextricably linked. There are specific expressions of partnership in the context of Philippians. [14 : 15] The Christians here had heard of Paul was a guy who went through some terrible situations. He had, having been a persecutor of Christians, he then became persecuted because of what he was doing as a missionary.

And the Philippians had heard of some of his need and they'd sent a gift to him, a financial gift. So they'd expressed partnership in that particular way. Part of what Paul goes on later in the letter to do is to express thanks more particularly and to talk about the one who'd been sent to physically bring the gift.

So there's all these kind of person-to-person and church-to-church interrelationships in the New Testament expressed. Hopefully we know something of that.

We know of the ways in which we can practically partner, help each other. So that's the kind of practical example. In terms of partnership as well, note the grounds of the partnership.

Again, when we think about what makes for a good partnership or fellowship, what's the basis for that? Sometimes my children are quite young. They're at school. I hear stories.

[15 : 22] You're probably familiar with the way this feels of one day somebody's a best friend, the next day they're just, they don't know. Why is this person no longer speaking to them? I thought we were best friends.

Now it seems weird. What did I do? Our relationships can be so like that, can't they? We feel on shaky ground sometimes. It just doesn't seem right.

It's not fair. What have I done? It happens, if I can take a bigger example, geopolitics, the UK, the US, best of friends.

We talk about a special relationship or not. Maybe nowadays we don't know whether it's so special. Is the UK still best friends with America? Is America still best friends with the UK?

Does it matter? So there's all these kinds of shifting feelings and the basis for relationships can change sometimes. What Paul says here about the basis of partnership.

[16 : 18] And again, remember we're thinking here in terms of the experience of living in the present. This helps us, doesn't it? When we feel like life can be tenuous sometimes, the links we have, the friendships we have, the communities, are they really, are people going to have my back?

Can I trust people? Paul, there's something about the grounds of the partnership that these believers have and that Paul has with these believers that is deeper than anything to do with our character or personalities or our moods, or it should be.

Let me go back with you again to verse four. Because he says, I'll read from verse four into five, I'm always in every prayer for you all, making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel.

So he says there are two things. One, the partnerships in the gospel. Because as he says in verse seven, we're partakers of the gospel. And that is the basis.

That's the foundation for the unity that Christians have together. And the expression of that, did you notice again in verse four, is that it means that everybody's involved.

[17 : 27] Everybody's involved. Doesn't write to the church in Philippi, brackets his best pals. Maybe he did in other places. Maybe he wrote to specific people about specific things. But here, as the Holy Spirit leads him to write this letter that will be included in the canon of scripture, look at what he says about the people.

Always, in every prayer of mine, for you all. Paul, the great apostle, regarded the church of Philippi with all of its diversity and all the people, whether they'd been there for years or a couple of days, you all people, all you people, partakers of grace, for you all, I love you and I pray for you and you're all included.

We're all included. And that's because the foundation of this partnership, the Christians share, is what Jesus has done for us. Not what we can do for him or what we can do for one another.

So what that does is it helps us think about the depths of the partnership that we share. It's rooted in the gospel. It's rooted in the work of Jesus. It compels us, therefore, to express partnership toward one another.

Think about it this way. Jesus is so committed, he partners with you to the extent that he came from heaven and earth to give his life for you. For his bride, the church. And Jesus would say with Paul, for you all, therefore the foundation is very sure.

[18:59] And the richness of our partnership, ongoing. It shouldn't change with our mood. Sometimes it does, and we confess that. But the partnership here that Paul is speaking about is rich indeed.

And that means that he says, in verse 3, I'm dotting about a little bit here, but he says, I thank my God in all my remembrance for you. Paul's overjoyed because of what God is doing in the lives of these people.

So here's something to do with the way in which we see ourselves in relation to others. How do I live in the moment? Well, I'm an individual responsible for my life. I stand before God, who's my creator, and I need a relationship with him, the foundation of which is grace.

I'm an individual who lives in community with other people. What's the basis for that? Well, if you're a member of the church and if you're a Christian, that partnership is also rooted in the gospel. And that transforms the way in which we think about others.

Didn't it? Didn't it just transform the way in which Paul thought about Christians? He hated them. And then he loved them because they too were loved by Jesus. How could he not love them?

[20:14] Now, one detail, I'm spending a bit longer on this point because so often this is what we struggle with. Community's hard sometimes, isn't it? Sometimes there are reasons where we find things difficult.

We disagree. Here's almost like a mini case study. I'm going to just draw on from a little bit later in the book of Philippians. Paul wrote to very real, tangible examples.

He knew things that were happening in churches, some of which we might be familiar with. Maybe you're struggling with these things too. Where we struggle to reconcile differences. Partnership is really hard.

In chapter 4 in Philippians, Paul writes very specifically, even to the point where he names two women who obviously had a disagreement.

And there was a risk that partnership would be broken or at least chipped away at to the extent that it would damage the fellowship and it might damage how people saw them in the community.

[21:12] These Christians, they can't even agree with each other. They're just arguing. Did you hear about Euodia and Syntyche? Well, that's who Paul writes to and he says, let me just read a couple of verses here.

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also true companion, whoever that is that he's writing to here, who's going to act as a kind of intermediary.

Help these women who've labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life. Very briefly, there's a few things here that help us practically when we think about partnership and how the gospel changes our approach to partnership, particularly when it might be damaged.

He says, first of all, agree in the Lord. So again, there's the basis. At the moment, Euodia and Syntyche don't feel they have much in common, but they're in Christ.

That can't be changed because they're both Christians. Jesus still sees them as his beloved daughters. Therefore, Paul calls them to think about themselves as agreeing in the Lord.

[22:25] And he goes on as well to say, help these women who've labored side by side with me. So he reminds them. Another translation, I think, talks about contending.

He reminds them that actually their work is a shared one. They're co-workers, co-laborers in God's mission field. And sometimes our perspective needs to be brought back again to the focus that God would give us.

We can't see it because of this thing that's happened between us and somebody. And it does have to be dealt with and sometimes we have to be practical and work through our differences. But here, Paul reminds them of a gospel focus that gives them orientation through conflict.

And one final detail, and this is beautiful. He says, who've labored side by side with me in the gospel, together Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life.

So what he's saying to them is, remember, you will share eternity together where there will be no disunity between you. How could there be in the new creation?

[23:34] So with that in mind, do everything you can to work toward partnership in the now, in the here and now. Okay, the first point was grace.

The second was partnership. Thirdly, more briefly, security. Paul talks about assurance for Christians, which is a wonderful thing. I won't labor this, but it's linked to what we were talking about

earlier.

However, sometimes we feel a lack of assurance with faith. Go God, accept me. We feel a lack of assurance with people. Am I loved? We feel a lack of assurance with circumstances.

Maybe that's the reason for what I was saying at the very beginning. Living in the here and now is not so great. And we put all our hope in the future, a job, or whatever it is. But there is an assurance that Paul speaks about here that again is almost underneath all of that or overarching all of that.

And that is the assurance that we have in Christ Jesus. I'm going to come back again to verse 6. So many of the verses in Philippians I find are the kind of verses that we might just remember.

[24 : 44] They're the kind of verses that echo around our minds and that's a good thing. Here's one of them. Paul says, I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Now, the tone of the letter often is so positive. This is a really beautiful letter to read because it's so effervescent. It's so full of joy. He's so thankful.

He's so happy. He's writing to people that he loves. And the basis for that, of course, is the gospel and what he sees in them of Jesus and the work of Jesus in them. And here he says to them that your future is secure and your present because of what Jesus has done.

So you see, again, that reference to the past and the future. He says, on the basis of what Jesus has done for you is the gospel. That is your hope. And he'll complete this work.

So he's looking forward and he's saying, I know that he will take you to the end. But of course, the outworking of that, we often focus on the end. We say, he's begun a good work in me.

[25 : 48] He'll finish it. I'll get to the finish line. Amen to that. He will. And you have that sense of assurance you'll not be lost if your faith is in Jesus.

You'll not be lost. And that promise of eternity is yours. Nobody can take that away from you. But of course, that is worked out day by day.

And what that means is that there isn't a day of your life if your faith is in Jesus where he's forgotten you. He's not forgotten you.

You will go through the fire and you will face circumstances that other people may forget you. You may sometimes forget yourself. But he won't forget you because he is completing his work in you.

We sometimes make the circumstances the indicator of whether God loves us. But that's not the way God teaches us to think about our circumstances. And what he's saying here, again, just in a line, and I'm not going to spend a lot more time on it.

[26 : 47] I just want to raise this again that this is another point for us to consider as we think about how to live in the present. Thinking about who we are, thinking about our status.

God says to you that you can have security in terms of yourself, your standing before him, and your eternal destiny because of what he has done for you.

One writer put it this way, the assurance God gives not only guarantees the outcome, it guarantees to every experience of every day. For in all things, God is putting the finishing touches.

The final point I want to leave with you today regarding just what we can learn here from this passage about gospel living, if I can put it that way, how God helps us live every day in the here and now is love.

In many ways, love is the foundation stone upon which all of us rests rests because it was the love of God for the world and his determination to rescue his people, redeem them from their sins, and put their feet on a solid rock and assure them of a foundation that could not fail that moved him to send his son Jesus into the world to go through the horror of the cross so as to redeem us.

[28 : 09] Love undergirds all things in so many ways. Let me turn with you just now to verse 9 where Paul says, it's my prayer, here again he's praying for the believers, it's my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so 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.

Now we have different ways of thinking about love personally, societies have different ways of thinking about love. It's interesting here that the love that Paul speaks about here in verse 9 it is my prayer that your love may abound it doesn't have an object.

He doesn't say your love for Jesus, he doesn't say your love for one another, he just says your love.

So is Paul being vague? I mean, you could ask if you were to read that, maybe if you were new to this passage, what's he talking about?

What does he mean? Love for what? Like I said, society sometimes has a very vague notion of love. In the 1960s all you need is love. What did that mean?

I think today some people are still trying to work out what that means. If you live by that principle, maybe a more up-to-date version, people will say love is love. Again, it's hard to know sometimes out of context what people mean by that.

[29 : 38] Paul isn't being vague and he's not just saying be loving, be kind, have goodwill toward other people. If he was saying that, the problem would be for him, for the Philippians, for us, that we come to the end of our love, don't we?

If it's just about us being loving, then there are days when I'm definitely not loving. Maybe I have reasons not to be loving. And in actual fact, what the gospel does is it goes into situations where there's maybe no reason to be loving.

Maybe Euodia or Syntyche could testify to that. But it gives us a compelling reason to love. And that is, again, that what Paul is talking about here is the love of God which prompted his work, which is the gospel, which is manifest in Jesus, exemplified in Jesus, in which you must believe in, that God so loved you that he sent his Son to be your Savior and is applied to you by his Holy Spirit.

So that's what Paul is speaking about here. And of course, what Paul does, as he does in other places like Ephesians, where he talks about the prayers that he has for the saints there, is that he's saying to them, you have this love.

It's the same in many ways as what we talked about with partnership. The foundation for unity in a church doesn't rest on whether we feel well toward one another, but it rests on what Jesus has done for us.

[31 : 10] And that applies, of course, to love as well. You are recipients of the love of God. He wants you to know his love, the love of Jesus which compelled him to live the life he did.

And what Paul is doing is saying I want you to know that more. So here's an everyday thing for you, living in the moment, you have the opportunity on a day-to-day basis, even in your circumstances, to know more of the love of Jesus for you.

In fact, we could say that that's his will for you, and that he shows you that through your circumstances, good and ill. He shows you when life is good, that his love is better, and that you could be flying in life, but if that's your foundation, it's an insecure one, but that his love for you will never end.

And he shows you when life is bad, maybe when you feel rotten because you've been let down, that he says, I loved you before you were lovely.

That's the basis of my love for you. And on the basis of my son, Jesus, God the Father says, I love you with an everlasting love. That's a love that nobody else can promise you.

[32 : 30] And Paul says, know that more. Think about it. Talk to one another about that love. And in fact, pray to God that that love, as the letter to John would say, we love because he first loved us.

That love that you have received and known is what you so long that your neighbors and your friends and your kids and their friends and whoever would also know. That's the way Paul so often thought about others, isn't it?

He was moved. He had this deposit, this gospel that Jesus had given to him. And he was moved in his life to seek to pass it on and to give it to others.

Because he wanted Christians to know the love of God more and more and more as their hearts expanded, filling up with the knowledge of God. And he wanted people who didn't have a clue and who were far away to come into the family of Jesus and know a love that transforms everything about who they are and everything about the way they see themselves in the world.

These are a few things that are more. I could go on. I'm going to sneak in a fifth point here. I could go on and talk about the way in which circumstances are changed. Even Paul's in prison where he says, even my circumstances allow me to speak about my faith in Jesus.

[33 : 49] But I won't make that point. I'll just refer to it in passing. Even Paul's terrible circumstances could be used by him as a way in which he could bring glory to God. And it's so different for us, isn't it, from the way in which we sometimes think about what is a fulfilled life or a way in which we can be fulfilled day by day, a day where we feel self-improvement.

In fact, what that does is it puts all the pressure down on our own shoulders to make something of ourselves, to better ourselves, to get on in life. And that can be a very fleeting thing for us.

Here we have sure, promised, lasting gospel truths that are applied to us by God when we believe his gospel, that change who we are as people.

They're true of us now because God says they are. And they change our lived experience, and we pray that they would, as they have the Holy Spirit ministers to us and speaks to us and counsels us day after day.

Remember, you're my son. You're my daughter. These things are true of you. Let me pray now. I'm going to close by praying that God's Spirit will fill us up and teach us.

[35 : 07] I'm also going to pray that God will help us if we don't believe these things, to come to put our faith in Jesus. So please, let's pray now as we finish.