*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

August 31 – September 5

Philippians

**Monday, August 31 Philippians 1:1-2**

*“Greetings”*

 Two things in these opening verses are important for us to note. First, Paul describes himself and Timothy as “servants of Christ Jesus.” Paul’s word for “servants” does not refer to hired household help but is the term commonly used in ancient times for “slaves” and carries overtones of humility and submission. Paul’s readers would have understood the term as Paul used it here to refer to people in service to Christ rather than in service to sin.

 Second, Paul calls his readers “saints” which literally translates from the Greek as “holy people.” This term refers not to their having attained some form of holiness through their own efforts, but to their status as the people whom God has called out from among others and set apart to live the responsibilities of their new life in Christ. All believers in Philippi are saints, and by mentioning the church leaders and deacons he is subtly making the point that the “average” Christian should not mistakenly believe that it is only the more spiritual or elevated members of the church who are “saints.”

*We serve you, Lord, by living according to your will for us. Amen.*

**Tuesday, September 1 Philippians 1:3-8**

*“I pray for you with joy”*

 Paul describes his prayer of thanksgiving as being “with joy.” His primary intention for this description is simply to affirm his affection for the Philippians; but it also announces a theme that runs throughout the letter: The believer should be joyful. Here we find Paul once again modeling for the Philippians a quality that he will later encourage them to cultivate among themselves. For Paul, joy is not the result of finding himself in comfortable circumstances but of seeing the gospel make progress through his circumstances and through the circumstances of the Philippians.

 The first of those circumstances is that the Philippians have entered into partnership with him in the work of the gospel from the time that he first preached it among them to the present, by themselves proclaiming the gospel and by finding ways to practically support Paul and other believers as they share God’s good news. The second circumstance for which he expresses joy is that he is confident that God will continue to do his good work in and through the Philippian believers, good work which gives evidence of true faith.

*Whenever we see you at work, Lord, we are joyful. Amen.*

**Wednesday, September 2 Philippians 1:9-11**

*“That your love will overflow”*

 Paul’s basic request is that the Philippians’ love will steadily increase. The term “love” is not further limited or defined, but in the context of the rest of the letter we can assume that it refers to the love believers should have for one another. One of the ways in which such love increases is through “knowledge,” that is, knowledge of God’s commands that instruct believers in practical ways how to love one another. “Understanding” is the moral ability to apply that knowledge in such a way that love is the result.

 Should they love one another in this way, with godly “knowledge” and “understanding,” they will be able to determine what God’s best in any given situation is and, by doing it, they will be living “pure and blameless” lives that reflect the righteousness of Christ. Practically speaking, they will be able to determine from a variety of competing possibilities what God’s good and perfect and pleasing will is. By doing God’s will, they will be offering praise and glory to God.

*What matters most, Lord, is that we learn how to love one another well. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

August 31 – September 5

Philippians

**Thursday, September 3 Colossians 1:1-5**

*“We give thanks to God”*

 Paul adopted the custom in ancient letter writing of offering a prayer of thanks to the gods and transformed this convention by expanding it and filing it with Christian meaning. His thanksgiving is not some perfunctory nod to various divinities for blessings received and misfortunes averted. It is a prayer to be read aloud in Christian worship and thereby becomes a witness of Christian faith and a means of Christian instruction. Paul never trots out some stock, all-purpose prayer but carefully tailors it to the situation of the church he is addressing.

 Paul informs the Colossians that he regularly prays for the church and gives thanks for them in every prayer. More particularly, he is thankful for their faithful acceptance of the gospel, which has spilled over into their love for others. Their active love is a sign of a genuine faith based on a solid hope. The faith that Paul commends is not faith in general but faith in Christ Jesus. It refers specifically to the belief that God raised Jesus from the dead and that he offers all believers, Jew and Gentile, the same promise of life.

*We give thanks, Lord, when faith, hope and love are evident in your people. Amen.*

**Friday, September 4 Colossians 1:6-10**

*“The Good News is going out”*

 Paul is thankful for the universal impact of the gospel as it has sprouted up everywhere on earth, including Colosse. He notes how the gospel has swept across geographical and racial barriers. The message of God’s love for all humankind and Jesus’ sacrificial death to redeem us by grace speaks in any language or culture. It speaks to the universal condition of every human being – male or female, slave or free, Jew or Gentile (and whatever other divisions humans may create).

 Paul also gives thanks for Epaphras having laid a solid foundation for the Colossians in the true gospel. The gospel can only bear fruit successfully when people faithfully proclaim it and when others respond with understanding and obedience. Paul did not believe that as an apostle he was the only one qualified to preach the gospel. He was commissioned by God to preach to the Gentiles, but he could not be everywhere. He rapidly equipped his converts to spread the gospel in places where he could not go himself.

*Your gospel has spoken to me, Lord, addressing my unique life. Amen.*

**Saturday, September 5 Colossians 1:11-14**

 *“Joyfully giving thanks”*

 Paul gives two reasons for Christians to be joyfully thankful. First, we “share in the inheritance that belongs to God’s people.” Paul is drawing the connection between the Old Testament Israelites as the children of God through Abraham receiving the inheritance of the Promised Land, and Christians as the children of God through faith in Christ receiving the inheritance of the Kingdom of God. Just as the Israelites inherited a land “flowing with milk and honey” so believers have inherited a blessed relationship with their heavenly Father.

 Second, God has delivered us from a kingdom of darkness and brought us into the light. Immorality, anger, strife, vengeance, violence, and oppression thrive in the dark kingdom from which we have been rescued (just as the Israelites where rescued from the dark kingdom of Egypt). In the Kingdom of God, which we have entered through God’s Son, we experience immortality, kindness, companionship, support, healing, and liberty. This new kingdom is filled with God’s light, and its character is love.

*Because of Jesus Christ, I live in the light of your love, Lord. Amen.*