



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to everyone*

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## **“Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” Philippians 1:12-27 Series: *Philippians for Friendship***

Today is Part Two of our study of Philippians, which I am calling, “Philippians for Friendship”. Please find Paul’s letter to the Christians at Philippi chapter 1.

Let’s recap last week’s insights before we plunge into today’s text. There was a form people used when they wrote letters in those days. They began by putting their own name in as “sender”. This letter is “from Paul and Timothy” who immediately identify themselves as “servants of Christ Jesus”. Only after the sender was named would you find the addressees: “to all the saints who are in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with presbyters and deacons”. “Presbyters” can be translated as “elders”, “overseers” or “bishops”. Our “Presbyterian” denomination gets its name here—we are a church run by elders. After the formalities are done, Paul begins (as he does in many letters) with a word of thanksgiving or gratitude or praise.

Today we start in verse 12. Listen with me for God’s Voice to US TODAY, as I read verses 12-27, from the New International Version. *[text]*

What had happened to Paul? He was chained up—in prison, we think, in Rome at the end of his life. He had been arrested back in Jerusalem when a riot broke out *about him*, and was taken to Rome in about A.D. 61-63 because he had appealed his case to the Emperor, which he could do as a Roman citizen—probably his birthright from his father. He has been eager to go to the heart of the Empire, to bring the good news about Jesus to the very seat of power at that time. But he’s a prisoner, not a free man. While he waits—and it could be a long wait—visitors from the churches he had founded around the Empire had come to bring him food, financial support, clothing and personal items. Prisons in those days did not take any responsibility for caring for their prisoners; they only stored them securely. It was up to the friends and family of the prisoners to see after food and clothing or other needs. Visitors usually could come and go freely; not the prisoners, of course.

Paul wanted to make the most of his time. Writing letters to his “sons and daughters” in the churches he had founded became a powerful ministry. And we are so glad to have his correspondence! His letters give us unparalleled insights into his life and ministry, and into the world of the early churches.

But from verses 13 and 14, he hasn’t just been writing letters day after day. He has spoken boldly with the prison staff and auxiliary guards so that everyone in the place knows about Jesus. That’s quite a feat. But his influence has gone further. There are Christian house-churches in Rome as well, that had been founded by other traveling missionaries. The local Christians had heard about Paul’s arrival and deposit in prison, and also about Paul’s accomplishments for the Kingdom of God. They come and meet with him frequently; they see

him in ministry even while he is in chains. Paul's example has given more courage and determination to the local Christians, and they have become more active in telling people about Jesus, because of Paul! Paul does not see his incarceration as a setback; it's an opportunity to bring Christ to people who might never have heard the good news, because as prisoners and guards alike, they were out of public circulation for so long.

Verses 15-18 are interesting. Not everyone who "talks the talk" about Jesus is fully formed as a Christian, Paul says. Some seem to be preaching Christ out of selfish motives—to impress others, to feel virtuous, to be seen to be as good as Paul, himself. Well, that's *terrific*, Paul writes. So what if they are as full of themselves as they are of Jesus??!. Bottom line—more people hear about Jesus! Praise God for that!

Isn't that an amazing attitude?. Paul is not defensive or ticked off at people who are not sincere. He is very practical. Bring it on, he says. Let Jesus be proclaimed, whoever is the messenger!

I'm not sure we have the same attitude these days. We seem more stuck on the messenger. If a pastor who has built an active, growing church falls into sin (usually it's over "sex, power, or money"), we tend to discredit him and anything he has said and done. People are disillusioned. But they're disappointed in the messenger; have they even heard his message about Jesus, and connected with God, themselves? It makes me wonder. If they think the messenger is (or should be) Jesus, they are bound to be disappointed.

Look, all of us are members of "sinners anonymous", in recovery from our sinful attitudes and thought patterns. "Hi. I'm Ken, and I'm a sinner" [congregation: "Hi, Ken!"] Yes, you are, and so am I. So is every other Christian. We start to get in trouble when we stop "going to meetings", or start thinking "we're cured", or claiming "we never had that problem".

Now Paul launches into a serious subject—what is to become of him. He cannot know for sure, of course. His trial is still to come. He thanks the Philippians for their prayers, and trusts their prayers are powerful to help. (The word translated as "my deliverance" is the word he uses in other places for "salvation".) But Paul does not want to presume on God's grace. He's not into "name it and claim it" preaching, or that distortion called, "the prosperity gospel". The verdict, Paul knows, could go either way. So now he starts thinking out loud about the possibilities. (That shows me Paul was an extravert, like me—we often can't make a decision until we've heard ourselves speak it!)

He hopes he has courage to face whatever happens, and to keep faithful--never acting in a way to discredit Jesus. Whatever happens—life, or death.

He really seems almost indifferent about what to ask for from God. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (verse 21) What does he mean?

The word Paul uses for "to live" is "zo-eh". That's the word from which we get "zoo" and "zoology". Paul lives and breathes Jesus Christ. The word he uses for "gain" is the word merchants would use for "profit" in their business. To live or to die—Paul can't lose! Either way—he WINS!

Paul had "eternal life NOW" with God. He didn't have to wait until after his body gave out or its blood was taken. Paul had such a rich, ongoing relationship with God that he was "in

Christ” moment by moment. He often uses that phrase in his letters--“in Christ”. It’s more than verbally saying, “Jesus is my Savior and Lord”. Believing that and confessing that is just the beginning of a relationship with God. Conversion is like a wedding ceremony in a culture that arranges marriages between families; the bride and groom barely know each other on their wedding day. They assent to the marriage, the wedding ends—and now the relationship begins. They have so much to learn about each other! And by God’s grace, as they come to know each other more and more, they find a love that makes their vows strong and sure.

But as he talks this out on paper, he comes down on the side of staying with life so that he can continue to be useful to others. So he will continue to make his defense in whatever court he finds himself, and he looks forward to release and full freedom for ministry. But even if he should lose his case, he wins. Wow!

So having made that turn, he begins to look forward to being with the Philippians again—he won’t have to use letters to stay in touch. He starts to actively want to be with them; he begins to think about all he could do with and for them. He will grow them still more mature and in love with Jesus. He will increase their joy with his joy!

It made me think of some of the marks of spiritual vitality Paul listed in his letter to the Galatians—the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.” There is more he could have listed; he was just giving examples of the qualities that become more and more evident when someone has more and more of their lives infused with the Holy Spirit of God.

“Infused” olive oil or “flavored” vinegars are quite the trend among the gourmet set, these days. You see more bottles of these at craft fairs and gift shops. Well, these liquids are “infused”; they carry more and more of the flavor of, say, lemon, or basil. It makes them more interesting; they get your attention because they are different.

Our first foster son, Rick Holland, used to love “nacho cheese flavored Doritos”. I mean, love! He’d eat a whole bag, and it wasn’t long before you could smell the nacho cheese flavoring on him—around his mouth, on his hands, even in his sweat. Rick became so full of nacho cheese Doritos that he was infused with them, and everyone around knew Rick was there.

Do we carry more of the flavor of Jesus? Is our love, joy, peace, patience (and so on) so much greater than others around us?

Have we grown in these qualities, say, during the last year? If not, then that’s a sign we’ve had our attention in other places than on Jesus. Perhaps no one has known us well enough to point this out to us; but if someone would, then we would notice, and turn our eyes toward Jesus, to receive from God what makes for eternal life NOW.

Verse 27—Whatever happens, you live in a manner worthy of Christ. “Walk worthy”, is how it’s sometimes said. The word Paul uses for worthy” in this translation is *politeuomai*. We get our word “politics” from that root. To be a “citizen” of a Greek city-state, or of the Roman Empire, was a source of pride for these people, and set some apart with greater rights and privileges. So politeuomai means, “conduct yourself like a proper citizen”. But Paul uses this in the plural—“y’all”, as our Southern cousins would say. And because it’s plural, it means both “as individuals,” and “acting together”. Christians are citizens of God’s Kingdom—this was one of Jesus’ more frequent themes, and Paul picks up on it in Ephesians, chapter 2. So we might

better say this, “show yourself to be citizens of God’s Kingdom, TOGETHER AS ONE, fully “faithing” (trusting) in the good news of God’s love in Jesus.” “Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel. . . .”

Let’s sum up what we’ve discovered this morning in the last part of Philippians, chapter 1. We have learned more about Paul’s situation—in prison, probably in Rome. We’ve seen that even with Paul in chains in prison, the gospel’s penetration to others around him is not hindered. We also know about Paul’s attitude, and we’ve taken hold of his hope.

What’s the “take-away” from these verses? Probably there’s a lot more we ought to grow in our love and life “in Christ”. To be “in Christ” is to be “infused with Jesus” so much that we can taste him, moment by moment, and we give off an attractive, savory aroma of “the finest ingredients”, an aroma that draws people closer to Him, the source. How might you and I “stink pretty”, as my dad used to say. How might we “smell more like Jesus”?

When I was interning in Southern California in youth work, one Sunday I was invited with my supervisor over to a family home for dinner. As Mel and I walked up the steps, through the screen door came the aroma of the same pot roast, the same potatoes, carrots and onions that my mother made all the time when we were kids. Oh! That pulled me into the house. It attracted me—and took me back. What of Jesus can we offer, to draw people in and take them back to the One who loves them completely?

How much is his aroma penetrating you, so he comes through your life? For the aroma of Jesus to penetrate us, we have to be close to him, right? And it takes time for him to penetrate us enough so “we give off Jesus”. How close are you to Jesus, how often, how long?

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on June 28, 2009, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]