

## Philippians 1:1-11

Homily from Philippians chapter 1 verses 1-11 ONLY (Although we've read the whole of Philippians chapter 1 today we want now to concentrate on what God is saying to us just in the first 11 verses).

What do you long for? Really want more than anything else? What you dream about driving into town, or in the wee small hours of the morning. What are you working towards?

Some long for the Cowboys to win a Grand Final. Well, that's a worthy longing, but there are some others which might just be slightly more important – a longing to be accepted, a longing for peace and justice in our world and personal lives, a longing for a child or a life partner, a longing for a stable job and family life.

What we long for tells us a bit about us. An Eels fan would not have been longing for the Cowboys to win. A Cowboys fan will be longing for them to win by a huge margin.

We can tell what really matters to us by what we long for.

There are some really important surprises in what this means for God's people in this short part of the first chapter of St Paul's letter to the little church in the town of Philippi just to the north of Greece.

Listen to how he describes these brothers and sisters in Christ he is writing to – because it's true of all believers:

Our identity – which will impact what we long for is here: here's the first surprise:

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We are “saints” - “God’s holy people”.

Of course, since this was written the word saint has been skewed a bit to mean “a Christian great one” – but here it means ALL God’s people – which is why the modern translators use that phrase.

It doesn’t refer to how good they are, or how much they may have done for the Lord. It’s that the Lord has said: “I’ll have those ones” They are mine.

And here’s the second surprise. Paul describes himself as a slave: “Paul and Timothy, servants/SLAVES of Christ Jesus”.

Slaves because as a minister of the gospel he belongs body and soul to the Lord Jesus. He is at the beck and call of Jesus.

His life, his will, his longings, his interests are not his own – he is a slave of Jesus – as we all are! We are not our own – we were bought with a price.

And the third surprise is that we are all children of the Father. I don’t know if we realize how extraordinary it is to know God as our heavenly Father. The Jews in the Old Testament didn’t. And yet we, like the non-Jewish Philippian Christians do. Because Jesus is the Lord who has made it possible. We are much much more than a club for people who like getting up on Sundays to meet for church. We are family. We are the family of God our Father through the Lord Jesus Christ.

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So we share our joys and our sorrows. We stand with one another in the good times and the bad.

Like an earthly family we didn't choose who else belongs – God did. In fact, have you noticed that having God as our Father might be the only thing common to all of us? It's wonderful that through Jesus rich and poor, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, male and female, old and young, plumbers and professors, childless and family members – through Jesus all are members of the family of God.

And here we notice that Paul has great joy to share as he writes.

*I always pray with joy when I pray for you (verse 3). Why?*

Again, there are three surprising reasons:

1. What he calls their partnership in the gospel. As we read on in this letter we discover that he's talking about the elephant in the room for so many churches: money! The Philippian Christians had shown they were family with Paul by supporting him financially. They had sent him cash when he needed it, and had done so gladly and generously. An old American preacher once said that usually the last part of a person to be converted is their hip-pocket nerve. Well, these people had shown they were real Christians by opening their wallets or money bags and handing over what was needed for Paul to keep telling people about Jesus. And that is a great joy for many ministers and missionaries today – that God's people partner with them in the gospel by giving to support them so they can tell others about Jesus.

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2. And now comes a second surprise: God finishes what he starts. “*I am confident that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of Christ*”. You see, it’s not just that the Christian life begins with God opening us up to the message about Jesus. That’s the way it is from now on. Left to ourselves we wouldn’t and we couldn’t keep going. Left to themselves the Philippians would not and could not have kept on supporting Paul. Left to himself, and as he writes, stuck in jail for preaching about Jesus, Paul would not have kept going.

But he did, they did and we do, because “*he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of Christ*”. Isn’t that amazing? What it means is that as his people work out what it means to be Christians in their day to day lives, their involvement in the family of God and wider world, God is working. As we will read in chapter 2: “*God is at work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*”. Living for Christ is NOT a Mission Impossible. Because God is at work in us.

3. And the third surprise that causes such great joy is that the family of God – no matter what their lives are like, share with one another in the grace of God. “*Whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me*”.

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What this means is that belonging to God our Heavenly Father through the Lord Jesus Christ is something that rises above everything else. Paul says, it doesn't matter whether I'm stuck here in chains - or I'm out and about telling people of Jesus; no matter whether you are working at your trade, bringing up your family or digging in the fields, serving the emperor, or a slave in a noble household – I rejoice that you and I still share in the grace of God. The love, the mercy, the kindness of God, the undeserved forgiveness of our sins, the breathtaking belonging to the God of all as our Father – doesn't drop away as we leave church. No, as he goes on to say, no matter what we are involved in: *“all of you share in God's grace with me”*.

So what? Here is his longing, his desire above everything else:

*<sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, <sup>10</sup> so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. (NIV)*

What do you long for?

I tell you, this joy we read about here is what I long for! That God's people everywhere – but specially us - we will see our love more and more filled with the truth of God's word;

Our lives growing in character like our pure and blameless master.

And lives more and more reflecting we belong to God through Jesus.

And all to his glory and praise. Amen and Amen.