

Who are we? What do we own?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 September 2024

Preacher: Nathan Davis

[0 : 00] Turn to Philippians chapter 4 and we'll read from God's word together. My name's Nathan and let me add my welcome, especially if you're new here today, it's great to have you with us.

Philippians chapter 4, reading from verse 8. Verse 8. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound.

In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

[1 : 19] Yet, it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment and more.

I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. A fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Let's pray. Dear loving Father, help us to listen carefully to your word.

[2 : 31] Enlighten our hearts through your spirit to live lives of holiness. Amen. Well, it's great to be here together this morning, isn't it? It's a joy to gather together and spend time as a family.

As partners in fellowship. As citizens of heaven awaiting our saviour. And as we come to the end of Philippians, it's helpful to remind ourselves of this.

To remember who we are. That's what God has been teaching us through Philippians, isn't it? Who we are and what we own. You'll hopefully remember.

That's how we kicked things off when we started this series a few months ago. These have been the two beams undergirding the book of Philippians. The two questions that this book is about.

Who we are and what do we own. And who are we? Well, we're citizens of heaven. We're partners, co-owners, teammates, brothers and sisters of one another.

[3 : 32] And together we own, well, plenty. There's tons that we own as citizens of heaven. We own the gospel, the spirit, the mind of Christ. We have Christ himself.

And hopefully you remember from a few weeks ago. We saw exactly how much of a gain Christ is compared to the garbage of all else. But we also have Christ's righteousness.

We share each other. We have joy and peace. The resurrection from the dead. We own salvation. Our treasures are boundless.

But Paul doesn't stop there. And as he brings this letter to a close and shares his final words, Paul has four final things to say. Four things to clarify what bearing our heavenly citizenship has while we remain here on earth.

In light of everything he has said up to this point, he has four things he wants the Philippians and us to know. Four ways of living, as we'll see, that is empowered by who we are and what we already own.

[4 : 38] And if you've got the bulletin in front of you, you'll be able to see our plan for this morning. I think I forgot to include the verses, the verse breakdown for each section. So just quickly, point one, disciplined citizens.

That's verses eight and nine. The next section, contented citizens. That's from verses 10 to 13. Point three, generous citizens from 14 to 20. And then our final point, welcome citizens, is from verse 21 to the end.

And at some point we'll conclude in some way. So, first up, Paul appeals for citizenly discipline. To think and act in a way befitting of our heavenly citizenship.

And straight up, I'm sure you'll notice the parallel of those two verses. Two lists culminating in an action. Let's read from verse eight. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable.

If there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things.

[5 : 50] Think and do. Thought and practice. In light of our heavenly citizenship, we are to think and act differently. Our thoughts are to be consumed by what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise.

And I think in light of the rest of Philippians, this is for two important reasons. Firstly, because that is who we are. That is the mind we already have.

We share in the mind of Christ. Christ's humble mind of chapter two, we are to have. Our identity in Christ flips our thinking on its head.

Who we are in Christ completely changes how we think. We are no longer deceived by the lie of this world that God isn't God. Our hearts are no longer darkened and our thinking no longer futile.

We have been made pure and lovely in the eyes of God. It would be contrary to who we are for our thinking to not align with that.

[6 : 56] Now, I'm not speaking of the way that our world talks about positive thinking, where no matter what, if you believe hard enough, you can manifest what you want. Where what you believe doesn't really have to line up with reality.

But no, what is true, honorable, and just, this is reality. Of course, we're not to neglect the bad things that happen, but through them to think on and remind ourselves of how good God is and the amazing promises he has given us.

And secondly, the second reason that our thoughts are to be pure and true is because our minds are an essential part of finishing the race and reaching Christ.

There's so much mindset language throughout Philippians. Back in chapter three from verse 13, Paul speaks of the importance of having his thoughts set on Christ.

From verse 13, Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

[8 : 05] Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that to you. Sorry, God will reveal that also to you.

When we set our minds on what is earthly and complain about everything bad around us and focus on the unlovely, it distracts us from reaching Christ.

Our focus gets distracted from him and we lose sight of the prize that is waiting for us. But when we set our minds on Christ and delight in him and focus on what is beautiful and excellent, it gives us a right perspective and a joy to keep running for him.

However, thinking by itself isn't enough. Thought and practice go hand in hand. As important as thinking is, a changed thought life needs to lead to changed actions.

We need to live differently as well. And how are we to live? Well, in imitation of those who taught us what is true and honourable and pure.

[9 : 09] So, yes, on one hand, that's Paul as we see his life and his teaching throughout the New Testament. But, of course, it's not only Paul because we haven't seen his life the way that the Philippians had.

But we do have godly brothers and sisters who we are also to imitate. Our elders, our teachers, our leaders, those of us in Christ who are also straining forward and striving towards the prize of Christ. Those who will consistently point us forward to Christ and to love him. To keep thinking and acting as a citizen of heaven. And we are not left alone in this either.

Our God, the God of peace, is with us. His peace means that we can think about what is true and lovely and pure. His peace calms our anxiousness that easily distracts us from these things.

The peace that he has made with us has transformed our minds to be able to know what is true and good and honourable. His peace empowers us to think and act.

[10:18] As his children. Okay, let's keep going. Point two. Contented citizens. Let's read from verse 10. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

You were indeed concerned for me but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound.

In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Now of the many things that our world struggles with in this day and age contentment surely must be right near the top.

But Paul isn't writing to the world, is he? He's writing to Christians. To us. Our world is so saturated by comfort, technology and ambition that discontentment easily sneaks into our Christian lives and churches.

Almost without noticing. I mean, the entire advertising industry is built on discontentment, isn't it? I'm not satisfied with what I've currently got and ooh, that looks good, so why not get it?

[11:31] It's in our phones, our TVs, on our buses and trains. It's everywhere. Which makes it all the more dangerous. Because being content is almost just a part of what it means to live in the West.

And it's why we need to take so much care in this. Discontentment quickly breeds resentment and jealousy. And turns our heart from the riches of the gospel.

And it is as much a danger for those with abundance and plenty as it is for the low, the hungry and the needy. But Paul's solution here, it's not to seek middle ground.

He isn't telling us to seek an average income as if that would protect us from pride or greed. No, Paul knows how to be poor. He knows how to be hungry.

How to be in need. He hasn't just faced those situations. He has learned how to be content in them. And he knows how to be content in wealth and riches and abundance. And how?

[12:33] Well, by knowing that which he already owns. By knowing that which poverty and all riches could never take away. Through knowing Christ, strengthened by him.

However, it's not the strength to break out of our current situation to reach a better one or a divine freedom to do whatever our sinful hearts might want. Which unfortunately is sometimes how verse 13 is read and taught.

No, this is much more profound. This is contentment for our current situation. We can clearly see from the verses that come before verse 13 that it's not an ability to break out of his current situation in order to then be content.

No, Paul is content no matter what situation he finds himself in. In Christ is the strength for contentment in whatever situation and circumstance we might be in.

And perhaps it seems a bit of an odd connection that Paul makes between strength and contentment. But Christ's strength is not just the power for us to grit and bear it, but the resolve to realize that he is of surpassing worth.

[13:44] His strength provides so much more security than any worldly position could ever bring. That in abundance or need, he is the only one who can truly satisfy.

However, as we move on to our next section, quite a big question is then raised. If Paul is able to be content in each and every circumstance, then why be generous? Shouldn't we all just be content and not bother with being generous?

Can I just be content with my riches over here and you with your poverty over there and get on with life? Well, of course, there must be more to it than that because despite Paul's contentment, he still rejoices in the concern and giving of the Philippians.

We see that back in verse 10. And also from verse 14, we see Paul's thankfulness for their generosity and partnership in the gospel. Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.

And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

[14:52] Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again. From the beginning of the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles, as soon as they could, the Philippians were right there with Paul, eager to contribute to the spread of the gospel and the work Paul was doing.

Earnest to share even what little they had, as we see in 2 Corinthians chapter 8. To joyfully give towards the needs of others. Generous with not only their finances, but their people and their time as well.

Remember how Epaphroditus risked his life to complete the Philippian service to Paul. Yet it is not the gift itself that Paul is thankful for.

Read with me from verse 17. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment and more.

I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. Paul's thankfulness is not for the gift, but the fruit of their giving.

[16:02] He delights in their gospel partnership, their investment in things of eternal value. He rejoices not because he needs their generosity, but because they do. He rejoices in their mindset of ownership of the gospel and their willingness to use all the resources at their disposal to see it go forth.

Their concern for the heavenly kingdom that drives them to use their earthly riches in pursuit of it. Paul is rejoicing because they are living in line with who they are, because they invest in not as earthly citizens, but as citizens of heaven.

And not only is Paul delighted in their generosity, but God is too. Their gift is a fragrant offering, a sacrifice pleasing to God. As we generously give our money, our time and our energy to the work of the gospel and to those in need, it pleases God.

It wafts up to him like a sweet aroma, delighting him like a fragrant perfume or a smell of a deliciously home-cooked meal. And as we think about that for a minute, that's crazy, isn't it?

The fact that our very insignificant riches could be used to please the one who owns everything, that seems to barely make any sense. But they do. They do please him.

[17:25] God delights in us when we use what he has given us for the good of his people and his kingdom. He takes pleasure when we love what he loves and partner in the work of his gospel.

He loves it when we invest our temporary treasures for eternal rewards. And bring returns it does. This is the highest yield investment you could ever make.

Let's keep reading from verse 19. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

Amen. God opens up the riches of his treasure room to provide for every need of ours. God is so much more generous towards us than we could ever be.

He is a good father who loves to give good gifts to his children. And in his generosity, he has given us life. He has given us salvation. His son through whom we have forgiveness. His spirit by whom we are brought into God's family.

[18:28] Peace, satisfaction, joy, purpose in one another. According to his unending riches in glory, God provides for every need of ours until he calls us home and we behold the unfettered glory of Christ.

It is his generosity that enables us to generously partner with gospel work as we work together to proclaim Christ's kingdom. Our generosity towards one another is but a mild imitation of the lavish generosity he has shown to us already.

But like the Philippians' generosity towards Paul, our generosity is as important for our sake as it is for those we are generous to. As we give towards the work of our church, towards missionaries, to MTS or AFES, to those in need, it matures and grows us, producing fruit in us as it pleases God. Which brings us to our final section. Let's read from verse 21. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. In his final words, Paul exhorts us to remember the kingdom of believers that we are a part of. The grace that our Lord Jesus has shared with us, which we see in verse 23, that grace brings us into a community with one another.

[19 : 59] That is who we are. Being a citizen of heaven means that we are part of the citizenry of heaven. We are deeply connected with one another as we strive on in the gospel.

Even with people we've never met, such as with Caesar's household and the Philippians. Now, as Roy mentioned earlier, the pastoral team and us MTs headed down south of Sydney this past week to the FIAC National Conference.

Four days of hearing talks from Gary Miller and being encouraged to continue going forth in gospel ministry and hearing the news about old and new churches across Australia. It was great.

And I don't just tell you this to raise your FOMO or make you sad that you weren't there. I think it would have been fantastic if we all could have headed down. But I say this because, yes, we are in fellowship with one another here at SLBC, but we're also in direct fellowship with 60 churches across Australia as part of the FIAC.

We are in gospel partnership with them. And they send their greetings. The Saints of Coast Evangelical Church enforced to send their greetings. The brothers and sisters at Cross and Crown, both on the Gold Coast and in Melbourne, share their love.

[21 : 12] The family at EV Church on the Central Coast want to encourage us to persist on together. Campus Bible Church from all the way over in Perth rejoice at our partnership. The growing church plant, City North Church in Glenorchy, Tasmania, are deeply encouraged by their fellowship with us.

The Saints at Crossroad Church in Canberra encourage us to keep boldly proclaiming Christ. And there's so many more. There are hundreds and thousands of faithful believers across Australia that we are intimately partnered together with, all striving together to take the gospel forth into the world around us.

This is what it means to be a citizen of heaven. This is who we are. And as through Jesus' grace, we were welcomed into the kingdom, so too are we to show hospitality and love to our fellow saints, welcoming them as our own.

But it's about time to wrap up. And as we do, let's remind ourselves of how we started. Not just today, but how we started this series. Who are we and what do we own? And then, well, what does that mean for the now?

How do we live as citizens of the new creation while not yet in the new creation? Well, we are citizens of heaven. While we remain on earth, our true home is with the Lord Jesus.

[22 : 32] And we own the gospel. We have the mind of Christ and we share each other. But we also have the God of peace with us. Through him, we can think and act in line with who we are as heavenly citizens, distinct from the world around us.

We have the strength of Christ through which we can be content in each and every situation. We have the blessings generously given to us from the heavenly treasure room. A rich treasure that gives us confidence to share with others in a generosity that is pleasing to God.

And we have the grace of our Lord Jesus which brings us into the kingdom of his people. A glorious citizenship that deeply cares for and loves one another.

An eternal fellowship with each other and with our Lord Jesus that surpasses any earthly allegiance. Let's continue to joyfully partner together in bold proclamation of the gospel until our Lord Jesus calls us home.

Let's pray. Dear gracious God of peace, thank you that we are citizens of your kingdom. Change our thoughts and ways in accordance with our true identity.

[23 : 45] Satisfy us with Christ, not vainly seeking after the temporary things of this world, but seeking to share what we have for the good of your kingdom. Help us to love and welcome your people and rejoice in who we are.

As we wait for the return of our Lord Jesus, help us to partner together in proclaiming the gospel. Amen. Amen.