

Blessed Assurance.
Philippians 1:1-7

Hymns: Blessed Assurance
It is well with my Soul
Responsive: Psalm 23
Bible Reading: Ephesians 1:1-14
1st John 3:18-24

So this has been an interesting week and I have had many things on my mind. I told Diana I had songs picked for this week, one being Blessed Assurance to which she promptly replied.. “We sang that last week” To which I responded, “Well, no matter we are singing it again.” This song has been echoing in my head all week, along with the account of Paul and Silas in Philippi that we went over last week.

Scripture records that while imprisoned in Philippi they sang hymns, and praised God. We do not know what they sang, or what the hymns of their day were, but I imagine they wouldn't be far different than the 2 that we sang this morning. Their songs of praise and worship echoing down the corridors of the prison and while of course it was neither of these songs we sang today I can imagine that theirs were much of the same message. While there, in prison they did not worry for they had the blessed assurance that Jesus was with them.

This has been going round and round in my head this week, I am one who does not usually pay much attention to lyrics in the music I listen to, and even the hymns that we sing have become so familiar and routine that often times I do not think much upon the lyrics. But with the way this week has been the lyrics of this song have been a great comfort to me as try to sort through and process everything.

Apart from some of the trials of this week, my mind has been consumed by a request, and at this point I feel it is less of a request as it is a requirement. That's right, Vic, I am talking about you! He informed me when we were there in Illinois that I have now been promoted to be the main speaker at his funeral. I am honored, and scared to death! Having not attended a funeral for probably 17 years or so, I don't even know what one really looks like. I have made it a practice to not go to funerals, to which I have caught a lot of flack for, but we all grieve differently and I prefer to grieve in silence and alone. That being said, I have a sneaky suspicion that Vic probably is aware of this and wants me to speak just so I have to be there! It is Lucky for me though, he is likely to live forever.

Joking aside, The reason why I bring this up here, is because with that request, comes a demand, that the message is not about him, but about Christ. Ever since then I have been wracking my brain, I don't even know what a funeral message is supposed to be like! Then in the midst of this, this week happened. And in God's providence we sang Blessed Assurance last week which is probably why it popped into my head and as I have been thinking about it, this has been a comfort, for no matter what goes on, or happens our faith and our life is in Christ.

Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine oh what a foretaste of glory divine. Through out any trial, any temptation, even in death, we overcome and can shout Blessed Assurance, because Jesus is mine. That is why I said I picture Paul and Silas singing this song. No matter what happens to us, we know that we are heirs of Salvation, purchased of God. Born of his spirit and washed in his blood.

As John said, Abide in Christ, and when he comes we can have confidence and not be ashamed, Christ is our assurance, his work on the cross has secured our adoption, we are now son's and daughters of God, and we are heir's to his promises. We are born of the spirit, we have this new birth, the shame, and the punishment for our sin's have been nailed to the cross and we are now washed in the blood of our savior Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 10:19-25. "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he consecrated for us, through the veil, that is his flesh, and having a high priest over the house of God. Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful, and let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much more as you see the day approaching.

Full assurance of faith, by which we can come before God by the blood of his Son Jesus Christ. As the song says, "oh what a foretaste of glory divine." One day we will see glory, one day we will be in the very presence of our savior, but now we have this foretaste, this teaser of glory that we have with Christ now,

Ok, enough of that now.. on to Philippians 1. Last week we looked at the account in acts that followed Paul's first journey here to Philippi. Now, we see a few years have past and there appears to be a rather vibrant church here in this city to which Paul writes to. This is another fairly short book, only being 4 chapters so it will probably not take us too long to go through it. Let's turn to Philippians this morning, starting in verse 1 we are going to be looking at the first few verse's

First thing of note here, is that in the first verse the translation we use says that Paul and Timothy are Bond servants of Jesus Christ. While on just a quick surface reading of this verse it seems pretty plain and simple but the reality is this phrase has a rather deep theological meaning.

Some translations like to translate the word that is used here, Doulos to soften it a bit, it is often translated as servant, here we see in the New King James it is translated as bond servant, or in other words, slave. There is a rather stark difference between a servant and a slave making this an important distinction here in this verse. A servant merely gives service to someone, while a slave is owned by someone.

In fact I think the translation we have here saying bond servant even takes some off of it. While for all intense purposes a bond servant in the time of the Roman empire, was a slave. A bond servant was someone who could voluntarily put themselves into servitude under a person. Often done because of debt toward this individual. But if we are to look at this biblically, I think even understanding it as bond servant, someone who willfully chooses, or allows themselves to become slaves to someone is not an entirely accurate picture here. The entire gospel is clear, and as Paul wrote in Romans 9: starting in verse 9.

"For this is the word of promise: At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this, but when Rebekah also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac, (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election

might stand, not of works but of Him who calls.) It was said to her, the older shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob I have loved but Esau I hated. What shall we say then, Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly Not! For He says to Moses, I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion. So then, it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

Or if we go over to Ephesians 2 starting in verse 8. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh who are called uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision made in flesh by hands- that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

We have been bought, we have been paid for. As Paul said in Romans it is not of our will, or our works, but of God who shows grace and mercy. We do not decide to give ourselves up to be bond servants to Christ. We have been bought by the blood of Christ. We were not free people who decided to become bond servants to Christ, but rather we were slaves to sin, death and the world. Being controlled by our own selfish lusts and desires. But Christ has purchased us from this bondage of death, but to life, not just to be slaves in servitude but as Son's and joint heirs with him. Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine!

So with that in mind, we can look at this first verse here and it just explodes with meaning, and doctrinal significance. "Paul and Timothy, slaves of Jesus Christ." The bible uses this term quite often, we tend to want to soften it in our translations to say servant, really that misses the entire point. Those of us who claim to be Christians, the reality is, that our life is not our own, we have been bought, with blood and we now owe all to Christ.

It really puts our relationship with Christ into perspective. This idea that we can believe in God, that we can accept Jesus but yet not see him as lord over us is not supported by scripture at all. It is false belief gone to seed breeding churches full of deceived followers who have not truly been born of the spirit, but are rather born of their own will. IF we truly are Christs, then he is our Lord. We have been bought, and as Paul says, we are now slaves to Christ.

This goes back again, to everything we have studied thus far, those who are Christs, will be Christlike. Those who have been adopted as son's, will have the traits of their father. You either still slaves to sin and the world and your father is the devil, or you have been adopted by God, bought and paid for to be freemen, and heirs with Christ.

So I guess that begs the question, if we are adopted children who have been freed from the bondage of sin, then why does Paul refer to himself as a Slave to Christ if we are indeed free, and children of Christ. I think the use of the term slave is a proper one to denote this very point, that while we are now children, free from the bondage of the world that does not make completely free agents, but rather we owe all to Christ, he is our Lord and Master, so it is not an improper use of the term to refer oneself a slave to Christ.

Next we see here in the first verse Paul refers to the Philippian believers as Saints. We don't

need to spend a lot of time going over the terminology used here, for we already understand that this term is not being used as the Catholic church uses it today, but rather it is just a way to address those who are set apart, or those who are holy, in other words, Christians. The Catholic church likes to use this term, and grant it as a title to those they deem have reached some sort of moral achievement.

But as we have seen already, our life in Christ has nothing to do with our moral achievements, our status is in Christ himself, it is his holiness imputed, or applied to us that sets us apart from the world. Karl Barth put it this way, “Holy people” are unholy people, who nevertheless as such have been singled out, claimed, and requisitioned by God for his control, for his use, for himself who is holy. Their holiness is and remains in Christ Jesus. It is in him that they are holy; it is from this point of view that they are to be addressed as such, in no other respect.

Continuing on, verse 3. “I thank God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer making request for you all with joy.” How often do we thank God for all that he has done for us? I think often times we don't think upon all the things that God has done for us. We are like children, and those of us who have had small children understand the work, and the frustration that goes into providing and doing every little thing for them and there is rarely a thanks Mom and Dad for all you do providing for me, instead its, I need this, or I want that, When we approach God I think often times we are much like our own children, God provides the very breath that we have, yet we approach him asking him to give us more, telling him what we want, or what we think that we need with out much regard to what he has and is already doing for us.

In the book *Death by Living*, ND Wilson captures the sense, and a greater scope of all that we are to be grateful for, and it helps to show how much we truly do owe to our sovereign Lord.

He writes. “As the earth screams through space, balanced exactly on the edge of everyone burning alive and everyone freeing solid, as we shriek through deadly obstacle courses of meteor showers and find them picturesque, as the nearest fiery star vomits eruptions hundreds of times bigger than our little planet, giving chipper local weathermen northern lights to chatter about, as a giant reflective rock glides around us slopping the seas, and as we ride in our machines, darting past fools and drunks and texting teenagers, how many times do we thank God?

We are always in his hands, but we often feel like we are in our own. We can't thank him for every breath and every heartbeat but we can thank him every day for not splatting us with the moon or letting us drop into the sun. When a drunk crushes some family, some mother, or some friend; when a story ends, then we wake up. It is then that we turn to God with confused expressions, wanting to know why he was sleeping in the boat.

God brought us here from nothing; is he ever allowed to take us to an exit? His own Son died young, do you think He doesn't understand? Moses did not see the promised land, Samson died blind in the rubble, Stephen beneath stones, Paul without a head, Peter upside down. In a bed, or on the battlefield, or on asphalt in shattered glass beneath a flashing light, we are all God's stories to end.

How many drunks has he spared you from? Thank Him before you ask him to spare you from another. How many breaths have you drawn? How many winter winds have tightened your skin? How many Christmases have you seen? How many times as the sky swirled glory above your head like a benediction? See it, Hear him, Thank Him. Ask for more. Search for moments in your story for which you can be grateful...gratitude is liberation. We are all mortals, called into this narrative in this time stream without our consent. And we will all reach and end. See the gifts, And if they seem sparse start counting. Omit nothing. Can you even count that high? You may have less than others do, like the widow who only had 2 small coins in the temple. God had given her little, but what did she do with her

little that God had given?

In all things, through famine, through feast, through sickness and health, through trials and deliverance thank God! Paul said he counted it Joy to be worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ. He sang hymns and praised God while in prison, he did not focus on his own problems but praised God for all he had given.

A church now exists in this city of Philippi, where only a few women gathered by a tree outside to pray to a God they did not know. Humanly speaking Paul's journey to Philippi in acts would have looked like a failed mission trip. He spent days there, was thrown in prison and all that there was to show for it was the conversion of Lydia's household, and the Jailer's household. As I reflect on this I am reminded of how we are here in American Churches with our mind toward missionaries. Or even our own services.. we want to see results, we want to see the numbers.

A missionary reports that they have been working in a village for years and they can confidently claim to have seen 1 family turn their lives to Christ, and churches start to weigh if the investment of their ministry is worth it, all the money we spent over those years and all there is, is a family? Or how often have we heard it, if a church is not constantly adding members their role, then they must be doing something wrong, they must be a dead church that God is not blessing or using anymore.

Yet look at Philippi, The key here, is to understand that it is God's work not mans. It is God who calls, it is God who adopts his children, it is God who adds to the church, It is because of this that Paul in his letter to them can say in verse 6. " being confident of this very thing, this very thing being the ministry that they have there, this fellowship in the gospel that he mentions in verse 5. Being confident in this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Is your church small? Have you been in the mission field for years with little to show for it? Have to witnessed to friends and family to only feel like your talking to brick walls instead of people? Do not concern yourself with it, keep going, preach the word, witness for Christ even if like Paul it ends up putting you in prison, or Stephen who was stoned to death. Paul's imprisonment lead to the conversion of the Philippian Jailer, and Stephen's death I am sure had a great impact on the life of Paul. You don't know what God has in store for you, how he may use the very thing that you are suffering through as a witness to those around you.

We should not worry and fret over our own lives, God has a purpose and plan for us....here it is, Your purpose driven life, That purpose, and that plan is that you worship Him, you share his good news, as Paul said, we are his workmanship, and he who has begun a good work in you will complete it.

Our life, our story isn't going to end until the day that God has appointed to end it. Christ is our confidence, Christ is our assurance, Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine, Oh what a foretaste of glory divine. Heir of Salvation, purchased of God, born of his spirit, washed in his blood.

Let us go forth today with a renewed spirit, trusting God in all things. Let us not focus on your plight, or our struggles, but instead... praise God, give him thanks that he hasn't yet caused this rock we live on to smash into the sun or spin wildly into space. Let us be determined not to think like children toward our father who provides all, begging, whining, and complaining for more, but rather be thankful and rejoice for all that he has done.