**BCM Bible Study: January 23/24, 2019**

**Philippians 1:1-11: Devotion and the Process of Salvation**

Catching Up

Start by catching up about Christmas break, asking intentionally spiritual questions along with more light-hearted ones. If needed, here are some starter questions:

* What was Christmas like with your family? How much is faith a part of your family’s celebration?
* How restful was your break? Did you feel like you got the chance to connect with anyone (family, friends, dog, etc.) in a meaningful way?
* Did you have any impactful spiritual moments over the break?

Set the Tone

Take a minute to set the tone for the semester. Communicate your personal goals and hopes for them as a group and as individuals. This is a good opportunity to set the bar high for attendance and commitment. You can say something like “My hope is that everyone will prioritize this time together each week, because I think the more consistent everyone is, the better we get to know one another, and the more we will grow together.” Be excited – that is infectious!

Introduction

Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians during his imprisonment in Rome in 62 AD. The Philippian church was the first European church that Paul founded; the story is recounted in Acts 16 – you may recall the conversion of the Philippian jailer and Lydia’s household. It is clear throughout the letter that Paul has a particularly warm, personal relationship with the church. They had sent him a financial gift through Epaphroditus (4:18) and Paul is writing not only to express his thanks, but to encourage the Philippians to live a God-honoring life as modeled by the attitude and life of Christ. This is the overarching theme of Philippians: “to live and die according to the pattern of the sufferings, death, resurrection, and glorious exaltation of Jesus himself.” (ESV Study Bible)

It is also important to note that Philippi was very Roman in culture and lacked significant Jewish presence. This does not mean that Paul never alludes to the Old Testament, but he never quotes it directly. Worship of the emperor was widely popular with its rituals and celebrations impacting almost every part of life – worshipping God would have had an ostracizing effect. (Anchor Bible)

Greeting: **Read Phil. 1:1-2**

* Paul departs from his typical convention of calling himself an apostle, and refers to himself and Timothy (a co-author or influencer of the letter) as **servants** or **slaves.** These words have certain connotations in the United States that would have been foreign to first century Philippians. An important passage that helps us gain insight into Paul’s meaning comes during the heart of this letter: **Read Phil. 2:3-11**.
  + From this passage, what does it mean to be a “servant” of God?
* There are many aspects of being a servant that do not apply here – for example, living in oppression and being owned by someone. Rather, the most appropriate connotation is **DEVOTION**: to be a slave of God is to be profoundly devoted or committed to serving the interests of God, even to the detriment of our own self interests. In a culture of social self-promotion as the means of financial gain and prestige, this was a counter-cultural message.
  + How does this connect to our own culture? In what way is this message still counter-cultural?
* Paul calls the church **saints**, which means that they are people set-apart for the service of God. In effect, Paul is saying, “you are with me in this role of servitude and devotion.”
  + In what way is this calling difficult for you? In what way are you sensing that your devotion to God will be or needs to be counter-cultural?

Prayer and Thanksgiving: **Read Phil. 1:3-11**

* What is the “good work” that Paul mentions in verse 6?
* Why is Paul sure that God has begun this work?
  + Salvation is not just a momentary event of being declared “saved” – that is simply the beginning. Rather, salvation is the lifelong process of becoming more like Christ that will be complete only when Jesus returns (note v.6 and 10 “day of Christ” refers to the Jesus’ Second Coming). On that day, all will be restored and men and women will then be as God intended.
    - How has your life changed since becoming a Christian?
    - How can remembering this give you hope and assurance during times of doubt or frustration with yourself?
    - How does the future hope of completed salvation impact you now?
* Paul intertwines love and knowledge in v.9 In Paul’s letters, “knowledge” generally refers to knowledge of God or the truth, especially that which leads to salvation or spiritual growth. Consider this statement: “The apostle cares not for any (false) knowledge that fails to issue in love. But it is just as important to reflect that Paul does not view love as mindless. Quite the contrary: knowledge is the way of love.”
  + In what way will Christian love look different than the way society expresses love?
  + When is it difficult for you to love others? How can you leverage the Christian knowledge that you have to foster more genuine love for others?

**Tangent Alert:** These verses look like Paul is calling for some sort of spiritual perfection when Christ returns, but remember a couple of things. First, Paul says in v.9 that he wants their love to continually abound – he is talking about perpetual progress. Second, this is something that will happen completely **only** on the day of Christ. The fruit of righteousness only comes *through* Christ, so it is not something we can attain on our own. The confusing phrase is “pure and blameless **for** the day of Christ.” The phrasing is awkward in English, but in general the word refers to **something that is already happening, which continues until a certain time** (the day of the Lord, in our case). Since perfection is not happening now, perfection is not expected. However, it is important not to water down the Biblical call to holiness. We are called to be holy as God is holy, knowing that spiritual progress comes from God alone.