

# CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Sermon-Based Study Guide  
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church  
Philippians 4.10-23 | November 22, 2020

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## I. Introduction to this Study

In this, our final week of engaging Paul's letter to the Philippians, we encounter Paul's desire to say "Thank You" to his partners in ministry in Philippi. While it seemed like he was concluding his letter at least twice before (in 3.1 and 4.8: note the word "finally"), some scholars have wondered whether these final verses were the sole purpose for the letter in the first place! While that may be an overestimation, they should not be glossed over either.

In these final verses, Paul states that as a result of God's goodness he is "content whatever the circumstances," and furthermore, that he "rejoices greatly" with the Philippians' ongoing generosity. Interestingly, we never see the Apostle to the Gentiles explicitly say "Thank You," due in part to how that would have been heard by the original audience, as we will see below.

## II. Connecting with One Another

This coming week many of us will celebrate Thanksgiving. Doing so provides us an opportunity to reflect on the many things we have to be grateful for.

Even in a year like this one, what are you grateful for?

## III. Study the Text

- a. In this final week of our series, it may be meaningful for you to read through the whole of Paul's letter again, recalling what we have engaged this fall. Compare some of the first verses with the last, where Paul expresses his affection and concern for the church he helped begin.

Begin by reading **Philippians 4.10-16**. Then turn back to **1.3-11**. What similarities do you see between these passages? Due to translation from Greek, some linguistic connections are not as obvious in English – just look for overall similarities in theme.

1.3/4.10:

1.5/4.15:

1.6/4.13:

1.7/4.14:

1.7/4.10:

- b. Why would Paul return to similar concepts and themes already alluded to at the outset of his letter?
- c. Notice that Paul does not specifically say "Thank You." In short, offering thanks in first century Greco-Roman culture would imply that he was still in need and, as such, would



welcome more gifts. What's more, it would imply that he was in their debt and would somehow repay them.

As such, Paul uses terminology that reflects not thanks for a financial gift, but rather language that would imply thanks for a letter. Then, he goes on invoking language of friendship and partnership, instead of patronage. Lastly, Paul invites the Philippians to see their giving not as gifts to him personally, but rather as gifts to the Lord.

Have you ever sensed a kind of "mandatory reciprocal giving" (where you receive something and feel that, in turn, you must give something back)?

Why do you think Paul would feel the need to halt such transactional giving?

- d. Some Christian athletes, who see God as their "strength" during competition, have alluded to **Philippians 4.13**. Of course, they are right to do so, though if we read verses 12-13 together, we may get a different sense from the context.

Is physical strength what Paul is seeking to communicate here? How would you summarize these two verses in your own words?

How has God been your strength in the midst of difficulty? How – if at all – could you more fully rely upon His strength in times of difficulty?

- e. Read **Philippians 4.14-19**. We again see Paul's desire to distance himself as the sole recipient from the Philippians' gift as well as to declare that their generosity has been seen and accepted by the Lord: "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God."

What do you think Paul means by verse 19? Is this a reference to material blessings, spiritual blessings, or both? Why? How does Paul's conviction in verse 19 relate to his perspective in verse 13?

- f. Since Paul is trying to deflect from himself as the recipient of the Philippians gifts, what do you think he means by verse 17? Clearly, "account" is meant metaphorically. But who is the account with? And how can more be credited to their account?

- g. Recall that the Roman authorities offered Paul nothing to eat during his imprisonment. As such, both the Philippians' care for him and Epaphroditus' willingness to travel a great distance to offer their gifts was something to be greatly thankful for (or, as Paul puts it, to "rejoice in").

Who in your life has served you in such ways? Parents? Friends? Spiritual Leaders? To be sure, their gifts were unto the Lord. How have you shown your appreciation to them? To God for them?

- h. In what ways have you responded to God's grace by offering gifts which are "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God"? Have you seen, as St. Francis of Assisi prayed, that "it is in giving that we receive"?

#### IV. Pray

- a. That as we move into the Advent season, we would respond to God's gift in Jesus by giving generously to things that extend His Kingdom;
- b. For our worldwide missionaries to be amply supplied, that they might continue their gospel proclaiming work without hindrance;
- c. That we continue to live out our mission of "inviting all people to grow into a Christ-centered life in God's family."

