

“Blessings AND Thanks in Abundance”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for First UMC Grand Junction, Sunday, November 24, 2024

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/>

Scripture: Phil 4:15-20 [NLT]

OPENING

We bring a couple of things to an end this morning in worship:

1. The church year, which began with the first Sunday in Advent *last* December, and
2. The *Stewards of God 2025* stewardship program we embarked on back in September.

It's been quite a year and, I hope, it will be quite a stewardship program, as well.

Between the planning that David, Joy, and I began with back in August, the small group meetings, the mailing, and the time in worship that David and I have spent, we've done a lot with this already. So, I'm not going to spend a lot of time preaching about our stewardship this morning.

It's really time for us to express our commitments to the Church and to each other for the year ahead, knowing there is a lot at stake in our responses. Our prayer all along has been that God would meet the needs of the Church through our combined resources, sacrifices, and generosity. Now is the time to celebrate God's abundant blessings in our lives with joy & thanksgiving.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

As Fran said at the start of the Scripture reading, these themes of abundance, joy, and thanksgiving are a part of the reading from Philippians this morning.

The letter to the Philippians was most likely written while Paul was under house arrest in Rome near the end of his life.

- He mentions being “imprisoned” in Phil 1:7 and 1:14.
- In Phil 1:13, Paul refers to “the whole palace guard” knowing that he is “in chains” because of his ministry for Christ. And he mentions “his chains” again a few verses later (1:17).
- And like bookends, Paul refers to the bulk of the Christian community in Rome, “*especially those in Caesar's household*”(!) [4:22, NLT], sending greetings to the believers in Philippi.

And yet, Paul's love for the Philippians, his gratitude for their kindness toward him, and his urging them to live in the joy of knowing Christ *and* the love of the Christian community run throughout the letter. In fact, it starts out with Paul writing,

*1:3 Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God.
4 Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, 5 for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now.*

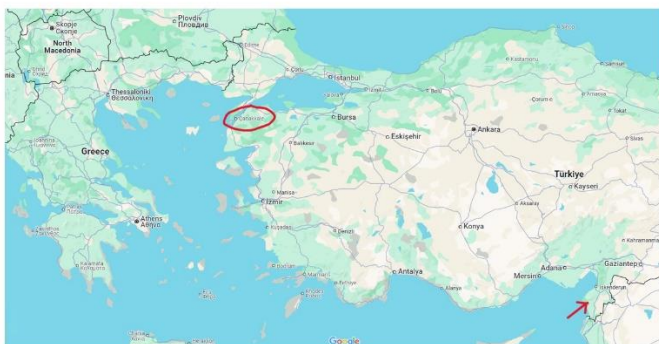
Paul's message in Philippians is one of warmth, gratitude, and deep satisfaction in knowing

- ✓ his all-in commitment to spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ,
- ✓ his sacrifices,
- ✓ his mistreatment,
- ✓ his bold witness for Christ, and now
- ✓ his imprisonment...

all of these things have borne a fruitful harvest of committed Christian discipleship in this beloved community, ironic as that is, given how his time there began.

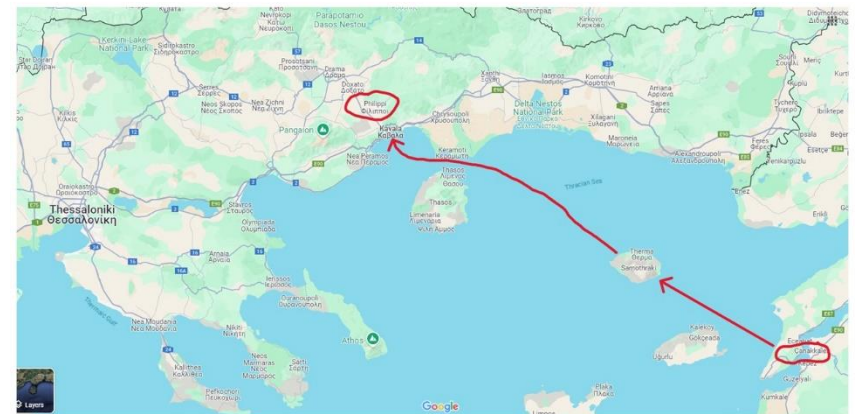
So, I want to home in on the passage for today for just a few minutes because it provides a very personal glimpse into the mutual affection between Paul and the Philippians. And to get at this, we need to review the relevant portion of Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 16:6-17:8) out of which the small Philippian community grew.

Paul began in Syrian Antioch, now just across the Syrian border with Türkiye and known as Antakya. And he made it all the way across Mysia, or Asia Minor, to the ancient city of Troas, also known as Troy (Homer and *The Iliad*). The modern Turkish city of Canakkale is very near the ruins of that ancient city.

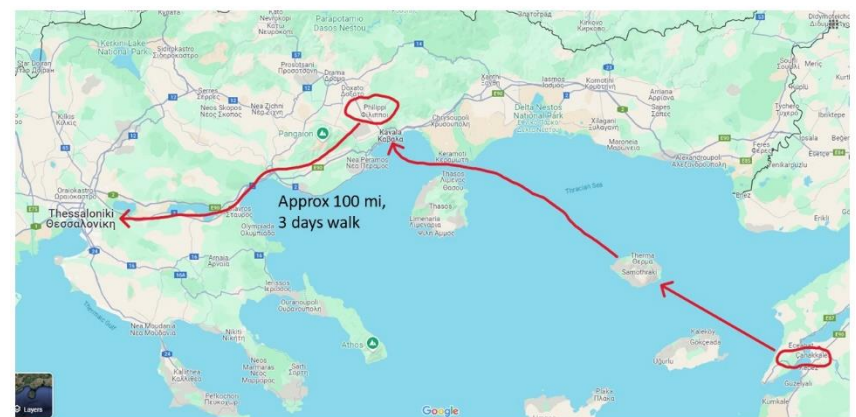


There, Paul received a message in a vision from a man from Macedonia, Northern Greece today, asking that Paul and his missionary team go there and “help them”. What kind of “help” isn’t specified, just that Paul go over there and help them.

Paul made his way from Troas/Troy/Canakkale all the way to Philippi, the first site of his ministry in Europe (Greece):



And then on to Thessaloniki:



Is it any wonder that Paul felt the tenderness he did toward the Philippians, given the way he and Silas were so harshly treated by the governing officials and merchants there? This was the church that began with the baptism of Lydia and many of her household and the small Christian community AND that tended to Paul's and Silas' wounds from their illegal beating by the city officials!



Site of Lydia's Baptism in Acts 16:15



The Ancient City of Philippi where Paul and Silas were (illegally) beaten and imprisoned for the night

And before closing his letter with the customary salutations and blessing, he points to the abundance of God's blessings in his life and his certainty that God will shower those same blessings upon them:

4:19 And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

20 Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen.

SERMON THOUGHTS

The invitation to the same sort of gratitude for the abundance of God's blessings is set before us today.

Like Paul, there are lots of things that beset us with concern, anxiety, stress, and pain. But like, Paul, we can choose to focus our attention elsewhere.

Remembering that he is writing "in chains under Roman arrest", he shares his vision for making it through the darkest of times:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication – with thanksgiving – let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ *Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

⁹ *Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.*

CONCLUSION

Commitment procession and offering...

♪ “All That We Have” – words to refrain on the screen:

*All that we have and all that we offer
Comes from a heart both frightened and free
Take what we bring now, and give what we need
All done in His name.*