

## Partnership in Mission Day – Sermon

**'Let's partner together – and make a difference'**

**Bible reading: Philippians 1:1- 11**

*(You may prefer to use this as a sermon script – or simply use it as an outline, giving shape to your own sermon).*

### **Introduction:**

I'm sure we all can think of some historical partnerships we've observed down through the years: Lennon & McCartney; Morecambe & Wise; Torvill & Dean; the Krankies (lol); and (for the scientific among us) James Watson & Francis Crick (who built on the earlier work of Dr Rosalind Franklin and identified the double-helix structure of DNA).

*(Optional: If your context lends itself to it, instead of using the above paragraph you could ask the following question and make the introduction interactive: 'What well-known partnerships can you think of?')*

Partnership is a powerful and invariably a beneficial thing – a concept that the apostle Paul wholeheartedly embraced. Two New Testament examples of these are Paul & Timothy, and Paul with Silas, travelling and sharing the good news of Jesus together. Another example is found here in this letter to the Philippians, where Paul speaks warmly of his partnership in the gospel with the Christians at Philippi.

What can we learn about partnership from this passage?

### **1. Partnership - the best way to work**

At least that's what many people suggest.

There's an ancient native American proverb - "One finger cannot lift a pebble."

Henry Ford who pioneered the automobile industry said, "Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success."

And of course, the Bible says: 'As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.' (Proverbs 27:17)

Partnering with others is very often the best way to work. In our reading today, we read:

*'In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel'* (Philippians 1:5)

The apostle Paul knew the value of partnering with other people. His familiar metaphor - the picture of the church being like a body consisting of different parts, is a reminder that we function best in collaboration with others.

God had called Paul and these Philippian Christians into partnership in the gospel.

- they had received the gospel message
- they were increasingly understanding it
- and most importantly were being called to live it out wherever they found themselves.

It's often tempting to go it alone. When you do that, you don't need to listen to anyone, or wait for anyone, or be waylaid because you've had to collaborate with anyone else. But that's usually second best, at best.

## **2. God wants you to share in this – to be a partner!**

We might be tempted to think this idea of partnering in showing and sharing the good news message of Jesus is for the experts - people who've been trained, people on the next rung up.

But wonderfully, that's not the case. Paul writes:

*'Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to **all** God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons...'* (Philippians 1:1)

The apostle Paul is writing to everyone in the Philippian church – not just church leaders or those regarded as the 'spiritual' ones. It's for 'all God's people'.

That means it's for everyone – and in our generation, that includes people like you and me.

Neither you nor I am the apostle Paul - but we're all invited.

No that's far too weak!!!

We're all **called** to partner together in living out the gospel of Jesus.

### **So here's a couple of questions:**

#### **What might being a 'partner in the gospel' look like for you and me as individuals in our particular circumstances?**

At home; at our work; with our friends and family; in our social circles – with the various people we meet?

#### **And what might this look like for you as a church?**

Is there a particular partnership that God is asking you to explore?

- Maybe with another Baptist church?
- Or maybe you and another local church intentionally partnering together to reach out to your community?
- Maybe you could partner with a near-by emerging church or church plant?
- Or might there be someone in your church that God wants to set aside for mission leadership in or beyond your community – and you can partner with them, and encourage and bless them?
- Or something else – that only you can think of?

Remember, we're all invited – no, we're all called to this privileged ministry!

## **3. Are you willing to 'walk the walk'?**

Let's not overlook that Paul is writing to *'...all God's **holy** people in Christ Jesus at Philippi...'* (v.1)

It's all very well to say 'I'm up for being a "partner"' - 'I'll get involved';

- but God is looking for 'Jesus-shaped' 'partners' – or as Paul puts it, 'holy people'.

That is people set aside for God and for his perfect purposes for the world

In the next chapter in Paul's letter he urges the Philippian Christians to live Jesus-shaped lives:

*'In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...'* (2:5)

To the Roman church, Paul wrote: '*...I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...*' (Romans 12:1-2)

That's a pretty high bar!

We'll look at this in more detail during the week in the companion Bible study written to complement this sermon, but in the meantime let's consider two quick questions:

**How would you describe the life you currently are living? Holy – or something else?  
What steps might you begin to take to help you live a more 'holy' and Jesus-shaped life?**

4. **Will you venture out of your comfort zone – and move beyond simply being nice to others?**

It seems that this partnership that Paul is talking about is not in any way superficial, but instead one that is developed through deep prayerful and loving relationships.

He writes:

***'I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now...'*** (Philippians 1:3-5)

***'And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more...'*** (Philippians 1:9)

Here we get a glimpse into the way that Paul's life has been completely transformed. The one-time persecutor of Christians has become a loving father-in-the-faith.

In v.8 he writes, ***'How I long for you with the affection of Christ'***.

I can't be sure, but I wonder if there's some cyclical thing taking place, here?

Did Paul develop a bit of a love for these Philippian Christians that led him to pray for them?  
And as he began to pray for them, might this (God-given) love for them deepen?  
And that lead him to pray even more?  
Further deepening his love and so on...?

I don't know.

I do know however, that many of us (me included), aren't great at praying through a long list of needs for others – for this person, for that person; for this church, for that church... until a relationship develops and then deepens with that person or church.

I guess the more I care, the deeper my love becomes – and the more heart-felt and committed my prayers become.

If any of this makes sense. If any of this is true for you, then it means that there's huge 'gospel' benefit in us working at deepening our relationships with one another.

Practically, we can't have 'deep' relationships with everyone – so that begs the question, who (which person or a church) might I (as an individual) and we (as a church)

- most helpfully pray for?
- seek to journey with?
- and work towards a deeper relationship and partnership?

## **Conclusion:**

This passage is full of important and helpful teaching – more of which we'll explore in the companion Bible study that accompanies this sermon.

## **But as we close today, let's remember:**

1. That partnering with others is invariably the best way to serve God
2. That God wants you and me to partner in showing and sharing the gospel – the life-changing, good news message of Jesus
  - He's calling you to this
  - He's calling you to this as a life-style
3. God is calling you and me to a Jesus-shaped lifestyle
4. And that means venturing out of our comfort-zones, moving beyond being nice
  - Asking God who he wants you/me
    - o to journey with?
    - o partner with?
    - o learn to pray for?
    - o and grow as partners together in the gospel of Jesus?

## **Closing prayer of reflection and commitment:**

**'Lord, what action, what practical step(s) are you challenging me/us to take today?**

*Give a minute for silent reflection.*

'Lord, I commit today to explore this further...

- o to talk to someone/ a Christian friend and explore together how best to act on the call to partnership in your gospel
- o (if you're a church leader) to discuss this with our leadership team and explore what this could look like in practice
- o to pray into this each day this week, to pursue a more Jesus-shaped life and work out how I can best daily live as a partner in showing and sharing your good news that can transform others.