

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Paul's Final Words To the Philippians Philippians 4:21-23

Several weeks ago on television I saw a particular segment of an ongoing vocal competition called "American Idol." In this particular segment, the show's producers chose to have the 10 contestants sing a rehearsed song entitled, "God Bless the USA" written by Lee Greenwood.

As Americans, there are many things we share in common. We share a certain government in common, we share certain rights in common, we share certain challenges in common, but there is nothing more important that we share in common, as "Americans," than our name.

Let me read for you the words of the song "God Bless the USA": "If tomorrow all the things were gone/ I'd worked for all my life. And I had to start again/ with just my children and my wife..... I'd thank my lucky stars/ to be livin' here today. 'Cause the flag still stands for freedom/ and they can't take that away..... **"I'm proud to be an American, where at least I know I'm free. And I won't forget the men who died, who gave that right to me."** And I gladly stand up/ next to you and defend her still today 'Cause there ain't no doubt I love this land,/ God bless the USA..... From the lakes of Minnesota/ to the hills of Tennessee.....Across the plains of Texas/ From sea to shining sea..... From Detroit down to Houston/ and New York to L.A..... Well there's pride in every American heart/ and its time we stand up and say..... **"that I'm proud to be an American where at least I know I'm free. And I won't forget the men who died, who gave that right to me."**

I know that there are lot of people in this world today who have a very negative view of America and unfortunately those numbers appear to be growing. But I know that there are a lot of people in this room this weekend who are more than willing to join with me in declaring that though our country may not be perfect we are proud to be called "Americans."

But there is another title that hopefully everyone here this weekend also shares in common, a title that should produce an even greater pride. It is a title that we find repeated twice in the last three verses of this epistle. Let me read for you **Philippians 4:21-23, "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. (22) All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. (23) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."**

What is the title repeated twice in these last three verses? It is the title "saint." What does this word mean? The word "saint" (HAGIOS) means a "set apart one." A saint is someone who has been set apart from sin unto God for holy purposes. This is Paul's favorite word to describe a Christian. In fact he uses this title over 60 times in his epistles. What can we learn about saints from Philippians 4:21-23? This is the question that I would like to answer this weekend.

Hopefully in answering this question we will find ourselves taking even greater pride in who we are. I am not talking about taking greater pride in the fact that we can call ourselves Americans but rather I am talking about taking a greater pride in the fact that we can call ourselves saints. We are not just anybody. We are Saint Dale, Saint Debbie, Saint Gerry.

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And when we take time to consider this special title that has been assigned to us I would hope that we would be filled with a sense of pride that would transcend every other source of pride. I would hope that as we consider this special title that we would be overwhelmed by our very privileged position. So let us go back to the question. “What can we learn about saints in **Philippians 4:21-23?**”

We learn how people become saints from a biblical perspective. If you go up to your neighbor and ask them, “How does someone become a saint?” How might they respond? I believe that many of them would respond by saying, “A person becomes a saint when that person’s life is so rich in good works that they distinguish themselves from other people . This is what we see reflected when we hear someone speaking about another person, say “He’s a saint.”

But if you go up to your Catholic neighbor and ask them this very same question and say to them “How does someone become a saint?” you will most likely get an entirely different answer. The Catholic neighbor, if they are somewhat versed in Catholic doctrine, will say, “A person becomes a saint by being beatified and then canonized by the Catholic Church.”

This is all very interesting and in essence the answer given by both your typical non-Catholic neighbor as well as your typical Catholic neighbor would be a correct answer based on how they understand the term “saint.” But neither of these answers are correct from a biblical standpoint.

Why? Because they emphasize works rather than faith. People will not become saints through their so-called good works (Romans 3:10-12). The Scriptures teach us in **Romans 3:10-12**, “**As it is written ‘There is none righteous, not even one; (11) There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; (12) there is none who does good, there is not even one.’**” I don’t care how good you might think someone to be or how good the Catholic Church might think someone to be, there is no one on the basis of their own good works who could ever merit the biblical title “saint” or in other words “a separated one.” Why is this? Because if the truth was fully known there is no one through their own good works who is perfectly separated from sin unto God for holy purposes. If people cannot become saints through their own good works then how can a person ever legitimately be called a “saint.”

The answer to this question is found in **Philippians 4:21**. Let me read this passage for you, “**Greet every saint in Christ Jesus.**” People only become saints from a biblical perspective when they can be described as being in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:21). In knowing this we can now answer the question, “How does a person become a saint?” People become saints not by performing good works but rather by exercising faith in Christ alone for their salvation in order to be found in Him (Philippians 3:7-10).

Let me read for you Philippians 3:7-10, “**But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (8) More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, (9) and may be found in Him not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.**”

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Paul came to know, by the grace of God, that even in spite of all his good works that he was not a saint. But he also came to know by the grace of God that he needed to be a saint if he was going to be saved. He therefore by faith exchanged the so-called righteousness he had enjoyed through the works of the law for the righteousness of God that was available to Him in Christ. He made this exchange by exercising faith in Christ alone for his salvation. And in doing this he became a “saint in Christ Jesus.” Or in other words, God came to see Paul in Christ Jesus as being perfectly separated from sin and unto Himself.

As Americans we enjoy many freedoms. We enjoy the freedom of speech, the freedom of the press, the freedom of worship and so many other freedoms. But being an American was never able to set us free from sin and from the consequences of those sins. Being an American never was able to make us a saint in Christ Jesus.

But in contrast to this, we as saints this weekend can boldly declare that by the blood of Jesus Christ and our faith in him we have been set free not only from sin and unto God but we have been set free from death itself.

Am I proud to be an American. Yes! But my pride in being an American does not touch the pride I feel in being able to call myself “**A saint in Christ Jesus.**” Why? Because only those who are saints in Christ Jesus are able to say that they are truly free.

What is the first thing we learn about saints in **Philippians 4:21-23**? We learn how people become saints from a biblical perspective. What else do we learn?

We learn about our special bonds with fellow saints. Let us again read **Philippians 4:21-23**, “**Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. (22) All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household. (23) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you spirit.**” There is a whole lot of greeting going on in this passage. This greeting is not simply encouraged it is commanded.

Look again at the very first phrase of **Philippians 4:21**, “**Greet every saint in Christ Jesus.**” This is a command. This command was being given to the first people who would see this letter. And who would those people be? Most likely that would be the elders and the deacons. The elders and the deacons were being commanded to greet every saint in Christ Jesus at the church at Philippi on behalf of all the brethren that Paul will now go on to identify in the remainder of **verse 22** and through **verse 23**.

He first of all mentions “**The brethren who are with me greet you.**” This group would be narrower than those described as “**All the saints**” in **verse 22**. Therefore this probably refers to Paul’s companion or co-workers who were intimately involved with him in his ministry. It would no doubt have included Timothy who had been mentioned in **Philippians 1:1** as well as **Philippians 2:19-24** and possibly Luke., though how large the circle was we do not know.

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In addition to his own greeting and the greeting of his co-workers, Paul now sends the Philippians the greeting of all God's people who are with him, especially those of the Caesar's household. Listen to **Philippians 4:22** “**All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.**”

Why did Paul choose to specifically mention the saints in Caesar's household? The sufferings that were being inflicted on the Philippians that we have read about earlier in the epistle were not being heaped upon them by the Jews. There were not even enough Jews in Philippi to have a synagogue in this very large Gentile city. Rather we would have to suspect that the sufferings that the Philippians were experiencing was being heaped upon them at the hand of those loyal to Caesar himself.

Paul is making sure that the Philippian Church would receive not only his greeting, the greeting of his co-workers, the greeting of the Roman Church, but most importantly the greeting of those who had been most loyal to Caesar. Paul in specifically highlighting the greeting from the loyalists in Caesar's household, who had become saints, impressed upon the Philippians the power of the gospel to bring about change. And this of course would hopefully provide them a ray of hope that their present sufferings on behalf of the gospel might even one day be diminished.

As an American I am proud that our nation and our ideals has made it possible for people of all nationalities, creeds, and colors to be united under the title “American.” But America has not nearly achieved the level of bonding that exists between Christians under the title of “saint.”

Let me try and highlight this for you. When speaking about various Americans it is common for us to hear Americans refer to one another as Irish Americans, Italian Americans, Afro-Americans, Latin Americans. Isn't this so? But now let me ask you this question. Do you hear Christians saints referring to one another in this same way? And I believe the answer is no! I simply have not observed these type of distinctions in our interactions with one another.

When introducing a brother or sister in Christ to a group of fellow Christians we do not say, “I would like to introduce to you my Afro Christian brother, Mr. so and so.” Or my Caucasian Christian sister, Miss so and so.” Why is this? These type of distinctions really have very little importance to us when it comes to how we view each other as saints. We see this reflected in the teaching of Paul in **Galatians 3:28**. Let me read this passage for you, “**There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**” The bonds that we have in Christ as saints are far stronger than the bonds we have with one another as Americans. The bonds we have as saints in Christ are so strong that even racial and cultural barriers are dwarfed by what we share in common.

As saints we share the same Lord in common. As saints we share the same passion to be conformed to our Him in common. As saints we share the same hope of being in the resurrection from the dead in common. These shared realities as well as other shared realities is what binds us so tightly together.

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Because our bonds are so very special it is not at all surprising that Paul expects that greetings be exchanged between us. Again I would like to remind you in light of the very special bonds that exist between us that we would heed the command of Paul in **Philippians 4** and that we will purpose ourselves each weekend to make it our work to greet the saints.

What do we learn about saints in **Philippians 4:21-23**? First of all we learn how people become saints from a biblical perspective. Secondly we learn about our special bonds? What else do we learn?

We learn about our continuing need for God's grace. Let us again read **Philippians 4:21-23**, “**Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. (22) All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.**” And then he says **(23) “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”** This concluding verse to this great epistle is a benediction. And what does he pray in this benediction? He prays that “**the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ**” would be with their spirit.

We do not only need the grace of God to become a saint in Christ Jesus but we also need the grace of God to live like a saint in Christ Jesus. And this was Paul's prayer for the Philippians.

The grace of God had been poured out upon the Philippians in a magnificent way when they became saints at the preaching of the gospel. But they still needed to walk in a manner worthy of that gospel. This is, as you know, not a very easy thing to do. But it is not as if resources are not available in Christ Jesus, His grace is more than sufficient. Isn't this what the Lord told the Apostle Paul in **2 Corinthians 11:9**.

I am proud to be an American. Certainly America continues to extend help to people in need perhaps as no other nation in the history of the world has extended help to people in need. Not only has America extended help to its own citizens through a multitude of its very generous programs but America has also extended help to the citizens of the world through its very generous actions.

But even though we may be a citizen of a great nation and have the privilege of calling ourselves Americans, it falls short when compared to the supply that Christ makes available to His saints if we would simply approach His throne of grace.

CONCLUSION

As an American I am proud of my freedoms but as a saint I am more proud of freedom and all of its consequences.

As an American I am proud of the bonds that fellow Americans share with one another but as a saint I am more proud of my bonds that we enjoy with one another in Christ Jesus.

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As an American I am proud of our nation's generous material supply to those who are in need but as a saint I am more proud of our Lord's generous spiritual supply for all those who will call upon Him in their need.

We should be proud to be called an American but we should be even more proud to be called a saint in Christ Jesus.