**GOD BEGAN A GOOD WORK IN YOU**

December 29, 2013

Philippians 1:1-14 / Key Verse: 1:6, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Philippians is called Paul’s Prison Epistle along with Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon because it was written while he was in prison in Rome. Philippians’ main theme is to live Christ-centered life. In Philippians, the words “Jesus” (21times), “Christ” (36times), and “Lord” (15times) are repeated a total of 72 times. This shows that Paul’s heart and mind were fully occupied by Jesus. To be like Jesus, to know Jesus more was his unstoppable desire and life goal. This shows Paul’s spiritual maturity in his old age and his unstoppable seeking of Jesus Christ is a good example for all of us in our life journey. Philippians is also called the Epistle of Joy because in this letter, the words “joy”, “glad”, and “rejoicing” are repeated sixteen times much more than Paul’s other letters. Prison life is known as most difficult life. How could Paul be joyful in the hardest environment in prison? We will learn what the source of his joy was regardless of situation. Especially in today’s passage we will learn Paul’s confidence that it is God who began a good work in us and it is also God who will complete the good work in us. If we have such confidence like Paul had, the adverse situation or circumstance will not be able to make us be fatalistic in our lives. Instead we will experience true victory, joy, and the advance of the gospel in and through us. May God bless each of us to have confidence of God who begins and completes good work in us! Amen.

**1. Partnership in the gospel (1-11)**

Look at verses 1-4. “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy.” Paul and the Philippians had a special relationship filled with love and trust. So in all his prayers for all of them, Paul always prayed with joy. It is not always the case that when we pray for some people, we always pray for them with joy. Sometimes we may feel a sense of anguish instead of joy. But to Paul, the Philippians are not the case. The Philippians were a source of thanks and joy to Paul not just once in a while but always. Then how could Paul always pray for them with joy?

In the first place, it was because of their partnership in the gospel. Look at verse 5. “Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,” Here the word, “partnership” comes from the word “koinonia” in Greek, which means “fellowship.” There are many kinds of fellowships, such as soccer fellowship, badminton fellowship, music fellowship and so on. These fellowships are all based on common interests and benefits which draw specific people in a subjective manner. They do not have universal relevance. They cannot include all people. Also they cannot last forever. However, partnership in the gospel is different. It is not man-centered, but Christ-centered. There is no hierarchy and no discrimination based on human standards. It includes all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds. Colossians 3:11 says, “Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.” They all share God’s blessing together equally (Ephesians 3:6). When we look at the members of the Philippian church, there were Lydia, a business woman from Thyatira, a tough jailer and his household, and a slave girl who was freed from demon-possession. These people had no reason to get together and do something together. But because of the gospel, they gathered together and had fellowship in the Lord.

The partnership in the gospel depends on the love of the gospel. The more we love the gospel, the more we are willing to participate in the gospel. So the partnership in the gospel reveals our love of the gospel. The Philippian church members had participated in the gospel with Paul from the first day when they became believers by Paul’s preaching until when Paul was writing this letter. According to 4:15, in their early acquaintance with gospel, the church at Philippi was the only one that shared with Paul in the matter of giving and receiving. When he was in Thessalonica, they sent him aid more than once when he was in need (4:16). Now when Paul was in prison in Rome, they sent a gift through a messenger Epaphroditus to Paul again to take care of Paul’s need (2:25; 4:18). They prayed for Paul, shared in his troubles, and were concerned for him. So Paul had a special, personal love relationship with them. That’s the one reason of why Paul prayed for them always with joy whenever he remembered them. In order to grow in knowing the gospel more and more, having partnership in the gospel is very crucial and absolutely important. Philippian church members practiced this truth from the beginning of their Christian life. So Paul was so joyful whenever he prayed for them.

Secondly, the reason that he prayed for them always with joy was because of his confidence in God. Let’s look at verse 6 and read it together. “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Here, “good work” does not mean “good deed” but “salvation through the gospel.” There is no better work in the world than the salvation of lost souls. It is God who begins this good work. Paul did not choose to go to Philippi by his own will, but God’s Holy Spirit led him to go there specifically (Act 16:6-10). When Paul preached the gospel to some women there, it was the Lord who opened Lydia’s heart to receive the gospel message (Acts 16:14). It was the Lord who performed a miracle through earthquake that led to the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his whole household. The Philippian saints needed to remember this. Otherwise there is spiritual danger that they could lose their faith in their personal faith and regarding the gospel ministry. After Paul had been in prison for a long time (actually it was around 2 years), they might have doubted that they could keep gospel faith to the end, or that gospel ministry would continue. So Paul wanted to help them to look at God. It was God who began the gospel work, and it is also God who would finish the work. Sometimes we lose our hope and vision when difficult and adverse situation come to us.

Now we are closing this year 2013 and when we look back on this year, when there seems to be not much progress in our personal success or personal faith or gospel ministry, we may lose our hope and vision toward our personal life and more importantly in our life of faith and even toward our gospel ministry. But we also need to have Paul’s confidence. In my life and in our gospel ministry, it is not I or we or any organization who began this good work. It is God who began this good work. And Paul reminds us that God will complete this good work in our personal life and in our gospel ministry. Although we struggle to be faithful, but sometimes we fail in our faithfulness. We can make mistake and fail. But God never fails. God completes what he started. So in order to continue to pursue Christ and grow in Christ and participate in gospel work, instead of looking at ourselves or situation, we should look at God only who will continue to work in and through us and complete the good work. Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter. In his body he was not with them. So if he had thought of them based on human circumstances, he also could be anxious about their spiritual growth and gospel ministry. But Paul put full trust in God regarding the matters. And he had confidence that God who began the good work in them would complete the work in them until the day of Christ. When he had such confidence, he could continue to pray for them always with joy.

Thirdly, Paul could pray for the Philippians with joy because they shared in God’s grace with him (7-8). When someone is in difficulty, there are two different responses. One response is to criticize him and judge him, finding his faults or weaknesses. The other response is to understand him, encourage him, comfort him and try to help him. When Paul had been in prison for a long time, some people criticized him and tried to stir up trouble for him. Their intention was to discredit Paul. But the majority of Philippians were different. They encouraged Paul and defended and confirmed the gospel with Paul. It was because they trusted Paul and the gospel he had preached. This is how they shared in God’s grace with Paul. When Paul thought about what the Philippians had done, the affection of Christ burned in his heart and he longed for all of them.

Look at verses 9-11. Paul not only gave thanks and prayed for them with joy, but also shared his concrete prayer topics for them. What were his prayer topics for them? Let’s read verses 9-11. “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-to the glory and praise of God.” As Paul said, the Philippian saints already had love in the gospel and it was expressed in their partnership and sharing in God’s grace with Paul. But Paul encourages them to grow in love more and more. How? It is in knowledge and depth of insight. To love more properly, we need to know knowledge of love. This knowledge does not mean simply factual knowledge but experiential knowledge which is gained by practical obedience in word of God and participation in the gospel. For example, when we practically obey 1:1 bible study with one student, we come to know better and have deeper insight about what the love of God means. As we heard in our United Christmas Worship Service Message by Charles Kim, to love is to be vulnerable (C.L. Lewis). To be vulnerable, we know how much we must learn humility, endurance, and patience toward weak or sin-sick person.

When we want to grow in true love more and more, in fact it is all about Jesus. Paul said, “… so that you may be able to discern what is best.” In our life, what is best? According to 3:8, Paul confessed, “What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish (garbage), that I may gain Christ.” Here Paul says, knowing Christ is surpassingly greatest; best thing which nothing can be compared with. Why? Only in Christ, there is true love; unconditional Agape love that enables anyone to be healed and restored to normal and healthy man. No one and nothing can save and transform sin-sick man except Jesus Christ. So knowing Jesus is the best thing we must seek in our lives. When we know Jesus more and more in deeper personal relationship, another blessing is that we naturally become purer and more blameless and finally we may be filled with the fruit of righteousness. This is Paul’s prayer toward the Philippians and for us too. As we close this year 2013 in a few days and face a new year 2014, let us look at God who began the good work in us and will complete the work in us with the confidence that Paul had in God so that we may not shrink back due to our failure or mistake but move forward toward our final victory in Christ.

**II. Advance the Gospel (12-14)**

When Paul was imprisoned for around 2 years, we can imagine how the Philippian believers could have worried about the gospel work. But surprisingly, in reality, the gospel work did not diminish. Rather the gospel was advancing through Paul. So Paul really wanted them to know this fact. Let’s look at and read verses 12-14. “Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.” Generally speaking, prison is known as the most difficult place for anyone to preach the gospel not to mention to live with joy. To Paul as well, it must have been true. Paul initially had a great vision to evangelize Rome and later up to Spain. But now Paul was chained in prison and he couldn’t move around to preach the gospel. Nevertheless in such situation, Paul had unshakable confidence that it was God who began his gospel work in and through him and sent him to Rome in this way. When Paul saw his situation with this confidence, even in prison, he found a way of how he could work for the gospel. According to Acts 28:30-31, for two whole years Paul stayed in prison and welcome all who came to see him and boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

As a conclusion, through today’s bible study, we learn that for our joyful mature Christian life and to advance gospel work, the adverse and hostile situation or circumstances are not fundamental problems. The source of unceasing joy and the power station of advancing the gospel work in spite of all hard situations are to have confidence that it is God who begins the gospel work and finishes it. May God renew our faith and gives us great confidence in God so that we may not depend on ourselves or situations but on God alone! I pray in Jesus name. Amen.