

## **Philippians 4: 21-23**

### **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ**

Paul began his letter to the Philippians by addressing the saints and commanding them to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 1 v1-2), and he ends the letter in the same way by greeting the saints and commanding them to the Lord's grace. This may seem nothing unusual but surely it is in fact remarkable! In the course of 4 chapters many things have come to light about the Philippians, - how they are placed, their needs, the duties and dangers before them, the love they should share and the divisions that are marring the church. At the end it is to the same grace and the same Lord that Paul commits them. His grace is enough for them. It is the remedy for every human need.

The verses with which Paul ends Philippians are, therefore, worth reflecting on. They reveal in turn the people who have received the grace of the Lord Jesus and the Lord from whom the grace flows.

### **The world -wide fellowship**

On the surface the world Paul lived in seems very different from ours. But in reality, the similarities outnumber the changes. There were divisions around race, nationality, and social and religious divisions. Nothing new there.

But Paul knew of a new humanity which had come to birth, a new people which superseded and transcended our cherished jingoisms, a truly new society. They were 'in Christ Jesus'. They were a distinct people, the *saints*. This is the people we belong to as Christians; yet very often we appear to know so little of the reality, excitement or practical implications of it. We have allowed the church to lose its distinctiveness as the new humanity. The vision of verse 21 should challenge us to repent of all that needlessly holds us apart, to mourn for what might have been and to cry out to God that for revival and renewal.

### **The Lord Jesus Christ**

How are we to understand verse 23? Who is the Jesus of whom it speaks? What is the grace for which it asks?

### *Jesus is God*

Four strands in the letter weave together to support the claim that our Lord Jesus Christ is fully divine. First there is the title, *Lord*, which is given to him. In the Old Testament, God revealed to his people that his personal name is I AM. This name is found in the Hebrew scriptures as ‘Yahweh’ from Genesis 4:26 onwards, and was explained to the people through the ministry of Moses. From motives of mistaken reverence, however, the use of this name was considered to be too holy. People retreated from their God-given privilege of calling him by his name and substituted for Yahweh a Hebrew word meaning Lord or Sovereign. This came into the New Testament (in the Greek word *Kyrios*) as the distinctive title of Jesus. By being *Lord*, he is God, Yahweh, the God of Israel, the one and only God. Compare Phil 2 v 11 with Isaiah 45 v 23.

### *Jesus and salvation*

The Lord Jesus Christ is called ‘saviour’ in Philippians 3 v 20, but the word which the Philippians used to sum up the saving work of Christ is ‘righteousness’. The answer to our need to be right with God is a gift of righteousness which God gives (Phil 3 v9). The gift is inseparable from Christ: Paul did not possess it before he possessed Christ (Phil 3 v4-7) but, being ‘found in him,’ righteousness – a righteousness which God accepts – became his by faith in Christ.

### *Jesus, Lord of life and service*

The life, which begins with God’s gift of righteousness in Christ aims to produce ‘fruits’ of righteousness. In our personal experience, obedience to Christ is the key factor in working out the salvation he has given us (Phil 2 v12) and it is as we obediently serve him that we come to possess our possessions. Jesus is the Lord of our service. He decides where and how we serve him. For Paul this meant imprisonment for Christ (Phil 1 v 13), and any hope he entertained of release was carefully subjected to the Lord’s will (Phil 2 v24)

### *Jesus our Hope*

Pauls’ delight was to know Jesus now, daily to know him better and in the end to know him fully.

Death is transformed in Christ: to die is gain (Phil 1 v21). This is the heart of the ‘the gain’, that we depart and are with Christ, which is far better (Phil 1 v23). But we may not die. Our earthly life may be terminated by the coming of a

Saviour from heaven (Phil 3 v20). The Lord Jesus Christ fills our vision of the age to come. One of the greatest incentives to holiness in the New Testament is that we might be ready for him when he returns. In all of this Paul sets a superb example. When he looked up, he saw the reigning Lord Jesus Christ, enthroned at the pinnacle of heaven (Phil 2 v9-11). When he looked back, he saw the Christ of Calvary, the bearer of our curse (Phil 2 v8), the author of righteousness (Phil 3 v9). When he looked forward, he saw the returning Saviour (Phil 3 v20). When he looked into his own heart, he found perfect satisfaction in the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 3 v7-12).

There is then no more fitting conclusion to Philippians than the simplicity of the final prayer. For us, as for himself, Paul wanted nothing but a daily and deepening experience of Jesus, satisfying and unsearchable:

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*