

# “Compassion Sunday”

## Philippians 1:3-5

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on May 7, 2017 by Pastor Barton Priebe

### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to Philippians 1:3-5
- Paul begins his letter to the Philippians with these words: **READ 3-4** - *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy.* Now what is it that Paul is so thankful for? What is it that so fills him with joy when he prays for the Philippians?
  - **READ 5** - *because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.* So Paul is filled with thanksgiving and joy because it is obvious that the Philippians grasp how stunning the gospel message is. They are clearly excited about the good news of what God has done for us in Jesus. How do we know this?
    - It is obvious because they have partnered with other Christians outside of their own church, like Paul, in order to see the gospel spread far beyond Philippi.
- You see, when you have been stunned by how good the gospel is then you delight to partner with other Christians who are taking the gospel to places that you cannot go and who are reaching people you cannot reach.
  - It is our vision at Central to see our community renewed through the gospel. By “our community” we mean ourselves, our city, and those places in the world where we can have influence.
    - The only way this vision can be fulfilled is through strategic partnerships. In our city, for instance, we are partnering with West Village church plant under Robin Martens. Globally we partner with missionaries. Today we want to talk to you about our new partnership with Compassion. I could not be more excited for this.
- We will get to talking about Compassion itself but I want to set all of this within the larger context of seeing our community renewed through the gospel. You see if we truly want to see our community renewed through the gospel then the two things I just showed you from Philippians 1 must be true of us.
  - First, we must be stunned by how good the good news really is. Second, we must be committed to sustained partnership for the sake of the gospel.
    - So let’s talk about these two things as relate them to our new partnership with Compassion.

### STUNNED BY HOW GOOD THE GOOD NEWS REALLY IS

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** First, if we are going to see “our community” renewed through the gospel, then we must be stunned by how good the good news really is.
  - Oh let your heart soar with mine as we just think about this word, “gospel.” As you well know “gospel” means “good news.” This tells us something critical about the nature of Christianity. Christianity is first of all and fundamentally about news.

- Our media today sometimes divides news into two different types: hard news and soft news. Soft news includes things like human-interest stories and tips for consumers. So for instance a diet plan is soft news. Soft news then is news that you can take or leave.
  - Hard news on the other hand deals with events that have taken place that affect life. Some hard news is so big that it affects everything. Think of these hard news headlines: “JFK assassinated”, “America Attacked – hijacked jets hit twin towers,” or “Global Financial Crisis.”
    - Christianity is hard news. Christianity is not first of all about teachings or tips for life. It is, rather, an announcement of something huge that has happened in history that affects everything. Right here we see that Christianity is unique among all the world religions and spiritual paths. All other religions or spiritual paths offer soft news. Christianity is hard news.
- But it is not simply news. It is *good* news. It is gospel. There is some news that is so good that people cannot help but burst forth in response. Like when you get the email saying, “Congratulations, you got the job.” Or when she says, “Yes, I will marry you.” Or when the newspaper says, “WWII is over”
  - That kind of good news changes your life. That, Paul says, is the nature of Christianity. The news of Christianity is so astonishing and so breathtaking that the one who hears it cannot help but leap for joy.
- The goodness of the good news becomes even clearer when Paul goes on in Philippians to talk about “preaching” the good news. This word “preach” was just a normal word taken from the culture of Paul’s day.
  - In those days when the Greeks would go and fight a battle with another nation like Persia, all the Greek people would wait nervously to find out the result. Would they be conquered? Would they all be enslaved? When the Greek army won the victory they would send a messenger, a herald, a good newser, back to Greece. Now understand this: the preacher did not deliver soft news.
    - He never showed up and said, “*Now gather around. Let me tell you From the soldiers on the front line I have learned 5 easy tips on how you can lose 10 pounds.*” No, a preacher’s job was to deliver hard news. He would run into the town and cry out, “*A great battle has been won on your behalf. You are free. Rejoice and be glad. Tell everyone this good news and live out your lives in light of the freedom that has been won for you.*”
- My brothers and sisters, let your heart soar over this truth. The heart of Christianity is good news. It is an announcement that a battle has been won on your behalf and that you are free. The gospel is the good news of all that God has done and will do for us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
  - Is this how you understand Christianity? Does it thrill you? If not, then you have either temporarily forgotten what it is or you have never really understood it at all.
    - So if we want to see our community renewed through the gospel we must first be stunned by how good the good news really is.

## COMMITTED TO SUSTAINED PARTNERSHIP

- Now this leads to a second obvious thing. When your heart is captivated by any news that you think is good, then you want others to experience it as well. You cannot help but talk about it.
  - New parents tell everyone about how cute their baby is. People who love music spend large sums of money on it and say to others, “Have you heard this song. You have to listen to it.” People who love sports invest time and money into watching it and say, “Did you see that game? It was unreal.”
    - You when we experience news that is good to us, we delight to tell others about it and to invest in it.
- Once you are stunned by the gospel you want others to experience its life transforming power. The problem is that you soon realize that the world is far too big for just you to reach.
  - This realization leads us to our second point. **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** In the second place, if we are going to see our community renewed through the gospel, then we must be committed to sustained partnership for the sake of the gospel.
- Do we not see this in the Philippian church? They loved the gospel and when they heard of Paul’s work among the Gentiles they eagerly moved to partner with him. **READ 5 - *because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.*** This was a sustained partnership.
  - In chapter 4 Paul laments that in the early days other churches refused to enter into partnership for the gospel. But not the Philippians. Paul says in 4:14-19 that the Philippians partnered with him time and time again.
- What did this look like? They prayed for Paul. They encouraged Paul. They sent people to assist him. And they gave generously of their money. Paul says in 4:16 that that ***“in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.”***
  - All through the N.T. we see that those who love the gospel also love to partner with others to see that gospel go forward. One of the greatest examples of this is the relief of poverty in the church in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem was in desperate poverty. People were suffering. Food was scarce. So Paul started a relief fund. The Macedonian Christians themselves lived in extreme poverty and yet we read in 2 Cor 8 that they were eager to give. They could not give much but they begged Paul to give and Paul says they did so out of an abundance of joy.
    - This is how we know we truly understand and believe the gospel – that we are stunned by how good it is and that we then are eager to partner with other Christians to see this gospel go forward in word and in deed.
- This is why we are so excited to partner with Compassion. Their vision says it all – “releasing children from poverty in Jesus’ name”. I understand from that it is Jesus who motivates them to do what they do and they want children to experience not just a release from poverty but the hope that is found in Jesus.
  - Heather and I were privilege to see this first hand in November when we went on a week long trip to Ecuador. I wanted to see Compassion in action and I must say, I was very impressed.

- Compassion always partners with the local church. In Ecuador they have 253 churches and 98,000 kids. When a church partners with Compassion they receive all the benefits but they must have 80% non-church kids in the sponsorship program.
  - So this pushes the church out into the community and the community also comes to the church. Every child gets access to a holistic program that develops them intellectually in school, emotionally, physically with food, and spiritually. It is all integrated together. These churches are exploding and everywhere we went we heard stories of people talking about how much the church has loved them and how they then came to Christ.
    - In Ecuador Compassion has a program called the child survival program and it is for very young children. 90% of the mothers in this program have become Christians and 70% are part of churches.
- Perhaps my favourite moment of our entire trip came when Allison prayed. We met Allison on another home visit. She was about six years old. We were led to her home where just she and her mom and little sister lived. The mother, with tears in her eyes, told us how her husband had kicked her out. She said, “I have done many bad things.” From the way she was dressed and the way she talked it seemed clear that she had been sleeping around in the village.
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** She now lived in this one room shack. But Allison was in the Compassion program. With great pride she showed us the letters she had received from her sponsor. **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** Our translator asked her what she believed about Jesus and she said, “He is my saviour.” She asked her if she liked to pray and she said yes. She then wanted us to pray right then and there. She knelt down on the floor and the translator told us that she was asking us to kneel with her. And so we all knelt on that hardpacked dirt floor. This is what she prayed: “I praise you heavenly Father. I thank you for everything I have. Please keep us on your path. I also ask that you would bring my father home. In Jesus’ name amen.”
    - We were all wiping away tears. As we walked away from her home I debriefed it with another pastor. I said, “That moment showed me the power of the Compassion program. Not only is she being fed and going to school. You can see that she is truly being disciplined. Her simple prayer had all the elements of biblical worship. She prayed to God as Father. She offer praise. She gave thanks. She recognized the need for God to lead her life. She lamented the loss of her father and offered up a request. And she concluded in Jesus’ name.” Someone has been modeling that and teaching that to her.
- Friends, at Central we cherish and love the gospel. It is the main thing we are about. It is the centre of all we do. It is for this reason that we are delighted to enter into this partnership with Compassion. They are doing a tremendous work. Children and families are being transformed. I am going to invite Geoff to come up now and give you some more of the details about what partnership looks like.