

A Gospel Driven Partnership & Prayer

1. Intro

- In JRR Tolkien's *Fellowship of the Ring* a band individuals from different origins and ridiculous diversity that exceed our ethnic or social differences ... come together for an important quest [SLIDE]
- Amongst the group were
 - Four hobbits – Frodo Baggins and his friends Merry, Sam & Pippin
 - Two men, warriors of the first rank - Boromir of Gondor and Aragorn, son of Arathon II, King of Gondor
 - One wizard – Gandalf, ancient nemesis of evil and repository of wisdom and supernatural power
 - An Elf – Legolas, from a fair race of archers of the forest with pointed ears
 - And a dwarf – Gimli, a stout, axe wielding creature from the dark chambers under the mountains
- The nine members of the fellowship bore few similarities
 - However, the very different individuals were bound together by their great mission to defeat the forces of darkness and save Middle Earth
 - The man, Boromir, despite his lapses gave his life for the hobbits
 - And the elf and dwarf, despite their differences came to form a great friendship so great that Gimli was inducted into an honoured order reserved only for elves
- It was their fellowship in protecting the ring that united them together around a common cause

- Same will often happen with human beings
 - People will come together in fellowship to work toward a common cause
 - Supporting Australia in the soccer
 - Raising money for breast cancer
 - Protesting against treatment of asylum seekers

- Volunteering at the local sports club
- But here in Philippians chapter 1, we see its ~~heart~~ depth of fellowship that exceeds any earthly fellowship
 - In v5 Paul refers to it as their fellowship in the gospel - NIV translates it partnership in the gospel
 - It's a fellowship that is grounded in the good news of Jesus ... and it's a quest that's eternal
- And not only is it a fellowship / partnership that Paul and the Philippians share in
 - It's a fellowship that you and I share in
- Today looking at what it means to be in a gospel driven partnership that brings more joy and more meaning than any other human fellowship we might know

2. Context

- Paul visited Philippi on second missionary journey [SLIDE]
 - Read about it in Acts 16
 - Resulted in the conversion of a
 - wealthy Gentile God fearer – Lydia
 - a young slave girl possessed by an evil spirit
 - as well as the jailer and his entire household
 - plus a number of others also became Christian¹
 - But there has also been opposition to Paul and his message ... so much so Paul and Silas were at one stage put in prison
- Paul visited the believers at other times on his other journeys
 - But now he's in prison, probably in Rome

¹ Acts 16:40

- The Christians in Philippi have heard about his imprisonment and sent him people and gifts to him to encourage and care for him
- Now he writes back to them to thank them ... but also to address some of the issues they were going through as a young and growing church

3. Gospel Driven Partnership [SLIDE]

- He starts his letter telling them how he gives thanks to God every time he thinks of them because of their partnership in the gospel

- Right from the start ... the Philippians have been partners in the gospel ministry of Paul
 - Supporting him while he was in Philippi
 - Encouraging him while proclaiming the gospel in other cities
 - Praying for him in his struggles
 - Providing for his needs while he's in jail in Rome

- And that support, encouragement and provision continued over the years even though Paul was constantly on the move and in other cities
- And so ... even though he rarely sees them ... he considers them partners with him in the proclamation of the gospel
 - Even though they are mission-ing in different places and circumstances, they're united in their purpose

- And that brings Paul great joy
 - He delights to know that
 - They're working together on the same mission in life
 - They care for and want to encourage Paul in his efforts to proclaim the gospel
 - That God is continuing to do his work in and through these Christians who he saw come to faith years before hand
 - So he rejoices in that

- He gives thanks to God every time he thinks of them because of
 - The work God is doing in their life
 - And their partnership in the gospel

- **Illustration**
- Say Gary Nelson asks me to come and pastor a small struggling church in NW Western Australia
 - Leave C@P / CC and lead to WA
- Throughout that time ... you guys are constantly
 - Sending letters to encourage me
 - Sending money to help support the church
 - Sending resources to help me do ministry there
 - Writing and telling me about the ministry here at C@P / CC
- Say 10 years later ... you send some people over for a few months
 - Do some preaching; run a kids club; help reach the community
 - Bring some more money and resources to help support the church
 - Tell me how well the church is going
 - All the original members are still here
 - Dean / Liam now pastoring the church
 - Col / Lisa is one of the elders
 - Mark / Josh is Youth Pastor
 - Little kids are now youth leaders
 - Youth kids are all grown up and married and still going strong in faith
- I would be super encouraged!
 - And I'd be praising God and giving thanks for our partnership in the gospel from the first day until now

- What's super encouraging for Paul is that the Philippians have continued to be partners in the gospel ... throughout the good times and the rough times
 - Even when the chips were down
 - In prison

- Struggling financially
- From a worldly perspective ... seems like his ministry is not going so well
- The Philippians continued to support, encourage, pray and provide for Paul

- Reason why is ...
 - Because it's the gospel of grace that unites them
 - As he says in v7 - *all of you share in God's grace with me*

- What's this grace they share in?
 - It's the good news of God's amazing grace shown to them in the death and resurrection of Jesus ...
 - That through the cross of Christ, God would forgive their sin and transfer them from being under his wrath and judgment to having the sure hope of eternal life

- It's that amazing grace of the gospel that's so gripped the hearts and minds of these Philippians that their partnership with Paul has endured
 - They don't drop Paul and forget about him when things get tough
 - They don't ignore the gospel ministry he's doing because he's no longer ministering directly to them
 - They continue partnering in the gospel with him

- Because when you understand the depth of what God has done for you in the gospel
 - it moves you ...
 - it changes you ...
 - it gives you a new worldview for prioritising your life
 - it gives you reason for being and acting

- **Application**

- At C@P our vision is *"To pray and plan for a doubling in the size of our church by 2017."*
 - *Double the number of people following and proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Saviour*
 - That's what we're on about
 - That's the partnership we're engaged in

- To make that happen ... requires us as a church / as a bunch of Christians to partner together to make that happen
 - I can't make that happen by myself
 - It's an activity, under God, we partner together to make it happen

- **Illustration – The Woodies** [SLIDE]
- Australian Tennis Open finishes tonight
- One of the greatest doubles tennis partners of all time were 'The Woodies'
 - Mark Woodford and Todd Woodbridge
 - They were the ATP Doubles Team of the Year five times
 - Won 61 ATP doubles tournaments as a pair including 11 Grand Slams

- Imagine if
 - Todd stood at the net and did nothing and just left everything for Mark to get
 - Mark stood at the baseline and did nothing and just left Todd at the net to volley everything
 - Got frustrated with each other and started smacking serves into the back of the others head
- Wouldn't work!
- A partnership requires parties to work together

- Like Paul and the Philippians, we all play a role in our partnership here at C@P / CC

- Some will
 - Preach
 - Teach kids church
 - Lead growth groups
 - Teach scripture
 - Sit on committees
 - Serve on Sunday's
 - Play music & sing
 - Welcome
- **All of us** ... will be people who are committed to
 - Church
 - Growth group
 - Praying for church, one another, our mission
 - Giving financially
 - Seeking to reach people we know and people in our local community
- Talk more of how we're going to go about that next week at our Vision Sunday

- **Illustration – Broughton Knox** [SLIDE]
- Before he became Principal of Moore College, Broughton Knox served as a chaplain in the British Navy in WWII
 - He happened to be on a ship preparing for D-Day, the invasion of Normandy
 - He noted that the minds of all hands on board, regardless of rank, were focused on the invasions success
 - No one thought of his own interests, but only how he could help his shipmates in their commonly shared task
 - He says "*I remember noting in my mind how I had never been happier*"

- After the invasion and return to England, everyone noticed a difference in the atmosphere on the ship

- It was still friendly and well run ship
- But several of the sailors, sensing the difference asked the young chaplain why things had changed
- Knox reflected
 - *"The answer was quite simple. During those months that proceeded and followed D-Day, our thoughts had a minimum of self-centredness in them*
 - *We gave ourselves to our shared activity and objective ... once the undertaking was over, we reverted to our own purposes, as we do normally"*
- When a group of people have a common goal ... they can
 - put aside selfish ambition
 - be willing to sacrifice their own preferences and even well being
 - ... for the sake of something bigger than themselves

[SLIDE OFF]

- And the common goal that was bigger than the individual lives of Paul and the Philippians was the proclamation of the gospel
 - It was the good news of Jesus that prompted them to put aside their own interests and be willing to sacrifice their time, effort, well being and finances ...
 - Because of the gospel
- As we start a new year with the same common goal as Paul and the Philippians ... proclaiming the gospel to our friends, family and neighbours
 - The thing that unites us ... the thing that motivates us must be the gospel
 - Can't be anything else
- We can be motivated by guilt
 - *"Unless I don't do this ... then ppl will think less of me"*

- You'll do it but feel resentment and bitterness towards those who have guilted you into it
- Motivated by sense of duty
 - *"If I do this I will have fulfilled my obligation"*
 - You'll do it ... but you'll have no joy
- Motivated by misplaced understanding that this will win favour with God
 - *"If I do this, then God will be happy with me"*
 - You'll do it but will have no assurance of your salvation and always be left wondering have I done enough
- Or you can be motivated by the gospel
 - Because what does the gospel teach us?
 - It teaches us that Jesus came and gave himself sacrificially ... putting aside his self interests ... for something bigger than himself ... the salvation of sinners like you and me
 - Gospel is a message of joyful sacrifice that brings blessing to others
- When we understand
 - that God did that for us; and
 - that this is a message of hope, salvation and blessing for all who believe it
 - Gospel gives us the ultimate sense of purpose and motive for all that we do in our partnership together this year
- And the thing is ... just as it was for Paul ... our partnership in the gospel is a partnership that brings great joy!
 - There's nothing like seeing what God is doing through a gospel partnership
 - There's a joy that transcends the struggles and hardships of life that's fulfilling, meaningful and eternal

- **Illustration – Lovell’s in Spain [SLIDE]**
- CMS Summer School > showed a video
 - Showed young woman speaking in Spanish about the impact of John and Jodi Lovell who are CMS missionaries working in the Anglican Church in Valencia, Spain
 - She shared
 - Like many Spaniards, Catholic background > but didn’t feel Catholicism had the answers
 - Walked into John’s church in Valencia looking for answers
 - John welcomed her, made sure she had someone to sit with
 - She said – she immediately knew this was the church for her
 - She said she heard John explain the Bible in a way she had never heard it explained before
 - She kept coming ... now she understands Jesus died for her sin, that she’s made right with God through her trust in Jesus
 - She pleaded with us on the video not to let John and Jodi stay in Australia ... that we must send them back to Spain
 - Not just so she can keep growing in her faith ... but because there are so many more people like her in Spain who need to hear the gospel
- I know John and Jodi > in my year at college
 - Remember them being interviewed at CMS the year they decided to leave Australia and go to Spain
 - We get their prayer letters and pray for them
 - We’re financial supporters of CMS
 - As I was sitting there hearing of the impact they are having in Spain ... I was tearing up ... not with sadness ... but with joy
 - Joy at what God is doing as we partner with John & Jodi in our small way in the gospel
- **Aside > plug for CMS**

- Come to CMS Summer School
- Support CMS financially
- Pray for our CMS missionaries > Steph and Charles

[SLIDE OFF]

- Friends ... as we partner together in the gospel here at C@P / CC ...
 - There'll be hard times
 - There'll be times when we struggle
 - There'll be times when the ground we're ploughing seems unfertile
- But in the midst of that ... there will also be great joy that comes from seeing
 - Seeing one another stand firm in the gospel
 - Seeing one another grow in their faith
 - Seeing God do his work in and through our partnership

- More to say about what that looks like for us as a church and our growth groups next week at Vision Sunday

4. Gospel Driven Prayer [SLIDE]

- Part of Paul's partnership with the Philippians is that he prays for them
- Gospel partnership is not all about human beings coming together to pull off something extraordinary
 - The partnership in the gospel that Paul speaks about isn't just a two way relationship between Paul and the Christians in Philippi
 - It's actually a three way relationship between Paul, the Philippians and God
- God is central to all Paul's gospel ministry
- It was God who
 - called Paul to faith
 - called him to be an Apostle to the Gentiles
 - Equipped him to preach and proclaim the gospel
 - Provided people and the financial means for him to go on his missions

- Turned the hearts of those he preached to believe in Jesus
- So in v9-11 Paul prays to God for the Philippians
 - *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.*
- He prays their love would abound more and more
 - Notice Paul doesn't say **what** they are to love
 - Doesn't pray their love *for God* may abound more and more
 - Or their love *for one another* may abound more and more
- This is because Paul prays that their love would overflow up to God AND out to each other
- It's a love that flows out of a knowledge and understanding of God
 - Who he is
 - What he's done for us in Christ
 - How he's fulfilled his promises
 - What his character is like
- The more we know about God, the more we will love him
 - The greater understanding we have of the grace he has shown us in the gospel ... the more we will want to serve him
- Paul prays they'll grow in their knowledge of God and the good news of Jesus ...
 - because he knows as that happens ... the Philippians will grow in their love of God and of others

- **Application**

- Must never understand the love that the Bible speaks about as a sentimental, sloppy, romantic comedy type of love
 - Love of God is a work of the Holy Spirit bringing about the revelation of Jesus through the word of God
 - And so the more you & I are in the word of God ... the more your knowledge of God and Christ will increase ... and therefore the more your love will overflow
- All the scriptures speak of Christ ... and each new thing you learn as you read the scriptures will become new reasons for loving him
- Remember this ... a superficial love of God is a sure sign of a superficial knowledge of God
- This is why we must give priority to
 - Gathering in worship each Sunday
 - Gathering in our growth groups each week
 - Opening the scriptures for ourselves each day ... even if only a small passage ... in order to teach ourselves and children
- For the more you know of him the more your love will abound for him and for others
- Paul wants the Philippians love to abound more and more ...
 - *... 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*
- Paul's ultimate purpose for the Philippians is that he wants to see them
 - standing firm in their faith
 - growing in Godliness and Christ-like-ness
 - right until the end ...
 - so that on the day Jesus returns they will be share in the salvation he brings

- **Application**

- How encouraging it would have been for the Philippians to know that this was the prayer Paul was praying for them
 - That he was calling on God to keep doing a deep spiritual work in them
 - That he genuinely cared for their eternal future and so he prayed earnestly for them in that
- How good would it be to have people you know praying that prayer for you!
 - How encouraged would you be
 - Not just knowing people who care that deeply for you
 - But also that your spiritual growth and eternal future is being presented to God in prayer for him to answer
- And so this prayer of Paul is a great example to us of the type of prayers we ought to be praying
- Because our human nature is to be self-centered ... it means our prayers will naturally move to be centered around us and our needs
 - The example of Paul's prayer here for the Philippians is a reminder to lift our eyes and see the eternal picture and pray for eternal things
 - Not to fall into the rut of just praying for
 - Johnny's got a cold
 - Assignment that's due next week
 - Grandma's big toe
 - But praying for the work of the gospel and those we are working alongside of in that gospel partnership
- So when you pray this year ... make sure you are praying for those we partner in the gospel with
 - People in your growth group
 - People in church

- Our link missionaries
- Others we know and support in gospel ministry

- As you pray for our partnership in the gospel ... I want to encourage you to be praying this type of prayer
 - Pray that our love will abound more and more in knowledge of God
 - Pray that we would keep growing strong in our faith
 - Pray we would keep growing in Christ-like-ness
 - Pray we would all be standing firm in our faith on the day Christ returns

- So here's my prayer for all of us this year as we partner together in the gospel
 - *That your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God.*

PRAY