

**Our Global Mission**  
Philippians 1:7  
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For the last several weeks I have planned this morning to move ahead with our study in Matthew 5, and had begun work to that end, but as I traveled home from South Africa, I found my own heart and mind conflicted. On that 16 hour flight from Johannesburg to Atlanta, I kept coming back to something I really wanted to share with you. I want, this morning, to share the fruit of your prayers for me and my ministry in South Africa, and I also want to share with you what the Lord has done in my own heart, and frankly, what strikes me every time I travel to serve the Lord in other places around this globe.

So, Lord willing, next Sunday morning we will return to our study of the Sermon on the Mount, but this morning I really want to accomplish two goals. First of all, I want to give you a brief report of my ministry in South Africa, but then I want us to turn to the Scriptures, and I want to give us all a brief challenge about our ministry, individually and corporately as a church, to the world.

So let me begin, first of all, with just a brief report of my ministry there in South Africa. There is biblical warrant for such a report, not that you need it, but I'll show it to you. Acts 14, Acts 14:26, when Paul returned from his missionary journey before the Jerusalem Council, Acts 14:26 says that "they sailed to Antioch," that was Paul's home church and, "from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished." And "when they had arrived," there in Antioch at the home church, they "gathered the church together, and they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." Now obviously that was a longer ministry than mine, over a much larger area than mine, and I'm sure more effective than mine, but nevertheless the warrant for such a report is found here and in other places in the Scripture.

So let me just give you a little brief overview. I want to begin by helping you see the context in which I served, the spiritual state, if you will, of the nation of South Africa. There are several different ways that you could describe its spiritual state. The first is paganism. On every continent on earth Satan and his demons have enslaved the people in some form of a damning false religion. That's what Satan is about in the world, that is his chief mission, is to pervert the truth and to enslave people to false religion, false ideologies, and he does that on every continent. Of course, here on our own continent, it tends to be the false religion of secularism and humanism and materialism, but on the African continent, there he is most effective by dominating its people with a form of paganism and false religion called animism.

Animism is simply the view that souls or spirits exist not only in human beings, but also in the rest of creation, in animals and plants and rocks and mountains and rivers, and all of the parts of creation. Animism in some form occurs on most of the continents on this planet. The missionaries that I was with while I was there shared with me some of what they had learned about the specific form animism takes in Africa. They learned this from a man who has devoted 50 years of his life to studying African religion.

For African animists God is extremely distant and impersonal, think almost the Gnosticism of the second century where God is so distant that He is unreachable. For some of them God is really not even a person, He's more like a power or a force, and He's a force that can be manipulated. He can be manipulated by magic, or by avoiding certain taboos, that is, actions that get God's attention. In animism the last thing you want is God's attention, because when you get His attention it usually doesn't work out well, He's angry with you, He's upset because you have broken one of the taboos. It might be as simple as some superstitious thing like a black cat; it might be other things as well. So then, since God is this impersonal force, since you really don't want His attention, He's distant and impersonal, the best way to interact with God is not directly, but through worshiping and praying to one's ancestors.

Ancestor worship is a big thing in the animism of the African continent. The ancestors serve as mediators or buffers between you and God. There are many ideas that are part of African animism that are tragic, but I think one of the most tragic parts of that particular form of animism is an idea I'd never heard of before, but once you hear it you understand a lot of what happens on the continent there. It's the idea of a limited good. The idea is that there is only a limited amount of good available, and if you take more than your share, you are actually taking it from someone else.

For example, if, let's say, there was a bucket filled with ten cups of water and there are ten people, a cup for each one, if you're number five in line and you take more than your share, instead of your one cup you take two cups, then they would say, see that means that the tenth person doesn't get any at all, you have essentially taken his good. Now, this concept works out, the concept of a limited good, works out in shocking ways across the culture. For example, and this actually happens in some of the more remote tribal areas to this day, if a woman has twins she will often take the life of one of those children, because if she doesn't, the other women in the village will, because they will see her as having taken more than her share. She got a child that one of them would have received, limited good.

Another example that is actually a true story from one of the missionaries I was talking with there, a farmer who had a farm on one of the rivers there bought some irrigation equipment in order to circulate the water from the river through his property and increase the yield of his crops, and as you might expect his crops did end up exceeding that of those farmers around him. Now, if you and I heard that story, our natural response, based on our own worldview, that's been

influenced by the Judeo-Christian ethic, our response to that would be, I need to get me one of those pieces of equipment to increase the yield of my own farm. That's not the response of an African animist. His response is to destroy, and this is what they did, the other farmers destroyed that irrigation equipment because he was taking part of the limited good. He was taking water that would've been for their fields and their crops, and so you can see how traditional African animism really has destroyed all potential progress on the continent.

In the end, the only hope is the gospel of Jesus Christ, which brings a complete change in worldviews, which says there is not limited good, but we serve a God of endless, unlimited good, who delights in doing good to His creation and who has provided us with all things to enjoy, and not only for ourselves, but we're to work hard and improve what we have in order to be able to help others as well. So the gospel is really the only hope for the paganism that is in South Africa and the continent.

But there is not only paganism there, there's also Christianity, and Christianity in several forms. First of all, there is the Dutch Reformed faith. Added to the indigenous people groups in South Africa were settlers from Holland that came in the 1600's. They brought with them, from Holland, the Dutch Reformed faith. Today that faith, the Dutch Reformed faith, is really a label for a large number of different types of ideas. There are, among the Dutch Reformed, evangelical Christians with whom you and I would enjoy fellowship and we would have much in common. There at the other end of the spectrum, among the Dutch Reformed, are Zionists, who believe that they are the new Israel alone, and that the other people on earth, including the indigenous peoples of Africa, exist, were created, only to serve them.

In between that are what we could call the traditionalists, the Dutch Reformed people who simply continue with the form of the faith that has existed, but for whom it has become nothing more than tradition, and really a social gathering, much as we see in the states, where people, they go to church because it's what the family's always done, and because it's where they make social contacts and where they have their social life. So, the Dutch Reformed faith is all of those things and everything between.

A second expression of Christianity in South Africa is Christian Syncretism. You need to understand this, when you hear about Christianity in Africa, much of it is a blend of some elements of the Christian faith blended with the traditional religion of animism. It is Syncretism. It is not pure Christianity, it is a blend of the two. I have often wondered why the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel that we have exported from the states thrives in Africa. When I first heard that it had arrived in Africa, my thought was, well, that won't last long with all the poverty there, I mean how long does it take to realize this isn't working?

But, in fact, it works very well because the ideas of the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel, its mystical and magical ideas, along with the concept of the power of demons, mix very well with the magical spirit world of animism. And so they perfectly blend together and they just start

calling instead of one of the spirits of animism, they start calling the power and force behind it, the magical force, the spirit, the Holy Spirit, but it's really just a blend of the Christian faith with the false religion of animism.

And then of course there is also the faithful church. It was my joy while I was there to mix with believers who were Dutch Reformed, Baptists, evangelical Anglicans, you know, that's sort of a misnomer here in the states, there are few evangelical Anglicans, but there are more there in South Africa, as well as independents. So, that's a brief overview of sort of the spiritual state of South Africa into which I went to minister.

But let me come, secondly, to the nature of my visit. Why was I there? Well, over the last 20 years graduates from The Master's Seminary have gone to South Africa to pastor churches, to strengthen the church, and to build a seminary. There are now more than ten men who have graduated from The Master's Seminary, along with their families, who serve there in South Africa. I interacted with a large portion of the church there, but my host was one of those graduates of The Master's Seminary, a man named Joel James.

Joel moved his family to South Africa. He was originally from South Dakota. I can understand why you would want to get out of there, but, sorry if I offended anyone with that, but I teased him to the same extent, but anyway, he moved with his family to South Africa some 18 years ago, and he now pastors Grace Fellowship Church in Pretoria, South Africa. He's a gifted preacher. In fact, I hope at some point to get him here to preach to you, and he has a wonderful congregation there of about 250 committed believers. He's also there, though, not only to pastor, but to serve the church in South Africa in various ways. He runs a training institute, the Grace School of Ministry for equipping and training pastors, and one of the ways that he tries to reach out to the rest of South Africa, and he's head of the team there, is the annual Shepherds' Conferences. That really is why I was there.

For the last 18 years, Joel has held a series of annual conferences for pastors and church leaders. They are spread out across the country to make it easier for men to come near where they live, and so over the two and a half weeks that I was in South Africa I was involved in three back-to-back conferences in various places across the country. The first was in Joel's church in the Pretoria Johannesburg area. A large percentage of the population of South Africa lives in that metroplex. It's two cities really, combined, that's Joel and his family by the way, and that's the modern city of Pretoria where they live, where he lives and ministers, and about 150 pastors, church leaders, and missionaries drove from somewhere between five and six hours away to be a part of this conference there in Johannesburg and Pretoria.

The second conference in which I was involved after that was in the northern part of the country of South Africa, in a city called Polokwane. If you're familiar with South Africa, it used to be called Pietersburg, that's the Dutch spelling of Pietersburg, not the Russian spelling. That conference was held at Christ Baptist Church and you can see a little bit of the facility there and

the ministry that's there. That church serves as the model for a seminary that is based on its property called Christ Seminary. Several of the professors were educated at The Master's Seminary and sent out as missionaries of Grace Community Church in California. There are at this point, and you can see some of them gathered there having a meal together, and by the way, that's corn maize they're making in those iron pots, think of southern grits, but as a base for a kind of a meat sauce that we were served for lunch, but you can see them together for lunch there.

There are about 60 students from, not only from, the nation of South Africa in this seminary, but also from all over the southern half of the African continent. In fact, I met a man from Madagascar and he was telling me about the church and the way things work in Madagascar. He said, "You know I loved your message. I love the directness of your preaching," he said, "but we could, we just, nobody does that in Madagascar." He said, "In fact, if you want to say something, you have to take a circuitous route, and eventually at the end of your message get to what you wanted to say." And so he's hoping to change that, and I encouraged him that it might be decades or it might be generational that he's working toward changing, but this is the kind of circumstances in which these men serve.

About 150 students from the seminary, graduates of the seminary, and other pastors from all of that area, even from north of South Africa and Botswana and beyond, came to the conference. One of the highlights of this particular conference for me was hearing the men sing, sing songs of worship, in their traditional language, in their traditional music style. I can just say that some of you are going to have to step up the energy level in our singing to make me feel at home again after that.

We flew from Polokwane through Pretoria and to the southern tip of the country. Our third conference was held in Cape Town. Some of you, perhaps, have been to Cape Town. It is without question one of the world's most beautiful cities. The conference there was held at Emmanuel Anglican Church. It's an evangelical Anglican congregation, and again about 150 pastors within driving distance joined us for that conference. So, over the two and a half weeks I was there I was able to speak to about as many pastors as would fill up this auditorium and it was just a great opportunity for ministry.

The three conferences were essentially identical and I was one of three speakers, Joel James spoke, Ted Tripp, whom many of you know, was there to speak, he taught through his material on shepherding a child's heart, I enjoyed reviewing that material again myself, as well as getting to fellowship with both Joel and Ted, and Ted brought his wife Margie along, so I got to visit with them. Joel had asked me to come primarily for two reasons. One was to present messages that would be spiritually edifying and encouraging to the pastors, that would impact their ministry. But the second reason, and in some ways the more foundational reason, was to hopefully serve as a model for expository teaching and preaching. They really don't have much

of that in their environment, it tends to be more storytelling or topical, and, of course, the power is never in the preacher, the power is in the message and the Word unleashed in explaining its meaning, and so that was my goal. It was to encourage some of the men who attended to consider pursuing additional training so that they would be better equipped to serve their congregations.

So, during my two and a half weeks there I think I taught some 26 different times. In addition to participating in the conferences, I also spoke on the two Sundays I was there, the first Sunday in Joel's church in Pretoria, the second Sunday in Emmanuel Anglican Church in Cape Town. I can tell you that it was a rich time of fellowship and encouragement. It was wonderful for me to see what God is doing across South Africa, and even to some extent a little bit of seeing what He is doing across the continent.

So that's a report of my own trip, but with that in the background, I want us to move on to consider, secondly, a challenge about our ministry to the world, a brief challenge about our ministry to the world. Listen, I was struck as I always am when I travel internationally, that we have to lift up our eyes as individual Christians, and as a church, from what's happening here to participate in what God is doing around the globe. I want you to see this in the life of a wonderful church in the New Testament, and that's the church at Philippi. Turn with me to Philippians 1. They serve as an amazing model of such thinking, and they will, frankly, challenge us.

Philippians 1:1,

Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now watch verse 3 as he begins to speak to them directly.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, [*and he says I do so,*] always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all.

Paul says he constantly offers prayers of thanks for them with joy. These people filled Paul's heart with delight. Why? What was the cause of his gratitude for them? Verse 5, "in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now." The word translated participation there is a very familiar Greek word. If you've been a Christian anytime at all you've heard it. It's the word *koinonia*. It's the word that we have translated into English as fellowship.

Unfortunately, we often misuse that English word fellowship. When a group of Christians get together to eat a box of doughnuts, or to have an activity, or even to watch a ballgame, we say they're getting together for what? Fellowship, and of course there's an element of truth to that,

real fellowship occurs. We mean, though, by that, they are enjoying each other's company, they're sharing a good time. But the English word, and its Greek counterpart, originally meant something much different. It referred to people who shared in something, or perhaps better, who were partners in something. It means to be partners. It's the way Tolkien used the word in his book *The Fellowship of the Ring*. He wasn't talking about they're having a good time together. He was talking about that they were bound together as partners in a common cause. That's how the biblical word is used.

Paul reminds the Philippians that they had participated as partners with him in the fellowship of the gospel from the first day. That is, from the day they came to Christ in Acts 16, until the day he penned this letter, some 10 years later. But how exactly were they partners with Paul? Verse 7, "For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart." It's interesting here, Paul sets out to justify his deep level of joy and appreciation for these people. I mean, after all, he's only seen them probably three times since he founded the church 10 years before, and so he says it's "right for me to feel this way about you all," he's justifying his mindset or his attitude toward the Philippians. He's saying there are understandable reasons for the fact that I am so grateful for you all and that you all fill my heart with joy. Why? Notice the middle of verse 7, "since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me."

Why were the Philippians really in Paul's heart? Notice the end of verse 7, "you all are partakers of grace with me." The Greek word partakers is literally fellowshippers, partners with me. Now he goes on to define, or in the earlier part of that verse, he defines the nature of their partnership. Paul thought of the Philippians as faithful partners with him in ministry in two ways. Notice, first of all, they were partners, "in my imprisonment," literally, in the Greek text, "in my chains." How are they partners in Paul's chains? Well, they had sent a gift to support him in his imprisonment, they had sent financial provisions to help support him during that time. We'll see that in a moment in Philippians 4. They also continued to pray for Paul and for his ministry. Here in Philippians 1:19 he mentions their prayers for him and they had refused to be ashamed of Paul. Think about it. Philippi was a Roman colony. It could be a source of shame to look for spiritual leadership to a man who had been imprisoned by Rome in Rome, and yet they were not ashamed of Paul. They continued to support and they continued to respect him and look up to him.

So they were partners in his imprisonment, but notice Paul adds a second way they were partners, and this gets to the heart of what I want us to see this morning. Paul says, I think of you all as partners "in the defense and confirmation of the gospel." Now, I think here Paul uses that expression in a double sense, I think, obviously, he's thinking about the legal situation in which he finds himself. He is about to have to give a legal defense for the gospel before the Emperor and to offer proofs to confirm the truth of that gospel, but I think he's looking at more than his legal circumstances. I think it points to his ministry as a whole. After all, Paul's entire

ministry was setting forth a defense of the gospel and confirming the truth of that gospel by his testimony and other proof.

So Paul is saying then, that he and the Philippians were united by their commitment to one cause. Paul says, you and I, we are like fellow soldiers in the same battle. I thought of that, my mind went back to Stephen Ambrose's book about the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division during World War II, he called the book Band of Brothers. "That those men survived the horrors of World War II, and not only survived, but actually were victorious," he says, "is a tribute not only to their training, not only to their toughness," but Ambrose says, "it was most of all, a tribute to their devotion to one another. They were a band of brothers." That's what Paul means when he says the Philippians were partners with him in the gospel.

Now, do you understand what Paul is saying here, and how this applies to you, sitting here in 21st-century Dallas, and to me and to our church? The entire church in Philippi, probably at the time with less than 100 members, and each of its members individually, were partners with Paul in his ministry. Now folks, Philippians was not just written for that group of Christians sitting in Philippi in the first century. It was written for us. It was written to correct our thinking and to challenge us to follow their example. Think about it. That little church, and each of its members, had a huge impact for the kingdom. So how did they serve as partners with Paul? How did they serve their role as partners in the fellowship of the gospel, and how do we?

Well very briefly, I want you to note with me, in this little letter of Paul to the church in Philippi, five ways that each of us individually, and corporately as a whole, how we need to buy into the global mission of Jesus Christ. You want to be a partner in the gospel? That's what you're supposed to be. In the global mission that God has for the world? Here's how you can do it, here's how I can do it, and here's how we can do it as a church.

Number one, love, teach, and defend the truth of the gospel. I'm not going to spend a lot of time here, but you need to know this; read Philippians 3:1-11, and you will see that Paul says, listen, I taught you about the gospel while I was there. The truth of justification by faith alone. I've written it to you before, Philippians 3:1, and now I'm writing it to you again, and "it's a safeguard for you," and then he warns them that there are those who would attack the gospel. Verse 2, "Beware of the Judaizers, the dogs, the evil workers, the false circumcision," and then he goes on to unfold the gospel of justification by faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone. But notice, he comes back to this theme in verse 17,

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I have often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ.

He says listen, there are people who call themselves Christians who are enemies of the true gospel. He said, if you're going to be part of the global mission, you better love the true gospel,



you better teach those under your influence, your family and others, the true gospel, and you better be willing even to defend the gospel against its enemies. If you are going to be part of God's global mission you've got to love the gospel. But let's move on.

Secondly, if we're going to be like the church in Philippi and be a part of God's global mission to the world, we need to live for the gospel in our own communities. Live for the gospel in your own community. Look back at Philippians 1. You see missions doesn't start when you get on a plane, it starts here, where you are, in your household, in your workplace, in your school, in this community. Look at Philippians 1:27,

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents - which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God.

What is Paul saying here? He's saying, if you want to be part of God's global mission for the world, it starts where you live, it starts in your community, and notice we live out the gospel in two ways. In verse 27, the first way is, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." That means live a life that reflects the power of the gospel to the people around you. Listen, do the people in your life, do they see the life-changing power of the gospel in your life, or do you look just the same as everyone else? If we're going to be part of God's global mission for the world, we have got to begin by living out the implications of the gospel in our own lives. Are you characterized by the fruit of the Spirit? Do people see a difference in who you are and how you live? Is your life characterized by love and joy and peace and long-suffering and gentleness, and so forth?

There's a second way we live out the gospel in our community though, not merely with our lives, but notice in the middle of verse 27, with our words. He says, I want to hear, "that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." This means more than living the gospel, this means speaking the gospel, and that's why in verse 28 there are sometimes opponents. This means communicating the gospel to others. Let me ask you, you want be a part of God's global mission? It starts by opening your mouth where you are and sharing the truth of the gospel. We must love, teach, defend the truth of the gospel. We must live for the gospel in our own communities.

We also need to copy the Philippian church in a third way if we're going to be a part of this global mission God has, and that is, pray for the advance of the gospel worldwide. Can we just be honest with ourselves, we all hear that and we sort of yawn and cover our mouths and think yeah, yeah, I know I need to pray, sure, sure, let's move on to something more interesting. Listen, do you understand how important your prayers for the advancement gospel worldwide really are? Look at Philippians 1:19. Paul says, "I know," literally, I am certain, I am confident

of this, “I know that this,” that is, my current circumstances, “will turn out for my deliverance.” Remember Paul’s in prison, in Rome, actually he’s in his own rented quarters, but he’s essentially in prison, he can’t go anywhere, he’s chained to a Roman soldier, and he’s awaiting his trial, and he says, listen, if at my trial the message I preach is vindicated, and I’m released, then I’ll enjoy deliverance. But, if the other happens, if I’m found guilty of treason for having a lord other than Caesar, and if I am put to death, then I’m still going to enjoy deliverance into the waiting embrace of my Lord. Either way, I win, he says.

But notice how his deliverance would be accomplished, verse 19, “through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Christ.” Listen, nobody believed more strongly in God’s sovereignty than Paul. We learned that, we learned our view of sovereignty from Paul, but Paul also believed that the sovereign God would accomplish His purpose in response to the prayers of His people. You see, the God that decreed the ends, what He would do, also decreed the means by which He would accomplish those ends, and one of the means He would use is answering the prayers of His people. Think about that for a moment. You and I get to cooperate with the sovereign plan of the eternal God. When you and I pray God has already determined what He will accomplish, but He has determined to accomplish that in answer to our prayers. That’s what Paul is saying. That’s why Paul was constantly asking the churches to pray for him, and when he asked them to pray for him, that meant in his mind they were actually assisting him.

Note this verse, in fact you may want to look it up, 2 Corinthians 1:11. Paul says this, “you also join in helping us.” How? “Through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf,” watch this, “for the favor that God bestows on us,” and how does God bestow favor on Paul and his ministry? “Through the prayers of many.” Do you really believe that? Do you understand that God intends to bless the work of world evangelism and of the global mission, the work of our missionaries, through your prayers? Let me ask you, how seriously have you taken your responsibility, individually, and I ask myself this question, and as a family, and as a church, how seriously have we taken our responsibility to be partners with those who go, partners in God’s global vision, by praying? Church in Philippi, they got it. They understood it.

There’s a fourth way that they participated as partners with Paul in the gospel, and that we can as well, and it’s this, we can be partners in God’s global vision by sending our own members to serve others in the advance of the gospel. The church in Philippi did. Look at Philippians 2. Philippians 2:25, we meet a man who is really, in the scope of world history, unimportant, but he was very important to God, and God here immortalizes his service. Philippians 2:25, “But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also,” literally, “your apostle,” that is, the one you sent, “and minister to my need,” and he goes on to describe that he got sick, Epaphroditus got sick, and, in fact, in verse 27 he nearly died through the sickness, and Paul was so grateful that God spared his life, and so in

verse 28 he's saying, I'm sending him back to you so that I don't worry about your worrying about him. Verse 29,

Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard;  
because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete  
what was deficient in your service to me.

Who is this man? Who is a Epaphroditus? Well, he was probably Greek. His name is Greek. He lived in Philippi, in Macedonia. He was probably born into a pagan family, because Epaphroditus means beloved of Aphrodite. So, later in life, he came to true faith in the true God through His Son Jesus Christ, and the Philippian church had sent Epaphroditus to Rome to help Paul. There's no indication, by the way, that Epaphroditus was a pastor in the church in Philippi, or a leader for that matter, he was probably just an ordinary member of the church, but Epaphroditus was sent with two important assignments.

First of all, he was to deliver their gift, their financial gift to Paul. In Philippians 4:18, Paul says, "I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent." So he was to bring that gift. You remember Paul lived for two years in his own rented quarters in Rome. The state, the Roman state, did not provide for prisoners, and so his family and his friends were responsible to make sure that he had money for rent, to pay for the quarters, and for food and clothes, and so their gift was to support Paul, as well as Epaphroditus, for months, and perhaps for a year or more.

But Epaphroditus had a second duty to perform. This is the one I want you to see, in verse 25 he says, he was sent as your "minister to my need." The word minister is used back in the Septuagint of the work of priests. It's as if the people in Philippi are priests and they are making a sacrifice to God, and their sacrifice is one of their own, Epaphroditus. They're sending him to help. Apparently they intended that he stay with Paul indefinitely, and that's why Paul is having to explain why he's sending him back. They weren't expecting Epaphroditus to return anytime soon. This was the first century equivalent of a short-term or medium-term missions trip. One group has already left our church to go on a short-term missions trip to England. Another leaves tomorrow to Kenya.

So what's going on here? The church in Philippi saw as part of its responsibility for the global mission of God, ministering to those who were serving by sending some of their own to minister as well. Listen, each of us, you, need to be willing to go, even in the face of risks. You need to be willing for your children to go, and you need to be willing to send others from our church family to assist those who are around the globe serving the global vision of Jesus Christ.

There's a fifth and final way that the church in Philippi partnered with Paul in the fellowship of the gospel. This little church, really an insignificant church in Macedonia, had a huge impact for the kingdom. A fifth way, and this is how we can as well, is sacrificially give for the advance of

the gospel. Look at Philippians 4:10, “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.” Now we don't know why they lacked opportunity, maybe they didn't know where Paul was, it may be that they didn't have the resources to give to support him, but now they are again. Verse 14,

Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.

Verse 18, “I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I'm amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you sent, and it is a fragrant aroma,” to God, “an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.” This is remarkable. It's remarkable on two fronts. One, think of the impact this one little church with less than a hundred people had on the ministry of the apostle Paul, on the gospel. Many of us are from European descent. The gospel went through Paul there. We sit here today enjoying the gospel because of that little church in Macedonia.

What's even more remarkable is that it wasn't a wealthy church. Look back in 2 Corinthians 8:1. It's not like they just had lots of resources. Second Corinthians 8:1,

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, [*that included Philippi,*] that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their, [*note this,*] deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality, [*their generosity*].

Here was a congregation that got it. They were not wealthy people, they didn't have a lot of resources, in fact, at that time they were in poverty, but they got a vision for the glory of Jesus Christ displayed in the nations of the world, and they gave to support that mission. I appreciate, by the way, your own generosity to do that, even as I heard while I was away about what you gave to support the seminary in India. This Philippian congregation had faithfully given to Paul's ministry since he had first come to Philippi 10 years before, and now they're continuing to support him in Rome. It's really remarkable. You understand? You understand what we're seeing here in this pattern? Every single one of us, regardless of our financial situation, must feel the responsibility to financially support the work of Christ across this planet, as the church in Philippi did.

You know, every year it's my joy to travel somewhere in the world, serving the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm the pastor of this church, I need to be here, but once a year it's my joy to travel somewhere around this planet, and every time I travel, my eyes, as this time, were lifted up beyond this wonderful church that we have here, and beyond the communities in which we

serve, to see the world, to remember that I as an individual, and my family, and that each of us as individuals, and our families, and that all of us together as Countryside Bible Church, collectively we are involved in something much larger than our own lives. We are called to be partners with those who are reaching the world, and in a very real sense partners with God Himself.

Listen, if you're a Christian, you're part of the fellowship of the gospel, the partnership of the gospel. Now, to my joy, many of you are actively involved in the mission, the global mission in which God is involved, but if you're not, it's time you started getting a vision for what God is doing in the world. Live the gospel, love the gospel, teach the gospel, defend the gospel. Determine to live consistently with the gospel in your own life and share the gospel with the people around you. Open your mouth and speak about the good news. Determine to become familiar with the missionaries this church supports, and faithfully pray for them. Join with them in your regular prayers, and don't just pray for those who have already gone, but pray that God will raise up others from among us. Pray that God would even be willing to raise up one of your own children, if that would please Him, to go somewhere else in the world and proclaim the glories of Jesus Christ. Decide to give to support the work of this church and our missionaries around the world. Consider going yourself as a short term support to our missionaries, and for some of you, some of you who are younger and setting the course for your life, at least consider and ask the Lord if it would please Him to send you to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ somewhere else on this planet.

But whatever you do, don't ever forget that if you're a Christian you are part of the fellowship of the gospel. You're part of the partnership around the gospel. You cannot, you must not, let your life be all about you and your life and your career and your family and your work and your entertainment, and even your church. Like the church in Philippi, that little congregation of people, we are all called to a global mission. Why? Because God Himself is on a global mission. I love that scene in Revelation 5, where the church is described as falling down and worshipping our great God and the Lamb, and you know what they say? They say, look, You have "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" drawn out a people for Yourself. Folks, we have to lift up our eyes beyond our own lives to see what God is doing and to participate as partners with it. Let's pray together.

Our Father, forgive us, forgive us for our selfishness, forgive us for being myopic, for being so provincial, for looking at our own lives and our own circumstances, and becoming absorbed in them when You are about something so much bigger. Father, thank You for the incredible example of that little church in Philippi. Father, may we follow their example, may we as individuals, and may this church collectively, continue and grow in our partnership with Your great worldwide mission to redeem a people by Your Son, for Your Son, to Your own glory. Father don't let us live for ourselves, but let us live for the thing that is on Your own great heart. We pray in Jesus name, amen.