

## **Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse April 22nd 2007 Philippians 1:1-11**

In former British colonies like India or Ghana, there are often still in existence trappings of the colonial past which make you feel like you are in Britain, with London taxis, and English breakfasts. In the same way Philippi was a colony of the Roman Empire and there was nowhere outside Italy that was more Roman than this city. As one commentator says 'The Philippians would have had a very good idea of what it meant to live by ruling principles that originated from afar.' In fact at this time, Roman Emperors were beginning to apply to themselves the titles of Lord and Saviour, and the Philippians took this very seriously. But this meant that nowhere would the cost of acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour have been so keenly felt. To sing 'Rejoice the Lord is King', would be a political statement, because it was to say that Jesus is Lord, not Caesar.

So Paul is encouraging the Philippians to stand fast in the face of such trials as being boycotted in businesses, or imprisonment, saying that it is possible to rejoice in the midst of such trials. Philippi was Paul's church, because he has a relationship and a bond with this church like no other, so he says that he prays with joy for them, and how much he longs for them all with the affection of Christ.

This is the content of his prayer:

1. Love may abound more and more
2. that this may be accomplished by full knowledge and insight
3. so that they might approve those things that really matter
4. so that they might be blameless when Christ returns
5. since they are already full of the fruit of righteousness that is
6. effected by Christ
7. to the praise of his glory

Paul prays that their love might abound more and more, not because they don't have love for one another – after all they gave generously to the church in Jerusalem, out of their poverty. No, he wants to challenge them to the harder thing which is to love those who are near to them. Like them we need to love those whom we do know, who live close enough to us to threaten us and hurt us or disagree with us. The real test of love is what you make of the person you have been in church with year after year! In a big church like Millmead, it is easy to walk away but in order to be a community we need to forgive and be reconciled. You need love, not a syrupy sentimental love but love that has integrity, and is guided by wisdom as to what to do in a given situation. Love will discern what really matters. Not that that means we have no moral integrity – there are things worth dying for.

But in the end the thing that enables us to stand before Christ as pure and blameless has everything to do with the fruit of our life together – the way we love each other, honour each other, show hospitality to each other, and bear with one another. We are witnessing now to that Kingdom to come, we belong to a colony of another Kingdom – we have dual passports. In our love for people, our sensitivity tact, appreciation we make the church a glimpse of heaven.