**SATURDAY February 2, 2017 Philippians 4:6-13**

What does a God-blessed life, a life at peace, look like? Paul’s lyrical testimony at the end of his letter to the Christians in Philippi gives us a picture. The key ingredients he focused on were trusting prayer in place of worry, an intentional focus on what is good and admirable, and a contented spirit in all circumstances, founded on a bone-deep confidence in God’s love and providence. That’s the kind of blessed life that Jesus offers to grow in each of us.

• It’s worth recalling Paul’s situation as he wrote (or probably dictated) these lovely words. He was in a dank, dismal Roman dungeon (see Philippians 1:12-14). Prayer and trust, the discipline to focus on the good, and a kind of relentless contentment were how God gave him power to endure even humiliation, pain and awful conditions. How can you more mindfully accept these gifts from God in your life, so that in all circumstances you can find contentment, blessedness and peace?

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**Extended Care Facilities**

* Dot Stone
* Donna McFadden
* Bill Breckel
* BJBrodie

**Prayers for Military, Law Enforcement, and**

**Fire Department**

* Tyler Fix
* Nick Imperiale
* Mark Kazee
* Kyle Knottnerus
* Mike Morales
* Ryan Mugridge
* Brian Vautin

**Lifting Our Church Family in Prayer**

**Prayers of Healing**

* Alice Lilly
* Rik Dejong
* Alta Peekstock
* Noelle Froelich
* Mike Dixon
* Bill Skinner
* Becky Elliott
* John Hall
* Hazel Gray
* Jim Humphrey
* Jimmy Meeks
* BJ Brodie



**Sermon**: The Reality of Persecution

**Date**: Sunday January 29, 2017

**Scripture**: Matthew 5:10-12

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,*

*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven…*

**Sermon Notes**

**Daily Study Guide**

**MONDAY January 30, 2017** **Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35**

The very first Christians lived out their faith as a fairly small, largely unknown group, living in a city that had crucified their Lord. But the apostles’ teaching, prayer, fellowship and a radical spirit of generosity bound them together. Together, they left behind a model of lives blessed in awesome ways by God’s presence.

• These early Christians lived a communal lifestyle, probably as a way of dealing with persecution and ostracism. In our prosperous, tolerant communities, we have other options for living out our faith. In what ways can you live in the first Christians’ spirit, sharing what you have so that there can be enough resources for people in need?

• The teachings of the apostles and the power of the Holy Spirit moved the first Christians to share their possessions, setting aside their own gain to bless others. Giving to others helped them live out God’s will in their lives. How does your readiness to share with others shape your walk with God? How does it reflect God’s impact on your life?

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**FRIDAY February 3, 2017 Philippians 2:1**-11

Verses 6-11, which Paul probably quoted from an early Christian hymn, weren’t just pious “church talk.” Verses 2-4 of chapter 2 (and Philippians 4:2-3) show that there was a real conflict between two influential women in the church and their followers. Living out the spirit of Jesus, Paul was sure, could return them to peace and blessedness.

• Does “with humility think of others as better than yourselves” (verse 3) mean we should think ourselves worse than others? The Message gives a clearer sense of Paul’s intent: “Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.” How can you live this in business? At church? In school settings? At home? Sports? In any area where rivalry with others disrupts your peace?

• If Jesus “did not consider being equal with God something to exploit,” but “emptied himself,” what does that say about the essence of the blessed life he offers us? When have you been able to humbly harness your own power for the good of another?

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**TUESDAY January 31, 2017** **Hebrews 11:1-6**

Hebrews 11:1 says, “Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don’t see.” This can be challenging for people today, especially if we have a “show-me” approach to life. But as we read the chapter’s list of those who have lived by faith (read beyond verse 6 if you have time), we begin to see that that kind of faith is a key to living a genuinely blessed life.

• Think about beautiful sights or loving relationships you’ve had. Can you “prove” beauty or love to another person? Scholar Leon Morris noted, “There are realities for which we have no material evidence, though they are not less real for that. Faith enables us to know that they exist.” What are one or two intangible realities that enrich your life?

• Comfort and ease are not central to the blessed life, contrary to what our world often says. Hebrews 11’s first readers faced hatred, and possibly death (see Hebrews 12:3-4). In what ways does your faith today in the gift of God’s presence encourage and fortify you to continue the faith journey toward eternal life with God, the ultimate reward?

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**THURSDAY February, 2017 1 Corinthians 12:12-26**

Writing to Christians in the city of Corinth, the apostle Paul vividly expressed a truth found in many parts of the Bible: we cannot live a truly blessed life alone, looking after only our own well-being. As “the body of Christ,” and more broadly as a single human family, what harms one of us harms all of us, and what helps one in the end helps us all.

• Mutual support is a main reason for being God’s family, not just a side benefit. God gave respect to the body’s less visible parts “sothat there won’t be division in the body and so the parts might have mutual concern for each other” (verse 25). Can you recognize when you need love and support from other Christians, and accept as well as give it?

• Like most of us, the Corinthians tended to be competitive. Paul didn’t just write about suffering, but triumphs: “if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it” (verse 26). Does celebrating when someone else gets the glory come easily to you? If not, how can God’s presence fill your life’s empty places, and free you to celebrate others? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**WEDNESDAY February 1, 2017 Psalm 112:4-9**

This wisdom psalm reminded us that those who follow God are usually caring, merciful, justice seeking people who freely give of themselves to help others. They generally trust in the Lord through even the worst of times and will not be shaken. They inspire others to live in ways that honor God. God blesses their lives in various ways, and they bless others in turn.

• A God-blessed life can sound daunting, yet millions who’ve tried it testify that it isn’t a burden, but a gift. As you use your God-given gifts to serve others in love, your life takes on purpose and meaning. You find fulfillment, one of God’s “present tense” blessings. When have you had the joy of sensing God blessing someone else through you?

• The psalmist used a striking metaphor for people who live God’s way: “They shine in the dark” (verse 4). When you live in God’s grace-filled ways, you are a light to the world. When have you seen God shining through you to be “light” in the darkness, bringing hope to someone else? When has another Christian’s “light” brightened your life?

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