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This week we started our new series in Philippians. We began the letter by noting, from 1v1-11, that the Day of Christ shapes the way Paul seeks to encourage and pray for the church in Philippi.

We noted that Paul was writing from 'lockdown' as he wrote and yet still it's a letter bubbling over with joy. We noted that foundationally this is because Paul's joy comes not from his circumstances or situation, but rather from big-picture gospel truths – what Jesus has done, is doing and will do. He's so captivated by Christ that it doesn't matter so much that he's in captivity. Despite being in prison, because Paul knows he's in Christ he has joy.

We noted how Jesus' return impacts how Paul seeks to encourage them

1. He's confident that God will finish the job

Paul's joy in the Philippians is initially seen in their partnership as believers (see Acts 16), as sufferers (again Acts 16 but also Phil 1:29) and as financial givers (Phil 4:15-16). He's also joyful though because he is confident that Jesus will finish and complete the job he has started. This is a huge comfort and encouragement for people like us in our current situation - God is Sovereign and at work. A truth we need to cling to.

2. A church more and more ready for the Day of Christ.

The second aspect of the importance of Jesus' return is in his prayer from v9-11 in that he wants the Philippians to increasingly be shaped now, by what they will be then. He prays initially that they would be abounding in love for one another (perhaps in response to the divisions he sees eg Euodia and Synteché start of ch4) - but not a mushy love, rather a

thinking practical love. The 'knowledge' he mentions is knowing God, and the 'insight' is wise living in God's world. When we know God better, we know how to live in His world better. The outcome of this is then is to 'discern what is best' as we make choices.

The promise from Paul is that, when Jesus returns, the Philippians will be filled with righteousness - full of righteous deeds. When we are despairing or cynical about our current sin (magnified perhaps by lockdown?!), and God's work in us - remember it is not through our own efforts and works - but his work in us - v11. And it's all for his glory and fame.

As always, feel free to use and adapt these questions as you see fit.

How is your joy at the moment?

How much do you think the return of Jesus effects your life? When did you last pray in light of it (before Sunday!)?

Why do you think it often feels so distant or unreal? Is our current lockdown changing this?

Why is Paul joyful as he considers the Philippians? Can you associate with this kind of Joy?

Why does it matter that he will complete the work he has started?

Who is this a particular encouragement to?

How does the return of Christ shape Paul's prayer in v9-11?

What does Paul actually pray for? Why?

Put his prayer into your own words...

Why does knowing God better make us better able to live well?

Do you pray these kind of 'big picture' prayers? Why do we often find these prayers hard?

How can we be increasingly shaped by the Day of Christ - as individuals and as a church?

How can we help each other to do this?