

## And Now the End Is Near

# Thanks for Being Partners

Frankton – 6/12/15

Scripture: Philippians 1.3-11 being partners in Christ with Paul in the mind of Christ

Proposition: Thank you for being partners in the work we have done here in Frankton.

So many local churches are struggling today because of feelings of "bad blood" that exists between the pastor and the congregation. Many churches cannot keep a pastor but a very short time. The "Honeymoon" is short lived. They are constantly "finding faults" with the pastor and his family. Then, at other times, the pastor behaves as "Lord Over God's Heritage" rather than a "Loving Shepherd." Sometimes years pass by --- you can mention the name of a past pastor and some folks within the church are caught up in "bad memories". Their blood pressure rises to almost stroke stage. You can also mention a past congregation where a pastor once served and he breaks out into hives --- thanking God that God had delivered him from that hungry den of lions. As long as there is internal strife and confusion within the local church, Satan wins! Precious souls usually become hurt and outsiders are not won to Christ.

But you will notice in our text, how Paul's heart is filled with love when he thinks of those precious saints at Philippi: [SLIDE] *Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God.* [3] This great church planter had organized many local churches but it seems that this particular congregation was Paul's "crowning work." Paul wrote this letter confined in prison. Toward the end of his life when he knew that death was just ahead what helped Paul to keep his joy and his peace of mind was when he thought of the time he spent with these precious people at Philippi. How they loved the Lord Jesus with all of their heart, how they lived faithful lives serving Christ; how they loved Paul and worked faithfully under his spiritual leadership. The times of fellowship they had together were still a blessing to Paul as he was confined in a jail cell.

He goes on to write a fantastic sentence from a great leader to his special people. He writes: [SLIDE] *Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, [SLIDE] for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ...* [4] Paul was thankful to the folks at the Philippian church for partnering with him to share God's love with the people at Philippi. He really loved the folks at that church. I'm sure there were times, especially when Paul and his helpers were being run out of yet another town, he would turn to Timothy or Silas or Barnabas, or whomever happened to be walking next to him on the road and say, "Oh, Timothy. Remember the church at Philippi. Now there was a church. There was a group of people that really got it. There was a group of people who loved Jesus and shared his message. That was a church. I'm so glad we went there, Timothy. I'm so glad they were our partners in ministry."

I know how Paul felt. I am so glad the Bishop sent me to this church. Let's get this right. I'm so glad the Bishop sent Jan and I to this church because without her love and support, I'm not sure how good a pastor I could be. But I'm so glad that you were our partners in ministry. I do thank God for you. I thank God for our ministry together. And I'm not shy about telling other people about the wonderful group of folks here at Frankton and how they get it; of how they love God and love their neighbor. I tell a lot of people about all of you.

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People ask me what's special about this church. They ask what happened to spark this church. I usually give them a couple of stories. So you're going to hear them right now. When people ask me what sparked this church, I tell them the story of our first mission trip. Jan and I got here in June of 2005. Katrina hit the Gulf coast in August. That following year, in November 2006 – a full year after Katrina had hit – we sent a group of about 16 people from this church (plus a few others from other churches) to spend a week down in Biloxi, MS, helping them clean up after Katrina. We were averaging about 75 people at the time, so 16 people was quite a high percentage of people to go.

So we go down there. We weren't experienced with mission trips – it was our first one. We were so fortunate to arrive and find that the place we were going to stay was full so they sent us to a camp on the shore of the Gulf. [SLIDE] We stayed on the second floor of a building whose first floor had been underwater during the hurricane. And we worked. For 5 days, we worked. And we ate. We ate well. Rex Etchison was our lead cook and we were probably the only group that went down there to work and put on weight while we were there. We ate well. We also took down cookies from the folks up here – enough cookies that we had cookies at every meal and gave away lots of cookies every day and still brought cookies home. But more importantly, those who went on the trip were changed. Something happened in Biloxi. The Holy Spirit moved every one of us a little closer to where he wanted us to be. We were changed. And when we came home to this church, we couldn't help but change this church. Since we got back from that trip, this church has never been the same. And it never will be. Thanks for partnering with me on that mission trip. That's the first story – the story of what sparked this church to change.

Here's the second story people usually hear from me about this church. A lot of you know that we officially opened the Factory in August of 2013. That's when we had the first tenderloin dinner in the Factory. You have to remember what the building looked like then. Everything was done but the back room, the activity room. The place looked really good except that big ol' back room – it still looked like a factory. It was clean, the oil smell was gone. The walls were still that ugly green and the insulation was showing. The floor was unfinished concrete. And we had no plans to finish that room any time soon because we had no money to finish that room. We were just pretty happy that we got the rest of the building done.

Shortly after school started that year, I brought over several of the school faculty and staff to go through the building and encourage them to use the facility saying that we wanted to be a partner with the school – our building was their building. I don't remember who all was in the group but I know that Paula Balenseifer, Mrs. B for short, was one of them. She was, and is, the art teacher at the high school. But more importantly, she was, and is, the junior class sponsor. I took the group into that big ol' unfinished back room and told them that we had room for expansion and it was in our future plans but not any time soon because we didn't have any money. Mrs. B said she thought it would be a good place for the prom. I probably laughed, at least on the inside. We talked for a few minutes and I told her I would take her idea to the Trustees and see what they said.

At the next Trustees meeting, I brought up the idea of finishing the back room, with money we didn't have, and hosting the prom. Now, church Trustees are never ones who are at the forefront in ministry. Typically, they're the ones who are holding back a bit. I expected some pushback from the group. "We don't have the money. We don't have the desire. It's too much work for us to take on. No." That's what I expected to hear. What I heard was, "Ok, let's figure out how we

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can get it done.” The end of the story is: they got it done. The back room was finished in time for the prom – just in time, no time to spare – but it got finished. And three proms later, we haven’t regretted it. And neither have the high school kids who have come to the prom here. That says a lot about how this church thinks. Thanks for partnering in that ministry with me

There are many, many more stories about the great folks at this church that I share with people. But those are two of my favorites. And I can just bet you that somewhere along the way, the good people at Loogootee will hear those two stories. Not that I will boast, but so I can maybe prod just a little bit. Thank you for partnering in all our ministries with me.

I’ve got one more story but I don’t know the ending yet. I know that you folks get to write the ending, I don’t. (*Talk about Buddy Bags, bring up Jenny, give her bags.*)

We are now down to my last few words as your pastor. I hope they’re good. I struggled with how to finish this last sermon. So here it is: God isn’t done with us yet. He’s not done with you and he’s not done with Jan and me. I believe God sent us here. He sent us here so that you and I would do his good work in Frankton and his good work in us. And we have done plenty. But there is still more to do. But there is also his good work to do in Loogootee. So he is sending Jan and me to Loogootee to work with those folks to do his good work in Loogootee. And he’s sending Nathan and Sarah here to be with you and do his good work here in Frankton. I expect that I will hear great things about this church over the next few years. And I hope you hear great things about the Loogootee church over the next few years.

I don’t know about you, but I have had a ball here the last eleven years. Jan and I love all of you and we hope we have shown you that we loved you. We have felt your love for us. And I am pretty certain that you will grow to love Nathan and Sarah just as much as you have loved us. So thank you for being our partners in doing God’s work here in Frankton and thank you for being our friends along the way.

