

Those We Long to See

Matthew Allen

Paul's letter to the Philippians is one of the most uplifting and encouraging epistles in the New Testament. The Christians in Philippi had a very special relationship with Paul, supplying his spiritual and physical needs at every opportunity. The congregation even sent a servant of the church, Epaphroditus, to minister to Paul in a time of need. The picture painted for us in Philippians is one of warmth, love, compassion, and grace. It is a true portrait of how Christian fellowship should be. In speaking of his brothers and sisters, Paul writes, *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel*, Philippians 1:3-5a. As Paul began to conclude his letter, you can imagine him reflecting personally on individuals within the congregation. You can almost see the smile on his face as he says, *my beloved brethren, whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord.... Greet every saint in Christ Jesus....*, Philippians 4:1, 21.

The joy of a fruitful relationship between brethren is truly special. This is especially true when you have an opportunity to work with and encourage brethren on foreign soil. Since 2003, I have had the privilege of traveling to Ukraine three times to work with brethren in the industrial city of Mariupol. Our most recent visit was this past March. It had been four years since our previous trip, but upon our arrival, we were greeted just as if we had been there the day before. Their smiling faces, extended hugs, and kisses on the cheek let us know just how much they appreciated our coming back. There is nothing like the feeling you have in moments like this. There is pure joy in the room. It is joy that transcends the language barrier. It is joy that comes only from a bond in Jesus Christ. It is the kind of joy that you want to experience over and over again and is, I believe, a glimpse of the joy we will experience every day in eternity.

I am often asked if the time and expense are worth the effort of conducting foreign work. And the answer is always a resounding "Yes!" Not only will God bless us with the opportunity of effecting the lives of countless others eternally, but God will change *us* in the process. I am a better person because of my experiences in foreign evangelism. The sacrifices of my brethren in Ukraine inspire me to higher service. The spiritual hunger of the saints abroad stimulates me to learn as much as I can about the incredible wonders of God's revelation. Their genuine humility challenges me to work harder to instill this quality into my life. And the generosity expressed through their hospitality and acts of kindness move me to be more giving.

Foreign evangelism is worth every bit of effort we can muster. I understand that not every person fits into this type of work, but there are countless persons who may have some unused or unknown talents that could be put into service abroad. How about you? Pray about it. Investigate various opportunities that may come along. Brethren overseas need your encouragement, teaching, and most importantly, your Christian love and companionship. Your life will be forever changed in ways you cannot possibly imagine.

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