

# Not Just An Ordinary ‘Hello’

## To the Citizens of Heaven, Part 4

### *Philippians 1:2*

When it comes to blowouts, not much can compete with the 1916 football game between Georgia Tech and Cumberland College.

The story behind this football game actually involved revenge over a baseball game . . . and the threat of losing several thousand dollars.

The Smithsonian website catalogs the event in its sports archives.

From what I read, it took place in the growing football mania of the early 1900s. Cumberland College played with the big teams like Louisiana State, Tennessee and Mississippi. But after the 1915 season, Cumberland discontinued their football program.

The problem was, nobody told Georgia Tech. They had a Cumberland game on their schedule, and if the Cumberland team didn't show up on the field, Georgia Tech demanded that Cumberland pay the forfeiting fee of \$3,000. Back in 1915, \$3,000 dollars was big money.

Actually to you and me, that's still big money. Stay with me – don't start daydreaming about what you could do with \$3,000 dollars. Look this way.

Cumberland leaders tried everything to explain their dilemma to the Georgia Tech coach . . . they didn't have a football team anymore. But the Georgia Tech coach refused to let them off the hook. Their coach was John Heisman, the future namesake of the Heisman trophy – and he wanted revenge.

The year before, his college had been embarrassed when their baseball team lost to Cumberland by the shameful score of 22-0. And then it was discovered that Cumberland had padded their team with some young professional baseball players . . . Heisman wanted revenge.

Cumberland was forced to piece together a team—a job that fell onto the student manager. And he managed to get 13 students to show up, head to Atlanta and play Georgia Tech.

According to the New York Times, it didn't go well.

When the game began, Georgia Tech scored on its very first play. Then Cumberland fumbled on their first play, and Tech returned it for a

touchdown. Cumberland fumbled again the next time it had the ball and Georgia Tech scored two plays later. And on and on . . . and on.

At half time, the score was 126-0. But Heisman refused to let up. By the end of the game, Georgia Tech had scored 222 points. Cumberland never scored once.<sup>i</sup>

One event sort of summed up their absolute despair when, toward the end of the game, the Cumberland quarterback, Ed Edwards, fumbled the snap from the center – yet again – and as the Tech lineman charged into the backfield, Edwards yelled to his fullback, “Pick it up . . . pick it up!”

Edward's fullback, who'd been battered and beaten all afternoon, yelled back, “No, you dropped it . . . you pick it up.”

One of the problems we have in getting the right perspective on Paul's intention as he wrote his letter to the Philippian church, is that we assume this church was in the lead; that the disciples are encountering one undefeated game after another; that it's been 10 years of championship seasons since the church started 10 years earlier, when Paul and Silas had come to town.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

At this very moment, their leader, the Apostle Paul, is writing this letter under house arrest and he'll be dead in less than 24 months.

The wrong perspective treats the letter to the Philippians as a formula for happy-go-lucky Christians - the truth is, Paul will refer to the way we think – and the battle in our minds – much more than he'll ever refer to how we feel.

In fact, this letter is a call to spiritual arms . . . a call to continue developing as a local church with an inner resolve to stand for the gospel of Christ in a culture that would always field the biggest athletes and have the strongest fan base and boast the more

expensive programs and always have deeper pockets.

The score on earth will never appear to be in favor of the Christians.

Which is why Paul will write these kinds of words to the Philippian church – I’m praying that you will *be children of God without blemish* – in other word – don’t cheat in the game, even if you’re getting pummeled – instead, he writes, *be children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and a twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the word. (Philippians 2:15)*

What Paul is doing in these opening lines is setting the record straight for the believer . . . no matter what the score board reads.

If you’ll turn to his letter, we arrive at the last lines of his opening salutation – or greeting – which is loaded with implication and encouragement.

And you need to know that Paul is following the cultural norm in beginning his letter.

We typically sign our letters at the end . . . in Paul’s day; they signed their name at the beginning and then identified themselves with a remark or two so you knew which Paul was writing.

So Paul began this letter, *Paul and Timothy* – and who are we? *Slaves of Christ Jesus*.

That lone would have gotten their attention.

Next, in a typical first century letter, the author would identify the person or people to whom he was writing.

Notice Paul does the same here – *to all the saints* – that is to the church *in Christ Jesus, located in Philippi*.

The typical letter of Paul’s day would wrap up its introductory remarks by giving a typical greeting.

And Paul uses the typical word of his day.

**Notice verse 2. *Grace to you.***

The verb form of this word is translated, “greetings”.

Over the years, archeologists have excavated truckloads of Greek papyri from the Near East – as well as letters written by officials in the Roman Empire – and literally thousands of them include this same opening word – greetings.<sup>ii</sup>

The Roman emperor, Claudius, used this same letter opening formula when he wrote to the City of Alexandria in the first century.

He began with his name; “Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus Imperator, Pontifex Maximus.

You’d never fit that on a driver’s license. And of course, he didn’t need one.

You remember how your mother would refer to you when she was angry? My mother would call me by my full name – Stephen Duane Davey – and I knew I was in deep trouble!

Can you imagine this poor mother – Tiberius Caesar Augustus Germanicus Maximus . . . by the time she gets it all out she forgets what she’s mad about?

And just who is he?

His letter continues, “Holder of the tribunician power, consul designate”

In other words, I’m the guy with all the power of the Roman Empire behind me.

Finally, he identifies the recipient – “to the city of Alexandria”

And then, just like the Apostle Paul, he adds this word, “Greetings.”<sup>iii</sup>

This is just your typical hello.

But here’s a critical difference. Paul isn’t interested in writing just another typical “hello”. So instead of using the popular verb form which is translated – “greetings” or “I send you greetings”, Paul uses the noun form *charis*, which gives us the word *grace*.

He doesn’t write the usual, “Hello to you” . . . he writes instead, *Grace to you*.

You see, Paul is going to transform the typical Gentile greeting and freight it – load it down – with gospel meaning.

Grace was more than a cliché for Paul.<sup>iv</sup>

Grace, as Paul will define it, is unmerited favor from God.

- Grace is the origin of our salvation – *for by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:8)*;

- Grace is the source of our spiritual growth – ***by the grace of God I am what I am*** – Paul wrote in ***1 Corinthians 15:10***
- Grace is the basis for our service (***Ephesians 3:8***) – Paul writes, ***I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace . . . though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given.***
- Grace is the source of never-exhausted, unfailing strength, for ***His grace will always be sufficient for you (2 Corinthians 12:9)***

Sam Gordon writes in his commentary, Grace gives us what we do not deserve and what we could never pay back. Grace stoops to where we are: grace is everything – for nothing – to those who don’t deserve anything.<sup>v</sup>

Grace is everything – for nothing – to those who don’t deserve anything.

Paul got it . . . and he wants the Philippians, at the very outset of this letter, to be reminded that he isn’t just saying “hello”; they belong to Christ; they belong together; they are serving together – all because of God’s grace.

Let me remind you of one man’s particular testimony that would eventually become indivisibly link him to the words, Amazing Grace.

John Newton had been raised in a Christian home in England during his early years. But he was orphaned at age 6 and lived with non-believing relatives. In that home, Christianity was mocked and he was persecuted for following the faith of his birth mother, especially.

At last, to escape the horrible conditions of his foster home, Newton ran away. He made it to the British navy yard and became an apprentice seaman in the British navy. He served in the navy for some time, but his growing rebellion and drunkenness got him into serious trouble. Again, he ran.

He deserted the navy and escaped with a slave trader to Africa. In his own biographical notations, he made it clear why he ran to Africa – he wrote, “I went so that I could sin . . .” “to sin my fill”.

He eventually joined a Portuguese slave trader and was promised great riches in that horrible and cruel enterprise. But he ended up being treated almost as cruelly instead, forced to work on this man’s plantation and eat his food, he wrote, “from the dusty floor like a dog.” So he ran away and made it to the coast where he lit a signal fire. He was picked up by a ship that was heading home to England.

The captain of that ship was disappointed that Newton had no ivory with him to sell, but because the young man knew something about navigation, he was made a ship’s mate. That didn’t last long, thanks to Newton’s love for liquor. He broke into the ship’s supply of rum and distributed it to the crew and the entire crew became drunk along with him. Newton actually fell into the sea and almost drowned.

Toward the end of the voyage near Scotland, Newton’s ship encountered heavy winds. It was blown off course and began to take on water. Newton was sent down in to the hold and told to man the pumps. He was terrified, certain that he was going to drown. He worked those pumps for several days, and as he worked he came under the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

He knew enough of the gospel he’d learned as a little boy from his mother. He wrote that he began to remember verses of scripture that he’d been taught to memorize – down there in below deck, he cried out to God for salvation and he was transformed by the grace of God.<sup>vi</sup>

John Newton would enter the ministry and become a powerful pastor teacher in England – most well-known because he exemplified the grace of God and he wrote the most well-known hymn of all time. Amazing Grace was a poem he composed to illustrate his new year’s sermon for January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1773.

Estimates suggest that this hymn is sung or played somewhere in the world at least 10 million times a year.

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me;  
I once was lost, but now I'm found  
Was blind, but now I see.<sup>vii</sup>*

The truth is – we are all indivisibly linked to the grace of God.

All of us who've been redeemed were lost and spiritually blind . . . but now we've been found by Christ and we have found our spiritual sight.

Paul does something else here.

He not only opens with a variation of the typical Gentile greeting, he also opens with the typical Jewish greeting.

***Grace to you . . . and peace.***

Again, the concept of peace would become a concept the Roman Empire was proud of . . . as if they'd invented it.

From 30 BC to 250 AD, Rome would boast that its Emperors were the Savior of the world and that they, the descendants of the gods, had brought peace to earth.

Just 6 years before Paul wrote this letter, the Roman statesman Seneca had coined the phrase Pax Romana – which was official Latin for the phrase – Roman Peace.

But the Emperor's peace had come at a steep price for those who supposedly enjoyed its fruits. Political oppression, religious crackdowns, suffocating taxation, widespread slavery was all a part of Rome's version of peace.<sup>viii</sup>

And people paid dearly for it.

But listen to the gospel – the peace that comes from Jesus Christ comes at the expense of Jesus Christ. It doesn't come through the death of subjugated people; it comes as a result of His death.

He's the one who dies; He's the one who pays the price; His grace pays for our peace.

The order of terms is not a coincidence here; first grace from God and then peace from and with God. Which is another way of subtly saying to the Philippians, people cannot experience satisfying peace unless they have received God's saving grace.

You don't pay for it . . . you can't earn it . . . He took care of it.

James Montgomery Boice wrote that it was no coincidence that the first words Jesus Christ delivered to his disciples after He arose from the grave and met them in that upper room, were the word "***Peace be with you.***" (*John 20:19<sup>ix</sup>*)

Imagine what He could have said.

- I thought you weren't going to abandon me!
- What happened to you – you didn't even help bury me!
- I poured three years of my life into you . . . I can't believe the ingratitude.
- And what about your faith . . . where's Peter . . . you didn't even make it through the first night of trouble . . . didn't any of you hear one word I said?
- Didn't I mean anything to you?

Think of the tongue lashing and the guilt and the condemnation He could have given them all!

Instead, His opening words to them were, ***Peace be with you.***

Peace?

He'd just paid for it.

The word Jesus used is a derivative of the word that was used in the battle of Marathon, several hundred years earlier. That terminology had become as famous to the ancient world as the lyrics to Amazing Grace are in our world.

The Battle of Marathon was the decisive battle in which Greece crushed the power of Persia. Pheidippides, the champion runner, threw down his shield and took off for Athens to deliver the good news of victory. He burst into the Acropolis where the citizens had gathered with fear and anticipation – and he shouted this same word Jesus used as he appeared in the upper room.

Peace!

It has the nuance of rejoicing in the fact that peace has been achieved through victory.

You could woodenly paraphrase this word to mean, "Rejoice, we have conquered."

Peace is won.

So here are the disciples, huddled in that upper room, John records that they had locked the door, terrified of the Jewish leaders. They every reason to

expect a Roman cohort to show up downstairs to arrest them for having broken a Roman seal on the tomb.

If you were keeping score, it would be the world – 222 points, the disciples – 0.

There wasn't a man in that room willing to pick up the ball and run with it . . . the games over . . . we just want to get out of it alive!

And the resurrected Jesus suddenly appears in the middle of the room – listen, in your greatest despair and failure, you cannot lock Him out.<sup>x</sup>

Without the door ever opening – He suddenly appears and delivers this famous phrase – You can start rejoicing because I've just won the victory and peace is now yours!

- The work of the cross is finished and it has brought peace (***Ephesians 2:14 and Romans 5:1***)
- The gospel that every believer is to communicate to his world is not called the gospel of “I sure hope this works and we get out of it alive” – no it's called the gospel of peace (***Romans 10:15***)

Rejoice, Jesus Christ has conquered!

So when Paul uses this word – tweaking the typical Jewish greeting of shalom with this word instead, he wants to remind them that even though they are buried in the Roman Empire, God has them there and will keep them there and will use them there for His glory.

And Paul is also reinforcing the idea that they and we understand we cannot create lasting peace . . . we can't manufacture genuine grace . . . we can only receive them as gifts.

Notice *verse 2* once more – ***Grace to you and peace from*** – where? – ***from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.***

Beloved, grace and peace can only come to those who know God as their Father.

And how do you come to know God as your Father?

John writes, *But as many as received Him* – Jesus Christ – ***who believed in His name – to them He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).***

Believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior and God the Father becomes your Father.

And you become His child.

These gifts of grace and peace come to those who can call God their Father – but notice also – these gifts come to those who call Jesus Christ their Lord.

I think in this context, given the fact that the Emperor claimed to be both Lord and Savior of the world – the giver of grace and the dispenser of peace – Paul is suggesting nothing less than treason.

Only Jesus Christ can be Lord . . . and if He is your Master – *your* Emperor – *your* Lord . . . than grace and peace can be yours.

In fact, this construction here emphasizes the equality and oneness between God the Father and Jesus Christ. God the Father shares His essential divine being with the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>xi</sup>

Jesus Christ is equally divine; equally eternal; equal in essence with the Father – without beginning or end; is to condemn yourself to search for forgiving grace and forever peace . . . you'll never be able to find them apart from ***God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.***

In this letter, Paul will, perhaps more gloriously than in any other letter, explain the equality of Jesus Christ with His Father.

In fact, Paul is making it clear in these opening lines that there is no Christianity without Jesus Christ's deity.

And deity does not have a beginning . . . and it will never have an ending.

This is much more than simply saying “hello”.

One of the more tragic stories to emerge from the world of Sports was the death of Junior Seau. Junior Seau was the well-known passionate, emotional leader of the San Diego Chargers. In his 13-year football career, Seau made the Pro Bowl 12 times.

He was selected to the NFL 1990's All-Decade team. His career had seen one victory after another.

On May 2, 2012, at the age of 43, Junior Seau took his own life.

In an interview with *Sports Illustrated*, his former teammate and friend, Rodney Harrison, transparently revealed that in Seau's last days he was desperately searching for peace.

Harrison said: He would tell me that the only time he truly felt at peace was when he was with his

children or in the surf. He would say, "When I'm on those waves . . . I have no worries . . . no problems. I [can] just forget about everything." Junior Seau, Harrison admitted with a touch of sadness, was always searching for peace.<sup>xii</sup>

I find it interesting that when Jesus Christ appeared in that upper room and announced he victory of His resurrection; He said, "**Peace be with you . . .**" **but then He went on to add, "As the Father has sent, I also send you."** (John 20:21).

In other words, grace and peace aren't something we're supposed to sit on . . . the gospel of grace and peace isn't supposed to stay indoors.

Take it out there . . . Jesus effectively said, "I'm delivering the news to you that we've won the victory . . . now go tell it to the world."

Paul is reminding the church in Philippi in these carefully chosen words – this is much more than an ordinary hello – Paul is reminding them and us – according to the scoreboard, it might not look like the church is winning . . . truth is, but we already have.

And people around you who *seem* to be winning, are in reality, despairing, thirsting, needy and guilty and beaten . . . they need to hear the victorious news of genuine grace and lasting peace.

They need to hear from you how they can have these incredible gifts of grace and peace when God becomes their Father and Jesus Christ becomes their Master.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 9/28/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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i <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/in-1916-georgia-tech-beat-cumberland-college-222-to-0-22745905/#hgGicAfgwCwXw1Fk.99>

ii James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians* (Baker Books, 2000), p. 23

iii Adapted from Boice, p. 23

iv G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians* (Eerdmans, 2009), p. 49

v Sam Gordon, *The Odyssey of Joy: Philippians* (Ambassador, 2004), p. 22

vi Boice, p. 24

vii John Newton – 1773

viii Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, General Editors; *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 12* (Zondervan, 2006), p. 190

ix Boice, p. 27

x Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Transformed: John 13-21* (Victor Books, 1986), p. 133

xi MacArthur, p. 16

xii Jim Trotter, "Why?" *Sports Illustrated* (5-14-12) citation: [www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2012/may/7052812.html](http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2012/may/7052812.html)