Hello everyone. I am excited to get share what God has revealed to me this week as I prepared to talk with you today. We will be examining the first chapter of the book of Philippians and listening to what the Apostle Paul was saying to the church in Philippi.

As I studied, I was reminded of my childhood. I loved to pretend that I could be something other than what I was. I pretended I was a cowboy who whupped on bad guys. I pretended I was a wolf who ran with a pack of my friends and we had great adventures. As I grew a bit, I learned to read and discovered comic books. Oh my! I learned about Superman and Batman. I loved to read about Richie Rich. I went to a garage sale one Saturday, and the folks there were selling their sons collection of comics. I got two grocery bags full of Thor and Sergeant Rock comics. They were amazing! As I read them, I imagined myself being more that I was. I saw myself as stronger, faster, and more capable than I was as a young boy. I saw myself as a superhero!

This passage reminded me of that vision of myself. Deep down, I want to be a superhero. I suspect you have the same desire. Come on, admit it. You want to be able to do amazing things and to boldly face incredible odds…and win!. I think it is something that is innate in all of us. As we consider our lives, we think to ourselves, surely there is something more. Something seems to be missing. What I really could use are some superpowers, right?

I propose that in order to improve our situation, we have to visualize what we want to be. Paul gives us a pretty good list of the things that we already have at our disposal.

In fact, Philippians 1 challenges us to live a life of wholly devoted Christianity.

What?! How do you suppose we do that? Well, we will look into Paul’s letter and I think you will be surprised by what we find there. Simply, I am here today to challenge you to accept the fact that you are in fact a superhero! In view of that, we can become fully devoted disciples!

Paul’s opening words in his letter to the Christians in Philippi give us a vision of how to be superheroes.

The first thing we have to recognize is that we have to know God.

Paul begins by saying 1Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: 2Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. His very first statement is to affirm the persons who make up the Holy Trinity. He speaks of God the father, the mighty one who sits upon heaven’s throne. He speaks of Jesus who is Lord over Heaven and Earth. Later in these passages, Paul will describe the Holy Spirit, who was sent by the Father to live in all regenerated Christians. It is vital that you are not confused about who God is. God is all three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three persons of the Trinity are God. Now, for many people, this is a mind-blowing proposition. In fact, I think I see some smoke rising over the group as brains are short circuiting. Your logical minds are shouting, How does three equal one?! Well, I have the answer that I think you will arrive at if you study this intensely, as I have. The answer is, it’s a God thing. There are lots of God things. How did God create the universe? How did God create life? How does God live outside of time? I could go on and on, but the argument I am presenting is that God is “more than” our questions. He simply is, and we can’t understand all that He is. So, when I consider how three persons can become so united as to be one, I recognize that God is able to be something that I can’t quite comprehend. God describes them as being so united that they act as one.

So, as believers, we have to be comfortable with who God is. In fact, we have to become experts on who God is, because we are supposed to spend lots of time with God. How could we possibly live as devoted followers of Christ, if we don’t know Him? As we pursue our quest to become superheroes, we have to understand that if we do not know God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) personally, we will not have faith and we will lack power!

To actively seek to become mighty, we have to embrace the idea that we must have a personal relationship with God and it has to be Priority One!

As we learn to know and trust God, we have to recognize what He has made available to us.

To be fully devoted superheroes, we have to recognize who we are in Christ.

Paul explains this well in verses two through 11. He shares, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Paul reminds the Philippians that the Creator of all is actively working in their lives to bless and mature them and will do so until they have been perfected.

These verses present these believers with the idea that God cares and is active each day. He doesn’t retreat to His crystal fortress of solitude. He remains active every day and wishes to improve the believers’ resources and abilities each day. Paul also wishes for believers to remember they have been given grace. That grace was an unmerited demonstration of how much they were loved by God. That gift of salvation was worth more than any other possible reward that exists and God gave it to them even though they had been rebels.

He continues by listing the improvements that God has given them in verses nine through eleven. He explains that they will ever increase in love, that they will gain knowledge (and it is speaking of spiritual knowledge and awareness) and discernment (which is often called wisdom). This ever-increasing set of abilities would allow them to know what is right and how to live in purity of purpose. He reminds them that they will have the fruit of righteousness. So, what is that, you might say? Well, you may remember in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul listed the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Remember, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to live with each believer and to counsel and empower them. Turn to 1 Corinthians 12 with me and let’s read, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. SHAZAM! Can you see that God is pouring amazing capabilities into believers’ lives? The Holy Spirit (God, remember) indwells believers and Paul is clearly stating that we can be granted amazing gifts, as the Holy Spirit deems necessary. I have mentioned before that we can be Superheroes. Can you see how these gifts of abilities and power create mighty buffs to our lives as believers?

When we recognize that we are the beloved children of God, the same God who gave us grace and forgiveness, the same God who sacrificed His life because of His love for us, the same God who indwells us and works to perfect us and bless us every day of our lives, we can gain access to incredible strength and power. We have to believe and have strong faith to gain access to this power. We also have to accept the responsibility to develop and use these attributes.

Here we are now, full of faith and power, all buffed up. Now what? Here is where things get challenging, because we have opposition.

We have to expect and prepare to opposition. Paul discusses the opposition he faced in verses twelve through twenty. He said, “12I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. 14And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

15Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. 16The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. 18What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, 19for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 20as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

Paul was writing to the Philippians while he was imprisoned by the Romans. He had experienced people who followed him around and would work hard to undermine what Paul had taught to the new churches he was establishing. Some were trying to turn people back to the Jewish faith. Others wished people to go back to a works based faith in Christ. Still others wished to mislead people into following them in mystical knowledge religions where only they had the secret to accessing God, for a modest price of course. Paul wanted these believers to understand that men would twist the message of the gospel for their own purpose and did not want them to be defeated by those actions. He reminded them that even those these men might have impure motives, God was in control. He could take what they meant for evil and turn it to good. Paul also was arrested repeatedly for sharing his faith. He was beaten severely multiple times and was stoned twice (which you are not supposed to survive). Paul knew what the life of a believer could be like. Paul knew that the believers would face opposition and he encouraged them to be aware of it and to prepare themselves by studying God’s Word and drawing close in relationship to God.

So, imagine you are a powered up, buffed superhero. Imagine that there are evil-doers who are ready to come against you. Now, imagine yourself smiling and moving toward these evildoers. You are the person that God can use to change the world. He is working to hone your abilities and knowledge, specifically so that you will be effective in His service. You have the best gear ever! Can you see that you prove your devotion to Christ when you accept who you are in Christ and develop and utilize the abilities He has placed in you. This is what it means to be a fully devoted disciple.

God intends for us to engage in concert with Him to make a difference in the lives of others.

Well, we find ourselves fully aware of who God is, who we are in Christ, buffed up, powered up, and facing opposition. So what is our mission?

We have to understand that our primary purpose in God’s kingdom at this point is to serve others.

Verses twenty-one to twenty-six give us Paul’s description of our mission. He shared, “21For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 25Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. Paul is essentially saying that when he considers the reward of heaven versus the life here on earth, he would love to choose heaven. Now hear me, he is not suicidal. He is convinced! He is so certain of the afterlife that he is ready to go. However, he pauses to express that he is aware that God has asked him to serve others. It is his mission. Out of love for God, and love for others, he sets his goals to do the very best each day he lives.

Imagine a superhero and villain fighting in a city, destroying buildings as they fight. The hero wins, demands a reward from the city, and then leaves without a care for the town that was destroyed. The superhero then heads back to the fortress of light and kicks back on the porch, gorges themselves with food, watches every form of entertainment, goes to bed early and sleeps late!

In this example, we can see what appears to be a superhero, but his actions don’t line up with what one would expect to be the character of a superhero. We, as superheroes, are supposed to be energized by the mission. We get to join God and be used by Him to bless others. Each day, we can step out, in all of our superhero-ness, and look for opportunities to be effective, to minister. I am sure you have had the experience of spending a whole day doing nothing. I mean nothing. So much nothing that you sense, hmmmm, I think I wasted today. There are other times when you had a sense of purpose, you developed and worked a plan, and you reached the end of the day and were somewhat amazed by what you had accomplished.

 I contend that is what is supposed to happen in a superhero’s life. We are meant to achieve and when we are doing the work God tasked us to do, it is an overwhelming blessing in our life and in other’s lives.

So, we have amazing capabilities as individual superheroes, but guess what? Our opposition is vast! The forces arrayed against us are skilled and motivated. We need to stand together.

To be effective superheroes, we have to understand that devotion requires that we understand the need to love and value fellow believers. Paul continues by saying, “27Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. 29For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, 30engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.” Paul clearly reminds them that they are not engaged in a solo conflict. They should be united. United in one spirit (which speaks to an agreement that believers are family, right?). United in one mind which speaks to a conscious choice to seek to work together with common focus. He concludes this sentence with the idea of standing side by side, like a shield wall, for the sake of the gospel.

 Many of you have seen movies that depicted shield walls. Men would overlap their shields and face their enemies, working in concert to repel their enemies and push forward into their opponent’s lines. It meant certain defeat if the other guy’s shield wall could batter through your shield wall. Each man in the line depended on the guys on either side of him. Likewise, each man was depended upon.

We have to embrace this idea of mutual dependence. Jesus repeatedly called for us to be united as believers. Paul starts many of his letters with this encouragement. It simply is not ok for us to ignore the importance of working together in the service of the Kingdom. The forces of Satan are many and they are wily. We have great resources available to us individually, but we become unstoppable when we form up our shield wall of faith as a church united. It is our challenge to choose to love and value each other. Rather than observing each other and commenting on shortcomings, we should approach each other in Christian love. Our goal should be to know and be known. Superficiality should be resisted and we should do what we can to uplift each other in our day to day lives. When the church mobilizes, we should take our place in the “formations”. The people to our left and right should be able to trust we will engage with all we have and that we can be relied upon to protect them.

Obviously, I don’t think we will be picking up spears and heading out the doors to poke demons with them. However, there are many ministries in the church where we are needed to “fill the gaps.” As we move into various areas of service to the community, we will need believers to step up and serve mightily. And guess what? We will face opposition. But together, we become a mighty army, right? Superheroes support their team, stand and fight, and can be counted upon.

These attributes of superheroes have to become completely comfortable for us to put on. They should fit us like spandex.

Can you imagine what your life would be like if you lived as a convinced superhero?

Well, let me set that picture aside for a bit. Can you imagine living convinced that you are a beloved child of God, completely and totally loved? You are so loved that God lives with you constantly, always available and accessible? I mean always. Can you see what life would be like if you were aware of what strengths had been granted to you and you were so comfortable with them you could use them at any time or situation? Can you visualize being part of a huge family that always has your back? They believe in you and will come running when you need them?

Paul wanted the Philippians to know these things as he began his letter. I believe you should know that these things are as true now as they were then. We, believers, have been deceived and we live below our inheritance. Are you willing to shake off the deception and to embrace who you are in Christ! Will you stand with me, children of God! Will you join me in service to the King no matter the cost? Will you study hard, believe hard, endure hard, serve hard, and love other believers with all your strength?

It could be that you have submitted to Jesus as your Lord and have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, but you just don’t feel like a superhero. I ask you to pray earnestly for the Spirit to give you clarity of who you are in Christ. He intends great things for you and it is worth the effort to become who you should be. I ask you to intentionally choose to live a life fully devoted to Christ and pursuing God’s Will for your life.

If you don’t know Jesus, He is our ultimate hero! He died for us, so that He could defeat death, at a great personal cost to Himself. He did that because He loves you. But, He did defeat death and was raised to new life! He has the authority to forgive your sins and provide you access to eternal life. It is His free gift of grace to you. You don't deserve it and you can’t earn it, but He wishes to give it to you. He simply requires that you honestly admit you have lived in rebellion to Him or have been indifferent to Him. Agree to turn away from that indifference/rebellion. He asks that you submit your life to His control and accept Him as Lord,

as the Boss of your life. Submit, release control, and He will send the Holy Spirit to empower and develop you into a Superhero, which we call a disciple in the church. If you would like to invite Jesus into your life as Lord, Pray this prayer with me: Jesus, I admit that I lived my life apart from you and I have sinned against you. I believe that you have defeated death and have arisen in new life. I ask for forgiveness and I submit my life to your Lordship. If you have prayed this prayer with me, I invite you to come forward and meet with myself or our prayer partners. We would welcome the opportunity to hear your story and to answer any questions you might have.

Church…..be superheroes!