

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JAN 23RD-24TH, 2021 // BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

A LETTER

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian church while he was imprisoned in Rome to thank them for their financial support and prayer, and to encourage them in the midst of real issues they were facing.

- “Epaphroditus” was most likely the pastor of the church in Philippi, and Paul alludes to him visiting him in prison to encourage him and give him financial support.

The estimated date of the letter is 62 AD, about 10 years after Paul's first visit to Philippi.

- This is a letter to a diverse, young, healthy, growing church with a deep, intimate connection with their founding leader, Paul.
- The letter has a conversational, informal tone (as if written to friends) and is mostly encouragement to continue pursuing a life in Christ even in the midst of challenging circumstances.

In chapter 1, Paul greets the Philippian church and assures them that his sufferings are actually a part of God's plan to spread the Gospel and exalt the Lord.

- In the world's systems, true joy is elusive, but as disciples of Jesus we can have joy in times of trouble because we have an eternal perspective in the midst of our temporary circumstances.

OUR SOURCE OF JOY (PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11)

The opening identifies Paul and Timothy as “servants of Jesus Christ”, yet only Paul was the author.

- The letter is addressed to “all the saints”, along with the leaders (“overseers and deacons”) in the church (vs. 1)
- The Gospel is the great equalizer. Structures of authority exist within the church, yet all of us are to be submitted to the authority of Christ.

Paul had developed a particular fondness and love for this church (vs. 2-4).

- He had preached and baptized them into the faith, and over the years they had supported his ministry financially and with prayer (vs. 5).
- He tells them that they are partners in the work of the kingdom.
- To truly be the church, active participation is required from everyone!

Paul is confident of what God has already done and knows that the God who began a good work in them will carry it on to completion (vs. 6).

- The Christian life is a lifelong journey, and becoming more like Christ is a process.
- Spiritual growth should continue in us until the day we see Christ face to face- a disciple is someone who is being changed by Jesus!

Paul's love and affection for this church is not lessened by his imprisonment.

- He refers to himself and to them as, “partakers of grace”, even in his imprisonment (vs. 7)
- This introduces a major theme of Philippians- that true joy is not dependent on circumstance, but on Christ.
- Rome was a city built on the pursuit of pleasure, happiness, and yet its happiest resident was in chains for his testimony of Jesus (“joy” & “rejoice” are mentioned 16 times in this letter!)

Having expressed his love for the Philippian church, Paul shares his prayer for their pursuit of Christian growth.

- He prays for love, the chief characteristic of a disciple of Jesus, to abound with knowledge and discernment (vs. 9).
- Love is more than a shallow emotion- our love for God and others should mature as we follow Christ.

Paul prays for their discernment (vs. 10) so they can approve of what “is excellent”, and be “pure and blameless for the day of Christ”.

- Discernment is the ability to examine or test every part of our lifestyle.
- We don't blindly accept every mindset, behavior, or belief of our culture; we prayerfully examine our lives according to the standards of Scripture (1 Thess. 5:21).

The natural byproduct of true Christian fellowship, God's grace, peace, and love, is that we are “filled with the fruit of righteousness” (vs. 11).

- That only comes through Christ at work in our lives for His glory- for us (salvation), in us (sanctification), and through us (service).
- As He transforms our lives, we become more like Him!

J.O.Y.- “Jesus, Others, Yourself” Isn't dependent on circumstances (vs. 7), is cultivated in Christian community (vs. 5), is fought for and guarded with discernment and knowledge (vs. 9) and is a work of grace that gives glory to God (vs.11).

CHRIST IS PROCLAIMED (PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18)

“WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ME...” (VS. 12)

A strange aspect of our human condition is that we're surprised when we face adversity, and often abandon our values and compromise our character.

- Our reaction to adversity defines us, not the adversity we face. Paul models this to the Philippian church by sharing a Christ-centered response and perspective to his sufferings.

“MY ADVERSITY ADVANCES THE GOSPEL.” (VS. 12-18)

Being under house arrest wasn't plan A...

- But Paul's God given mission in life was to advance the Gospel, and being in prison could not prevent that from happening.
- Because of His imprisonment his testimony spread to the entire imperial guard (vs. 13)
- Other believers became bold to “speak the word without fear” (vs. 14)

Paul was also a realist, and he understood that not everyone who spoke the gospel boldly in his absence was doing it for the right reasons (vs. 15).

- Some were simply hoping to capitalize on Paul's imprisonment to replace him as the leader of the Christian movement while he was gone.
- Nevertheless, Paul's perspective was focused on the Gospel being advanced! (vs. 18)

In every generation, sinful people have used Christianity for personal gain and advancement.

- Some of us have the tendency to only see what's wrong with Christianity, instead of all of the ways the Gospel is being advanced.
- We're called to celebrate wherever Christ is being proclaimed, knowing that God is strong and kind enough to save and touch people in spite of self-centered leaders with corrupt motives.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST (PHILIPPIANS 1:19-30)

“MY ADVERSITY EXALTS CHRIST.” (VS. 19-26)

Paul maintains his perspective and remains encouraged while imprisoned because the Spirit of Jesus Christ remained at work (vs. 19).

- Our encouragement in the midst of adversity doesn't come from our own willpower and mental strength- it's from communion with God.
- His peace surpasses all understanding (4:7).

Whether he regained his freedom to minister outside of prison or went to be with the Lord in heaven, Paul didn't want to be ashamed of his testimony for Christ (vs. 20).

- Courage was the prerequisite for Christ being exalted in Paul's situation, whether that was living for Christ or dying for Christ.
- Courage isn't the absence of fear- it's choosing action in the face of it.

“TO LIVE IS CHRIST, TO DIE IS GAIN.” (VS. 21)

Many scholars believe that this verse gets to the heart of this book.

- Christ is the source of meaning for Paul, therefore in living, Paul gets to exalt Christ and make Him known to whoever is around.
- In death, the adversities of this life would be over, and Paul gets to be with Christ in heaven. Therefore, to die is gain.

Paul was so committed to a Christ-centered perspective that He saw the benefit of both of his less than ideal options—

- (1) Staying alive in prison meant fruitful labor for the Gospel,
- (2) Dying in prison meant an eternity with Christ.

What is living and dying to you? “To live is money and to die is to leave it all behind...” and “To live is recognition and to die is to be forgotten...”

Paul is able to find joy in his circumstances because he sees them as opportunities, not setbacks.

- This isn't wishful thinking or an optimistic detachment from reality-this is the hope available for anyone who places their hope in Christ's power.

“MY ADVERSITY ENCOURAGES OTHERS.” (VS. 27-30)

Just as Paul maintained his testimony for Christ, he encourages the Philippians to follow his example and be faithful by living a life “worthy of the gospel”.

- This isn't a life of perfection, but rather a life of purpose grounded in the work of the living Christ- not moralism, religion, or legalism. The unexamined life is not worth living. Living worthy of the gospel is living differently, sacrificially, generously, and courageously following the example of Jesus in every way.

Paul tells the Philippians to stand firm and stay in community (vs. 27), not live in fear (vs. 28) and accept suffering (vs. 29)

THE POWER OF PERSPECTIVE

True joy comes from ordering our lives rightly (Jesus, Others, Yourself), it's always internal, and never dependent on circumstance. Adversity doesn't define us, our perspective and response to it reveals our identity and priorities. God is bigger than your circumstances and knows what you're going through- in your darkest hour, God is working in ways you can't see. Are you Ordering your life properly to find true joy? Believing God and holding onto hope? Standing firm and staying in community? Living a life worthy of the gospel? Rejecting fear and receiving courage from Christ to be obedient?