

Philippians 1-2

“Sharing in God’s Grace”

As you know, Paul wrote many letters to churches in the first century that were collected and added to our New Testament. In his letters, Paul addressed different concerns with different groups of people, depending on what they needed to hear, in order to encourage them in their daily life of faith.

Philippians were the believers of the first church Paul planted in Europe. You who studied the book of Acts two years ago will recall that the city of Philippi was a Roman Colony. Philippi, a city along the Egnatian Way, was a major road that connected Rome (West) with Constantinople / Istanbul (East).

Now writing about 62 A.D. from a prison in Rome, Paul wrote to this church as he anticipated his release from prison to finally “stand before Caesar.” Remember from Acts 21 this prison detention all started with Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem about 59 A.D. and his revelation before a scheduled flogging that he was born a Roman citizen, thus preventing that from happening. News of a pending plot to kill Paul had him transferred to Caesarea, where first he appeared before Governor Felix and then later before Governor Festus. Festus wanted to send Paul back to Jerusalem; however, being a Roman citizen Paul demanded that he be allowed to present his case directly to Caesar. And so he was sent on his way to Rome.

In Acts 24:16 Luke wrote, “When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. In 24:30-31, we learn, “For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Apparently Paul received greetings via Epaphroditus, the Philippians’ messenger and representative. They had sent Paul a financial gift. With great joy, Paul replied with this letter to the Philippians and writing in 2:24, *“And I have confidence from the Lord that I myself will come to see you soon.”*

Two words earmark this remarkable short letter. The first is “REJOICE”; “kairo” in Greek used eight times in Philippians, and 70 times in the New Testament.

The second is the word “JOY”; “kara” in Greek used five times in Philippians and 59 times in the New Testament.

In these four short chapters Paul is going to talk about the fact that there is joy in living (chapter 1), joy in serving (chapter 2), joy in sharing (chapter 3) and joy in resting (chapter 4).

Chapter 1: Joy in Living

Webster defines joy as "great pleasure or happiness; delight or the expression of that emotion." Certainly considering the confinement Paul was enduring, this was not a delightful place to be. However, restricted his body was, there were no chains on the delight in his soul. We know that true joy does NOT depend on our circumstances. Many equate happiness with how healthy you are, or how much money you have, or how your loved ones are treating you. But joy runs deeper than that. Joy is the quiet, confident assurance that God loves you, He is with you, and He is at work in your life—no matter what. Joy depends on your connection with Jesus Christ, and no one can take that away from you! Paul wrote from prison (4 years and counting!) . . . "*I am in chains because of Christ*" Phil. 1:13. And he still exuded JOY! What was it that gave this man of God JOY?

He had confidence – (vs. 6) "that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ." Life and what the future held for Paul may have been indefinite, but he knew that the Holy Spirit had indwelt these Philippian believers and they would not be left without God's guidance.

He was joyful in seeing his mission accomplished (vs. 12-18; "*the message about Christ is being preached, so I rejoice*"). Paul was being a faithful witness, sharing the Good News about Jesus in his confinement. He said that all the soldiers in the palace guard now knew why he was in chains. I can imagine that Julius, the Centurion who was in charge of transporting Paul from Palestine to Rome, in Acts 27-28, had a lot to share with his fellow Imperial Regiment soldiers when they arrived in Rome!

Can you imagine sharing about this man Paul with his fellow soldiers? After 2 weeks in a storm, Paul said that God spoke to him and we ship passengers were ALL going to be saved! And then on Malta, a deadly snake bit him and he lived! And then he healed the father of the Chief Official! And then, all the sick on that whole island were brought to Paul, and he healed every one of them! You need to pay attention to this guy! He is extraordinary!

After a couple of years in Rome, Paul had already seen some fruit for his missionary work. In the end of the letter, he sends greetings, both from himself, and "*other Christians* who work in Caesar's Palace."

So, the whole Roman palace guard hears the Gospel. And then other Christians see Paul's boldness, and they get bolder in proclaiming Jesus as Savior. Some have mixed motives. Some wanted to get Paul in bigger trouble, out of envy and jealousy.

We should pause here and say this clearly: God cares a great deal about **WHAT** you and I do. And He also cares a great deal **HOW** and **WHY** we do what we do. We need to have the right motives. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. He did what He did out of love and compassion for others. Do we do the same? Or are we still trying to impress others and gain attention and glory for ourselves. That Christian lady Roberta Hesthenes said, "Never try and rob God of His glory by saying, "Look what I did."

"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ..."
 - Philippians 1:27 (NIV)

"Whatever" has been a popular word, particularly among teens, for years. But did you know that this word is also found 173 times in Scripture? It's kind of a word now in our culture that blows someone off. I'm tired of arguing with you, but I still think you're wrong. So . . . "Whatever!" Paul has a much better use of this word in Philippians 1:27.

Here, Paul instructs us that "**whatever**" happens, we should conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Wow. That makes the over-used word "whatever" seem a lot more serious. I can't let my circumstances dictate my behavior. For athletes, for example, is Paul saying that even if my opponent tries to cheat me, I can't retaliate? What about if the ref misses a crucial call? What about when my coach doesn't play me when I've earned a spot? I think in each of these situations, "whatever" has no parameters – our behavior can't depend on circumstances, because circumstances in this life are rarely fair or simple. I think Paul is saying that we need to be Christian thermostats, and not thermometers. Do you know the difference? A thermostat moves up and down depending on the temperature in the room. But a good thermometer? He or she determines the temperature in the room.

He was ready – (vs. 20-26) *"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."* If Caesar was to release Paul, he would go on doing what he was called to do . . . be a light in this dark world and spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. If not, heaven with all the glorious treasure he had stored up there by being faithful was waiting for him along with the welcoming arms of Jesus.

I've conducted many funerals over the years and I can truly say that those that are for Christians are real celebrations of life. We grieve for our loss, but rejoice in the knowledge of the wonderful eternal life our loved ones have entered into. And our joy is even more complete if we have the assurance we'll one day we will join them because of our love for and commitment to Jesus Christ.

He knew their steadfastness – (vs. 29-30); *"For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ, but also the privilege of suffering for him. We are in this fight together."* Joy in suffering. Can those two even be linked together? Well, if not, then how could Paul and Silas, his missionary partner, be sitting chained to the stocks in that Philippian jail in Acts 16, with their backs beaten and bleeding, and they are "*singing hymns to God.*" "*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy Name.*"

In the early church in Jerusalem, in Acts 5, *"The Jewish Council called in the apostles and had them flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go. Vs. 41 says, "The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus."*" And did this flogging shut them up! Not a chance! *"And every day, in the Temple and in their homes, they continued to teach and to preach this message: "The Messiah you are looking for is Jesus."*" The apostles got a whipping, and they kept on preaching about Jesus.

Paul suffered a long imprisonment for the Gospel. And he kept on proclaiming the Good News. What is it going to take to stop you? A criticism? One unresponsive person? Someone who disagrees with your theology? God forbid that you and I lose our joy in Christ and go silent. Because "*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing the word of Christ*" (Romans 10:17). You and I may have to suffer to see the mission of Christ accomplished. Don't let anything stop us!

Chapter 2: Joy in Serving

Paul says there is a way that the Philippians can increase the joy he already has! "***Make my joy complete by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one heart and purpose***" (2:2). Some people interpret this verse as losing one's own individuality, like now in the church I have to walk and talk just like everyone else. I don't think Paul is saying that we should all eat the same flavor of ice cream and wear the same clothes. That's uniformity, but not necessarily a unity. Unity is built up and strengthened, when you and I love each other, respect each other, and work together for a goal that is bigger than ourselves! He rejoiced that the Philippian Christians were financial and prayer partners with Paul, ever since he left their city (= 10+ years!)

Paul rejoiced that the Gospel was being preached, even if some people's motives were not all right. He rejoiced that the whole Roman Praetorian Guard had heard the Gospel message, even if it was one soldier at a time, chained to Paul for hours. And now, Paul can rejoice that a good strong young church like the one in Philippi was moving forward in unity, proclaiming the Good News and rejecting selfishness so that they can shock their neighbors by how selflessly they care for each other.

A Christian can go through life with one of two basic attitudes:

- 1) I can love God and Jesus, and try to get through life with a minimum of discomfort and pain. I can give a little, and expect a lot in return. Or,
- 2) I can love God and Jesus, and imitate Jesus by serving others. I can give a lot, because I want others to have and experience what I have in Jesus.

Question: How far did Jesus go to model that behavior, to "look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others"?

-- "***Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had... Though he was God,...He made him himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave...he humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross.***" (2:5-8).

I read a book on Christian persuasion, or how to dialogue with people about the gospel in a winsome way. It's by an English author named Os Guinness titled Fools Talk. He says, in talking about Jesus' incarnation, that this is the supreme example of what he calls a "fool maker." "The "fool maker" person who others think is foolish is not a fool at all, but he is prepared to be seen as a fool, even derided, so he can address truth to power, to prick the

balloons of the high and mighty, and even tell the Emperor that he has no clothes. **This is what Jesus did on the cross.** Jesus shamed and subverted the vaunted wisdom, strength, and superiority of the world through the cross, coming in disguise as a non-entity. Look at what is really going on at the incarnation and the baby in the manger and at a tortured man dying on a cross and you see that everything that is happening is more than it appears to be. The massive absurdity morphs into an illuminating mystery, and all the blood and offense brutality turns into a heart-melting embrace. **So seemingly powerless that he could not save himself, Jesus actually was dying to save other and embrace the world.**

Everything that climaxed in that Passover week was spring-loaded with a deeper, history-changing truth." And I love this part: "Jesus accomplished it, under a disguise so strange that it bewildered Jesus' most ardent followers; and the devil (a rat) fell for the smell of the cheese!" (pp. 72-73)

Jesus shows His love by being willing to go and die a terrible death in our place! Jesus, being God, humbles Himself to reach down to us, so that we can be lifted up to God. Jesus limits Himself mightily, and the plays the fool and the victim in order to atone for our sins, and defeat sin and death and be exalted by *God "to the highest place, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father!"*

In Philippians 2:12-13, we read a phrase that might be a bit confusing: First, Paul tells us to "*work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*" And then, Paul says, "*for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*" First, it sounds like we are responsible for working out our own salvation. That sounds like the rest of the world's religions, where the individual is responsible to earn her own way to heaven.

We know from Paul's other writings that, we are saved by grace through faith, and NOT by our own good works. I think this phrase "*work out your salvation*" is really a call to put into action the saving work that Jesus has done in your life. Solve the problems facing you. Jesus saved you and forgave you and has given you His Holy Spirit. He has shown you how to live a life of humble love and self-giving. So put that new life into practice! And, don't forget that God's Spirit is right there with you, to guide you and encourage you to act and live the way He wants you to!

In this context with the Philippians, they are to get rid of their divisions and discord, and live together in **UNITY**.

One way to stay unified is to "*Do everything without arguing and complaining*". Have you ever tried to do that, seriously?! When you see something you may not prefer or like, just to stay positive and not get critical? That is instant oatmeal to talk about, and brain surgery to live out every day! This is Upper Division Christian living here! And this is where true JOY is discovered! If we can manage to achieve a life without complaining and arguing, Paul says that we are going stand out from a "*crooked and perverse generation*"(in other words, we're going to be seen as different, in a good way!); and we are going to SHINE brightly, like stars in the universe before a dark and depraved world.

Bruce Larson in his book There's a Lot More to Health Than Not Being Sick has a quote from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a pivotal Christian thinker, that has good food for thought. Listen:

"Joy is the surest sign of the presence of God." This Jesuit priest-theologian-anthropologist had a good deal in common with the Presbyterian sages who penned the Westminster Confession of Faith. The bottom line for you and me is simply this: grimness is not a Christian virtue. There are no sad saints. If God is really the center of one's life and being, joy is inevitable. If we have no joy, we have missed the heart of the Good News and our bodies as much as our souls will suffer the consequences.

In other words, "Joy is the flag that flies over the castle of our hearts announcing that the king is in residence today."

As much as Paul wanted to see these believers personally, for now the alternate plan was to send Timothy, a co-worker Paul regarded highly like a son working with his father to spread the gospel. And certainly Epaphroditus would be returning with this letter in hand. The Philippians knew Epaphroditus had been ill and Paul comments that he almost died. "Honor men like him" . . . a good reminder. Day in and day out in our world today people are laboring and some even dying in their work to advance the kingdom of God.

Let's review what we've learned so far in Philippians:

- 1) We can have JOY in knowing God is still at work in us to help us grow and mature
- 2) We can have JOY in seeing Christ's mission carried out — more people are getting saved and being added to God's family
- 2) We can have JOY in know that we are "in Christ" and ready to meet Him face to face the day He calls
- 3) We can have JOY in suffering for the cause of Christ because we're never left to face it alone
- 4) We can have JOY in maintaining unity in God's Church
- 5) We can have JOY in imitating Jesus, and humbling ourselves and living to help and serve- others

Living in a close relationship with Christ, embracing His mission in this world, loving God and others, THERE is where we will discover JOY! And because it's not dependent on any health or success or prosperity conditions, then no one can take it away.

I've got the JOY JOY JOY JOY down in my heart! How about you!?? Let's pray together...