

A Letter of Joy

Philippians 1:1 (NKJV) 1 Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

Everyone wants to be happy. And in America we think that it is an entitlement. The founders only had the idea that one had a right to pursue happiness, not that someone else owed it to you.

But people will do most anything to be happy. They will pursue mind altering substances. They will leave their mate and children for another.

And there is a large branch of Christianity that promotes the idea that God wants you to be happy. It's the health and wealth gospel. The good news that God sent His Son to make you happy by you being wealthy and having just everything you want. Also that God sent His Son to give you perfect health. What a lie. What a deception.

The apostle Paul knew nothing of all of that. You see there is a difference between happiness and joy.

Happiness comes from your feelings, your situation, your happenstance.

Joy is much deeper. That is why Paul could write this letter filled with so many references to joy.

Even though his situation could hardly get worse.

Lets begin to look at this letter this morning. Maybe we can understand what gave Paul such joy.

I. The Church at Philippi

A. Its beginning.

1. Acts 16:6

Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.⁷ After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them.⁸ So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."¹⁰ Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

11 Lydia Baptized at Philippi

Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis,¹² and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days.¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.¹⁴ Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who

worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.¹⁵ And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

16 Paul and Silas Imprisoned

Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling.¹⁷ This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."¹⁸ And this she did for many days.

But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.¹⁹ But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.

²⁰ And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city;²¹ and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe."²² Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.²³ And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.²⁴ Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 The Philippian Jailer Saved

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.²⁶ Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.²⁷ And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.²⁸ But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

²⁹ Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.³⁰ And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were

baptized.³⁴ Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

35 Paul Refuses to Depart Secretly

And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go."

36 So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace."

37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out."

38 And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.³⁹ Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city.⁴⁰ So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.
NKJV

B. Its character

1. It was poor and persecuted.
2. When Paul takes a collection for the saints at Jerusalem he doesn't ask them to contribute.
3. But they insist.
4. They only had supported Paul on his further missionary journey.
5. This was the occasion of the letter. To thank them for their recent gift.
6. They had a few problems but nothing like the other letters Paul had to write to different churches.

II. Look at Paul's life

A. **Paul's life of trials.**

Immediately after his conversion, Paul's bold, fearless proclamation of the gospel aroused the ire of Damascus's Jewish population. They sought to kill him, and he was forced to flee the city by being lowered from the city wall at night in a basket (Acts 9:20-25). Later he was forced to flee from Iconium (Acts 14:5-6); was pelted with stones and left for dead at Lystra (Acts 14:19-20); was beaten and thrown into jail at Philippi (Acts 16:16-40); was forced to flee from Thessalonica after his preaching touched off a riot (Acts 17:5-9); went from there to Berea, from where he was also forced to flee (Acts 17:13-14); was mocked and ridiculed by Greek philosophers at Athens

(Acts 17:16-34); was hauled before the Roman proconsul at Corinth (Acts 18:12-17); and faced both Jewish opposition (Acts 19:9; cf. 20:18-19) and rioting Gentiles at Ephesus (Acts 19:21-41; cf. 1 Cor. 15:32). As he was about to sail from Greece to Palestine, a Jewish plot against his life forced him to change his travel plans (Acts 20:3). On the way to Jerusalem, he met the Ephesian elders at Miletus and declared to them, "Bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me" (Acts 20:22-23). When he got to Jerusalem, he was recognized in the temple by Jews from Asia Minor, savagely beaten by a frenzied mob, and saved from certain death when Roman soldiers arrived on the scene and arrested him (Acts 21:27-36). While Paul was in custody at Jerusalem, the Jews formed yet another plot against his life, prompting the Roman commander to send him under heavy guard to the governor at Caesarea (Acts 23:12-35). After his case dragged on without resolution for two years and two Roman governors, Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:10-11). After an eventful trip, which included being shipwrecked in a violent storm, Paul arrived at Rome (Acts 27, 28). As he wrote Philippians, the apostle was in his fourth year of Roman custody, awaiting Emperor Nero's final decision in his case.

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Philippians.

III. Paul & Timothy

IV. Bondservants of Jesus Christ.

A. Most letters say apostle

B. Most letters list a whole list of fellow workers.

There is a joy that goes beyond the happiness that the world offers. I offer it to you this morning through Jesus Christ.

Philippians

Robert P. Lightner

Introduction

On his second missionary journey Paul visited Philippi. Through his ministry there several people trusted Christ as their Savior. Some of these were Lydia and her family and the Philippian jailer and his family (Acts 16:14-34).

Soon after Paul's visit a local church was established in Philippi. The church helped the apostle in different ways so this epistle was written to acknowledge their help, as well as to help them.

Philippians is personal and practical in its tone and teaching. Paul emphasized the need for believers to rejoice in Christ. "Joy" (chara) is used four times (Phil. 1:4, 25; 2:2; 4:1); "rejoice" (chairō) occurs eight times (1:18 [twice]; 2:17-18; 3:1, 4:4 [twice], 10); and "glad" occurs thrice (2:17-18, 28). (In 1:26 the word "joy" is a different Gr. word; there it is the word "glad," "boast," or "glory," [kauchema], which also occurs in 2:16 and 3:3.) Paul wrote frequently in this epistle about the mind of a child of God. One's manner of life is truly a reflection of what occupies his mind.

The Theme of the Epistle

Though many exhortations and challenges are given, one major theme or emphasis pervades the book. All the teachings are expressions or ramifications of this one central truth. This theme is "living the Christian life."

The Historic Occasion

When the Philippian believers heard about Paul's imprisonment at Rome, they sent Epaphroditus, who may have been their pastor, to minister to him. Epaphroditus personally comforted Paul, expressing to him the affection of the saints in Philippi. And he brought Paul a financial contribution from them so that his confinement would be more comfortable (4:18). Three times before—twice when Paul was at Thessalonica, and once when he was at Corinth (Phil. 4:15-16; cf. 2 Cor. 11:9)—the saints ministered to his needs. The Book of Philippians might be called a thank-you note to saints in Philippi for their generous gifts.

While Epaphroditus was in Rome, he became so ill he almost died (Phil. 2:27). After he recovered, he took Paul's letter to the Philippian Christians.

Philippi was a Roman colony (Acts 16:12). After the Battle of Philippi in 42 b.c. some Roman soldiers were ordered by Anthony to live there. Then in 30 b.c. Octavian forced some people in Italy to give up their homes and settle in Philippi and elsewhere. These Philippian residents were given special privileges including the "Italic right." This meant that the colonists, in return for their displacement, were treated as if their land were part of Italian soil. So the residents were citizens of Rome, their "mother city," and enjoyed the full rights of Roman citizenship, including exemption from taxes. So Paul's words (Phil. 1:27) "conduct yourselves" (lit., "live as citizens")

and “our citizenship is in heaven” (3:20) had special meaning to the Christians at Philippi.

2 Corinthians 11:23-30 (NKJV) 23 Are they ministers of Christ?--I speak as a fool--I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. 24 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness-- 28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? 30 If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.

The Purposes for the Epistle

The initial reason for writing, as indicated, seems to have been to thank the Philippians for their love gift. But Paul also took advantage of this opportunity to address some of the problems in their church. Apparently rivalry and personal ambition were present among some of the saints (2:3-4; 4:2). The Judaizers were also gaining a hearing (3:1-3). In addition, an antinomian tendency was creeping in (3:18-19).

The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

That divine joy is the theme of Philippians; the Greek word for joy, in both its noun and verb forms, appears more than a dozen times in its four chapters (1:4, 18, 25; 2:2, 17, 18, 28, 29; 3:1; 4:1, 4, 10).

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Philippians.

Philippians 1:4 (NKJV) 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy,

Philippians 1:18 (NKJV) 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

Philippians 1:25 (NKJV) 25 And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith,

Philippians 2:2 (NKJV) 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

Philippians 2:17-18 (NKJV) 17 Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

Philippians 2:28-29 (NKJV) 28 Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. 29 Receive him therefore in the Lord with all

gladness, and hold such men in esteem;

Philippians 3:1 (NKJV) 1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.

Philippians 4:1 (NKJV) 1 Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

Philippians 4:4 (NKJV) 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

Philippians 4:10 (NKJV) 10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.

The Philippian church was the first church Paul founded in Europe. The apostle came to Philippi on his second missionary journey, being directed there by the Holy Spirit in a most dramatic way:

“A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. (Acts 16:9-10)

Though the initial converts were Jews or Jewish proselytes (Acts 16:13-15), Gentiles made up the majority of the congregation. That there was no synagogue in Philippi (or else the women Paul initially encountered would not have been meeting outside the city on the Sabbath) is evidence that the city's Jewish population was small. Two dramatic conversions, those of the wealthy proselyte Lydia (Acts 16:13-15) and the jailor (Acts 16:25-34), marked the church's birth. (For a description of the events surrounding the founding of the Philippian church, see chapter 18 of this volume.)

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Philippians.

“It is not generally recognized how poorly Paul had been received in Rome. When we read the Book of Romans we think that the church that had received this letter would owe undying gratitude to the man who wrote it; but although this should have been true, it was certainly not the case. Luke tells us that when Paul arrived in Rome as a prisoner, many of the Christians went out to meet him, just as we might go to the airport to meet a celebrity. But then Paul went to prison. Two years passed, perhaps more. The pastors were jealous of Paul. They neglected him for that reason. When the pastors forgot their duty, the people forgot it also. In time Paul was almost forgotten. The proof of this lies in the fact that when Onesiphorus, a visitor to Rome, tried to find Paul some years later, no one could tell him where Paul was. It was only by careful searching that this faithful Christian found him.” Boice, James Montgomery: Philippians : An Expository Commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich. : Baker Books, 2000, S. 13