

Rejoice in the Lord

Text: Philippians 1:1-2

Introduction:

1. In this message we will seek to set the scene for the study of the Book of Philippians.
2. Philippians is a ray of sunshine, an Epistle that is filled with encouragement and blessing. Someone has described it as the Psalm 23 of the New Testament. His letter is something of a missionary thank you letter but it is much more than that too as we will see.
3. Paul held the church at Philippi, along with the other churches in Macedonia, in high esteem (2 Cor. 8:1-5).
4. For this introductory message, we will consider some key matters that are pertinent to our study of this wonderful Epistle.

I. THE AUTHORSHIP OF PHILIPPIANS (Phil. 1:1)

A. The Person who wrote Philippians

1. Pauline authorship is crystal clear, Paul's name appears in the salutation (Vs. 1).
2. Additionally, there are frequent personal references in the Epistle that strongly affirm Paul's authorship of this Epistle. There is reference to his imprisonment – "my bonds" (1:13) as well as Paul's close associates Timothy (1:1, 2:19) and Epaphroditus (2:25, 4:18).

B. The Place where Philippians was written

1. Paul wrote during his first imprisonment in Rome (See Acts 28:16-31). Paul refers to his 'bonds' (1:14), "the palace" (praetorium) (1:13) and "Caesar's household" (4:22)
2. Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon were also "prison Epistles" written during the same time period.

C. The Period when Philippians was written

1. Paul wrote from prison in Rome about A.D. 61, roughly ten years after his establishment of the Philippian church (Hester).
2. There is some debate between commentators as to whether Philippians was written before or after Ephesians and Colossians.
3. The prison Epistles were written towards the end of the Apostle's ministry. Paul's final letters, the Pastoral Epistles, would be written approx. 2 years later in A.D. 63.

D. The Purpose for which Philippians was written

1. Pastor Richard Hester in his New Testament Bible History course suggests four purposes for writing.
 - a. To thank the believers at Philippi for sending him a financial gift. They had done this in the past as well.
 - b. To explain the illness and return of Epaphroditus to Philippi who had brought their gift to Paul at Rome. Epaphroditus had remained for a time to serve Paul and to perhaps work to make up the shortfall of funds needed by Paul. During this process Epaphroditus fell sick. Paul didn't want them to feel in any way

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- that Epaphroditus had been a “quitter” and failed in his mission (2:29-30).
- c. To encourage the Philippian believers in their trials (1:28-30) and to assure them, even though he was a prisoner, the gospel of Christ was still being preached.
 - d. To appeal for unity in the church: in this vein he writes the great Christological passage (2:1-11) about the humiliation and exaltation of Christ.
2. Robert Gromacki, in his excellent commentary, suggests 9 purposes for writing. There is some overlap with the previous points above.
- a. First, Paul wanted to relieve their anxiety over the circumstances of his imprisonment (1:1-30). They thought that the apostle’s ministry had been brought to an abrupt stop, but Paul assured them that God was using the episode for the advancement of the gospel.
 - b. Second, there apparently was a growing disunity among the members as evidenced by the fact that Paul appealed to them to manifest humility and unity (2:1-8).
 - c. Third, he wanted to inform them of a possible imminent visit by Timothy (2:18-24).
 - d. Fourth, he attempted to explain the reasons behind Epaphroditus’ sickness and healing (2:25-30).
 - e. Fifth, he desired to warn them against the deceitful tactics and doctrines of the Judaizers (3:1-4:1).
 - f. Sixth, he admonished two women, Euodias and Syntyche, to maintain spiritual unity (4:2-3).
 - g. Seventh, he prescribed truth that would give them mental and emotional stability to replace their anxiety (4:4-9).
 - h. Eighth, he wanted to thank them for their financial assistance (4:10-20).
 - i. Finally, he expressed greetings to all of them (4:21-23).

II. THE AREA OF PHILIPPI (PHIL. 1:1)

Consider the background of Philippi...

A. Geographically

1. “The city was located on the fertile plain about nine miles from the Aegean Sea, northwest of the island of Thasos. Neapolis served as its seaport.” (Gromacki) It was approx. 12 miles from Neapolis (Hansen).
2. John Phillips adds, “Philippi was a Macedonian hill town overlooking the coastal plain and the bay at Neapolis. The old Thracian settlement had been fortified by Philip II of Macedonia (father of Alexander the Great) to commemorate the addition of a new province to his kingdom and to protect the frontier against the Thracian highlanders. The plains of Philippi were famous in Paul’s day as the site where the armies of Antony and Octavian (who later became the emperor Augustus) had met and mastered the armies of Cassius and Brutus, the conspirators who had assassinated

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Julius Caesar. There the Roman republic breathed its last gasp and gave way to the age of the Caesars about 42 B.C.”

3. The ancient city of Philippi is located in the country of Greece today.

B. Politically

1. Philippi was made a Roman colony by Caesar Augustus and settled with Roman veterans. Part of Rome’s strategy for maintaining its wide empire was to establish colonies such as these that were tenaciously loyal to Rome. Its inhabitants were Roman citizens, who had the rights not only to vote but also to govern themselves. As a Roman colony, Philippi had the same legal status as cities in Italy (Macarthur). Philippi would have had the stamp of Rome all over it.
2. “At every turn the missionaries were confronted with Rome: Roman houses, Roman officials, Roman soldiers, Roman togas, Roman speech, Roman merchants.” (Phillips)
3. Acts 16:12 highlights two key facts about Philippi, “And from thence to Philippi, which is the **chief city** of that part of Macedonia, *and a colony*: and we were in that city abiding certain days.”
4. Appears the city had an antisemitic flavour. In fact, it appears very few Jews lived at Philippi. We detect some of this contempt in Acts 16:20-21 when Paul and Silas were dragged before the magistrates by the masters of the demon possessed girl. “And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, **being Jews**, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being **Romans**.”

C. Commercially

1. While Philippi was not a major commercial hub, it was still important given its strategic location in the major trade route connecting East and West. The important Roman Road known as the Via Egnatia ran through Philippi in Paul’s day. Paul tended to Evangelize the centers along the all-important road system of the Roman Empire.
2. The city was also important commercially on account of the gold mines in the nearby mountains.

D. Religiously

1. Like other cities of that time, there were a number of pagan temples in Philippi but it was Emperor worship that dominated the religious landscape in the city on account of it being a loyal Roman colony.
2. “Although Greek, Phrygian, and Egyptian gods had their temples in Philippi, the imperial cult was the most prominent in the city. With impressive altars and temples dedicated to the emperor and members of his family, the city’s religious life centered on the worship of the emperor. Withdrawal from participation in the imperial cult was viewed as subversive activity.” (G. Walter Hansen)
3. No doubt the persecution of the believers was largely on account of their unwillingness to bow the knee to Caesar as lord.

III. THE ASSEMBLY AT PHILIPPI (PHIL. 1:1; ACTS 16.6-40)

Consider three truths concerning the establishment of the church in Philippi:

A. The Call to establish the Church (Acts 16:6-10)

1. The Spirit’s Direction (Vs. 6-8)

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2. The Sinner's Petition (Vs. 9)
3. The Servant's Submission (Vs. 10)

B. The Converts within the Church (Acts 16:11-40)

Three of the converts in this church are described in the Book of Acts. There was...

1. Lydia – a prepared heart (Vs. 11-15)
 - a. She heard the Gospel (Vs. 13)
 - b. She received the Gospel (Vs. 14)
 - c. She followed in Baptism (Vs. 15a) Note: The fact her household was baptized reveals they were also saved.
 - d. She hosted God's servants (Vs. 15b). Appears her home became the mission base for the Apostle and his depute Silas.
2. The Damsel – a possessed heart (Vs. 16-24)
 - a. The events leading to her conversion (Vs. 16-18)
 - b. The events following her conversion (Vs. 19-24)
 1. Paul and Silas Arrested (Vs. 19)
 2. Paul and Silas Accused (Vs. 20-21)
 3. Paul and Silas Beaten (Vs. 22-23)
 4. Paul and Silas Imprisoned (Vs. 23b-24)
3. The Jailer – a providential heart (Vs. 25-34)
 - a. The Singing of God's Men (Vs. 25)
 - b. The Shaking of the Prison (Vs. 26)
 - c. The Saving of the Keeper (Vs. 27-34)
 1. The Salvation of the Jailer Himself
 2. The Salvation of the Jailer's Household

C. The Conflict facing the Church

1. The exact details of the persecution they were facing isn't given in Philippians but Paul makes a clear reference to it in Chapter 1:28-30 – "And in nothing terrified by your **adversaries**: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but **also to suffer for his sake**; Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me."
2. Jesus said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John 15:19)

IV. THE AIM OF PHILIPPIANS (Phil. 4:4)

A. The Central Themes

1. Jesus Christ – as with Paul's other writings, Christ is central to His theology. Philippians is full of Christ and contains one of the highest Christological passages in the New Testament (2:1-11).
2. Joy – Philippians is the Epistle of joy and rejoicing. The whole Epistle pulsates with this theme. The word 'joy' occurs six times (1:4, 25; 2:2, 17, 18; 4:1) and the word 'rejoice' in all its forms appears 12 times (1:18,26; 2:16,17,18,28; 3:1,3; 4:4,10). R.C.H. Lenski writes, "Joy is the music that runs through this epistle, the sunshine that spreads all over it. The whole epistle radiates joy and happiness."

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- a. A significant theme considering the fact that on the human side of things with Paul's present circumstances, you would think he would have little cause for rejoicing. He is in prison and yet he is full of the joy of the Lord! Baxter writes, "Chains are clanking on the writer's wrists and ankles, but he makes them sound like the bells of heaven."
- b. The theme of Philippians reminds us that our joy in Christ is not determined by our situation or the things of this world. Sadly, our joy tends to be easily robbed by things such as:
 1. Circumstances – we tend to be happiest when things are "going our way".
 - i. Illustration: "Dad must have had an easy day at the office," little Peggy said to her visiting friend. "He didn't squeal the tires when he pulled into the driveway, and he didn't slam the door when he came into the house. And he even gave Mother a kiss!"
 - ii. Circumstances are not really under our control. God is the ultimate One who is in charge of that and accepting His sovereign will in all things helps maintain your joy.
 - iii. Wiersbe writes, "Paul did not look at Christ through his circumstances; rather, he looked at his circumstances through Christ – and this changed everything."
 2. People – some people are joy stealers! What people say and do can so easily rob us of our joy.
 - i. Illustration: A young lady jumped off the school bus as it stopped in front of the house and she slammed her way through the front door. She marched defiantly up the stairs into her room and again slammed the door. All the time she was muttering under her breath, "People – people – people – PEOPLE! Her father went to the door and knocked softly. "May I come in?" he asked. She replied, "No!" He tried again but she said it even more firmly: "NO!" He asked, "Why can't I come in?" She answered: "Because you're a people!"
 - ii. Note: Try to be an encourager rather than a discourager of God's people. Some people are joy drainers!
 3. Things – things tend to consume us, especially in our affluent society. We have so many comforts and props around us and when one of them is disturbed or removed, we act as if the world has come to an end.
 - i. The world tries to deceive us into thinking that to be happy, we just need more things! Christ said, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Lk. 12:15). He also warned us not to lay up treasures on earth but treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:19-20).
 - ii. Illustration: Abraham Lincoln was walking down the street with his two sons, who were crying and fighting. "What's the matter with the boys?" a friend asked. "The same thing that's wrong with the whole world," Lincoln replied. "I have three walnuts and each of the boys wants two!"

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4. Worry – perhaps this is the greatest joy stealer of all. How many of God's people are robbed of their peace and joy by worry. Think of what Paul could have worried or fretted about. He was a political prisoner facing possible execution. He had enemies who were working against Him. And yet he was rejoicing in the Lord. Many Christians spend the majority of their lives living in the land of “what if” and “what might be” rather than living in the present reality of where God has them. Concerning worry, Wiersbe says, “Worrying is actually the wrong thinking (the mind) and wrong feeling (the heart) about circumstances, people, and things.”

B. The Supporting Themes

There are several other dominant themes in the Epistle that can be discerned. They tie back to the central theme of joy.

1. The mind – the mind is another prominent theme in Philippians. Paul uses the word ‘mind’ 10 times and the word ‘think’ 5 times. The Greek word for ‘mind’ “stresses the thinking process. One who thinks in a certain way is one who is spoken of as having a certain type of mind.” (Theodore Epp) Right thinking was the key to Paul's joy and is one of the main keys to Christian living. Right living flows out of right thinking. Wiersbe suggests the theme of the Epistle to be **“The Christlike mind that brings Christian joy.”**
2. Christian Unity – the unity of the church was clearly under threat and is the main issue we can detect that he seeks to correct in the church. Philippians does not contain nearly so much rebuke and correction as some of Paul's other letters.
 - i. He exhorts them to be united in striving for the Gospel (1:27).
 - ii. He exhorts them to be likeminded and to do nothing through strife or vainglory and to adopt the humble mind of Christ (2:1-11).
 - iii. He exhorts them to do all things without murmurings and disputings (2:14).
 - iv. He exhorts two ladies (Euodias & Syntyche) in the church to be of the same mind (4:2).
3. The Gospel – The Gospel is mentioned 9 times in this short Epistle. Paul is passionately concerned about the furtherance of the Gospel.
 - i. Paul was thankful for their fellowship in the Gospel (1:5).
 - ii. Paul was set for the defence of the Gospel (1:7, 17).
 - iii. Paul's trial had resulted in the spread of the Gospel (1:12).
 - iv. Paul exhorts them to live in a way that would become the Gospel and to strive together for the “faith of the Gospel” (1:27).
 - v. Paul speaks of Timothy who had served faithfully with him in the Gospel (2:22).
 - vi. Paul asks help for the women who had laboured with him in the Gospel along with other fellow labourers (4:3).
 - vi. Paul expresses thanks to the Philippians for their support of the Gospel ministry (4:15).

V. THE ARRANGEMENT (OUTLINE) OF PHILIPPIANS

A. General Observations

1. Philippians does not divide easily into separate parts as some of Paul's other Epistles such as Romans. This is because, while containing solid doctrine, it is one of Paul's more personal Epistles. In fact, it is possibly the most personal of his writings.
2. To illustrate, in these four short chapters there are over one hundred occurrences of such words as I, me and my. In fact, the word I can be found 65 times.
3. His style is intimate. He addresses the Philippians as his "beloved", "brethren dearly beloved", "longed for", "joy and crown" and again, his "dearly beloved."

B. Specific Outlines

1. One suggested outline of the Book taking the mind as the theme is as follows:¹
 - The Single Mind (Chap. 1)
 - The Submissive Mind (Chap. 2)
 - The Spiritual Mind (Chap. 3)
 - The Secure Mind (Chap. 4)
2. Another suggested outline taking Christ as the theme of the Book is as follows:
 - Christ our Life (Chap. 1)
 - Christ our Mind (Chap. 2)
 - Christ our Goal (Chap. 3)
 - Christ our Strength (Chap. 4)

Conclusion:

1. What is robbing you of your joy in Christ? Is it circumstances, people, things or worry?
2. Are you allowing God to accomplish His purposes for the Gospel through your trial or are your carnal responses obstructing His plan?

¹ Outline by Wiersbe.