

Our Journey Through The Book of Philippians

Mike Butler
Southside Baptist Church
First Edition
January 2025

Unless otherwise noted all Scripture is taken from the New King James Versio

Our Journey Through the Book of Philippians

Mike Butler
First Edition
January 2025

Lesson #1 - Introduction

Welcome to the Book of Philippians

Setting the Stage:

To get ourselves in the right frame of mind to study this amazing letter let's first put ourselves in the shoes of its author, the apostle Paul and then visit the world in which he lived.

*Born in the city of Tarsus, in present day Turkey, Paul was both a Jew and a Roman citizen. Sent to Jerusalem as a young boy he was trained under the best Rabbinical teachers of the day (Acts 22:3) and became in his own words “...a **Hebrew of Hebrews** ...” (Philippians 3:5). This earned him a place amongst the Pharisees and probably as a member of the Sanhedrin, which meant he was certainly a man of stature and respect. But over time he became recklessly jealous of the Jewish faith and would do anything to protect it. Even imprisoning or executing followers of a young Carpenter from Galilee named Jesus.*

*That's what he was doing the day it happened. An event that would forever change his life and the course of human history. Paul was traveling with a group of men along the road to Damascus where he intended to arrest more people who were following a new belief system they called “...**the Way**...” (Acts 9:2). Their affinity for its leader, the young man named Jesus, must have seemed odd to Paul, because even though the young teacher had been dead (and some rumored resurrected) for several years, the number of people following Him was increasing at a rapid rate. Something had to be done about this and Paul knew exactly what that was. So the Jewish leaders had given him written permission to hunt these people down and bring them to trial. That's why He was headed to Damascus where he believed a group of them lived. But on that day everything would change. Along the road Paul was suddenly blinded by a great light and then he heard the voice of God. In fact, the voice he heard was the Teacher*

Himself, Jesus who called out to him from heaven. Paul was stunned. His years of Rabbinical training had not prepared him for what was happening, but he could not deny the reality of what he heard and saw. It was at that moment Paul realized Jesus is real, and not only that, he realized Jesus is the Messiah — He is God.

*Paul's life changed that day and he immediately went from being a persecutor of The Way to its most outspoken ambassador. He had been selected by Jesus to be His apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). To accomplish this Paul traveled thousands of miles across the Mediterranean region and the Middle East preaching the “gospel” truth of the risen Messiah. Along the way He became a hated target of both the legalistic Jews and the Roman government. He was constantly being criticized, mocked, beaten, whipped, stoned and imprisoned. All because he was one of those who “...**turned the world upside down...**” (Acts 17:6) with his radical testimony of the young man from Galilee.*

*But now Paul found himself in a Roman prison. This wasn't the only time he would be in prison because frankly he had no intention of staying quiet about the gospel. So now he was under arrest, incarcerated, and with a doubtful future. In fact, as he reflected on his situation he realized he could probably be executed at any moment at the whim of some irate Roman official. But he didn't care. He saw himself being “...**in chains for Christ...**” (Philippians 1:13) and he was perfectly okay with that. As he sat in confinement he asked for the Lord's guidance. Should he fight back? Should he try to escape? Should he agree to give up preaching and just go home in peace? No. None of these would do. Instead, the Lord inspired him to write a letter from prison - several letters in fact - but one of them would be to his beleaguered brothers and sisters in the city of Philippi. They were his friends and had helped his ministry. So he'd write them a letter, but instead of telling them how bad it was for him in prison he would try to encourage them in their own difficult lives. He loved them and knew they were suffering as well, so he wrote them a letter full of thanksgiving and joy. A letter that continues to encourage believers centuries later.*

So Why Study Philippians?

As I look across our class (and the broader church in general) I recognize many of us are dealing with significant challenges in life. Some are facing health issues, for others it may be financial, or problems on their job, difficulties with a relationship, loss of a loved one, or any number of trials life throws our way. Others have children, grandchildren, siblings and spouses who are struggling. But through all of these challenges most everyone has been steadfast. In fact, many have grown closer to the Lord and stronger in their walk as a result of their difficulties.

So when I think about you I think about the apostle Paul and the Book of Philippians. Why? Because Paul wrote his letter to the church at Philippi while he was in a Roman prison. He could have complained about his circumstances or described the challenges he faced. And yet, in his suffering, he wrote a letter often called "The Book of Thanksgiving" or the "Book of Joy". That's amazing. Here is a guy imprisoned for his faith and near the end of his life, and yet, the Lord inspired him to write a letter to encourage other people. But how could he do that? How could he ever find the strength within himself to ignore his own plight and seek to encourage other believers? Easy. The Lord would give him the strength he needed to endure and would inspire the words he needed to say (2 Corinthians 12:9 / 2 Peter 1:20-21). But I also wonder if Paul ever thought back to the story of Ruth and the fact she had been given a heavy burden by her redeemer, **"Also he said, 'Bring the shawl that is on you and hold it.' And when she held it, he measured six ephahs of barley, and laid it on her. Then she went into the city."** (Ruth 3:15) Ruth's Kinsman-Redeemer Boaz had given her a heavy load to carry, even though he knew how heavy it was. Yet rather than complain, she carried it, and shared it, just as Paul was doing. He might have also been encouraged by the promise Jesus made when He said, **"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."** (Matthew 11:28). It is this wonderful promise that can give all of us Paul-like strength when we **"...are heavy laden..."** and have difficulty carrying the load we are given.

And that's what I see in our class. Many burdens to carry and struggles to overcome, yet many of you are such an inspiration because you never give up. In your own way you have a testimony like the Book of Philippians.

So let's take a journey together into a Roman prison and listen as Paul writes a letter to the church at Philippi. A letter for the ages. A letter also written to us. And as we do, I pray you are as encouraged and challenged by this story as I have been.

Mike

Lesson #1 Continued - Introduction

How I Approached Philippians

To me Philippians is unique in the sense it is such an encouraging letter written from such an unencouraging place. Paul wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon during periods of incarceration. Often called the *"Prison Epistles"*, each of these letters offer abundant and clear truths from the Lord. But Philippians also expresses joy and confidence even though Paul was in a situation most of us would find nearly unbearable. And yet, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he wrote a letter so encouraging it is often called *"The Book of Thanksgiving"*.

So in writing these lessons I wanted us to feel his joy in those times when we're dealing with issues in our own life.

So I approached Philippians this way:

- Geography / Culture / History of the Roman Empire:
 - I want us to get our head around the Roman Empire of Paul's day. They were his mission field so we need to understand who they were, how they lived and what they believed. In doing so we can better understand why Paul addressed specific issues the way he did. Particularly since he was speaking primarily to two very different groups of people - self-righteous Jews and idol worshiping pagan Gentiles. Understanding their culture and world-view is much like a missionary who seeks to understand how a tribal culture thinks and acts so they can better understand how to share the gospel in their unique context.
 - But a study of the Roman Empire can bring to light some similarities to our own modern culture. Rome was one of the most godless and hedonistic societies in history. Known for their culture, architecture and art, they were also known for barbaric warfare and the senseless execution of millions of people who did not agree with them. Today we see our own society falling further and further from truth, and even in religious circles they are focused more on their own prosperity than they are on Jesus. Like Paul, we can see a mission field in our society where people are grasping for something they cannot find. So we need to help them find Jesus.

- Geography / Culture / History of Philippi:
 - Why did Paul write to the early church at Philippi? Who were they? How did they live? What did they believe? This will help us understand Paul's audience in a specific region of the Roman Empire and how he addressed their needs and issues.
- The Man Saul / The Man Paul:
 - Who was Saul, the educated and dangerous Pharisee? Who was Paul, the humble and Christ-focused apostle to the Gentiles? As we study the writer of Philippians we will explore his pre-Christian state as a hot headed zealous Jew, and his converted state as arguably the greatest evangelist in history. Who was he? What made him tick? How was he converted to Christianity? What was his ministry journey like? All of this will help us understand the mindset of the man Jesus chose to be His representative to the Gentile world.
- Expository Teaching:
 - Then we will do a chapter-by-chapter review of Paul's letter. We'll focus on key points and seek to understand what he wrote and why. Generally when I write lessons I try to create about an hour's worth of context in each one. That way we can cover roughly a lesson per week in class. But for Philippians I broke it into fewer lessons. I want us to take our time and not be constrained by lesson boundaries. Instead, let's discuss the text, slowly explore its meaning and understand how to apply what the Lord is teaching us.
- Application:
 - I want this study to be more than an academic verse by verse survey, so I have tried to use Paul's letter to give us applications for our own lives. All of us are, or will, deal with issues in life that will beat us down. We can look at these as our own "prison" – a place we find ourselves where we'd rather not be. But how do we do like Paul and use that situation to glorify God? How do we find joy in our trials? How can we encourage others the way Paul encouraged the Philippians even though we might not be so encouraged ourselves? I view the Book of Philippians as a letter to all of us from the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21). A letter to encourage us in our own lives so our testimony can be glorifying to the Lord. That way when the lost world sees us dealing with our own trials and tribulations with the joy of Jesus in our hearts they will see something in us they will want for themselves.

Biblical Context:

As a backdrop for our study of Philippians, let's go back and review some of the introductory material from our previous study on the Book of Romans. This will give us some historical context on the Roman Empire, the city of Rome where Paul was a prisoner, and the life of the apostle Paul himself. We will also study the city and people of Philippi to better understand who this letter was written to. This information should give us an historical context and add depth to our study.

But first, let's discuss something that may not be obvious. – Why is it so important to study Rome, Philippi and Paul before we study the scripture itself? Because this is where and when God chose for this to happen. Frankly, God could have given us His word without human scribes, and He didn't necessarily need to tell us who the scripture was originally written to. But if God did it that way it might be more difficult for us to apply scripture to our own lives. So the Lord gives us “context” by helping us understand when the Bible was written and who it was originally written to. That way we can understand the culture, world-view and mindset of the original readers. In doing so, we get a much deeper understanding of the “context” in which it was written, which in turn gives us a platform to better understand what the scripture actually means. In the case of Rome we see an empire much like our own. Large and powerful, but also sinful, hedonistic, immoral and focused on the pleasures of life. Looking at America today I think we can relate to some of that and understand the culture Paul was writing to. Then we see the church at Philippi. Part of the larger Roman Empire but they were a minority, alienated and persecuted because of their faith in Christ. We sometimes feel that way too; right? Because as true believers we become more and more alienated from mainstream society.

And then we see the scribe himself, Paul, a religious man with a sinful past who was redeemed by Jesus and turned his life over to serving the Lord. That may be a description of us as well. But God often lets us see more of a writer than just their name. We see the inner-workings of the writer's mind and heart. We may get a glimpse of his family dynamics, or the struggles they went through, or their triumphs and tragedies. And when we do, we can sometimes relate our own lives to theirs and pull even more application from the text.

For example:

- Abraham was a man of great faith but to escape a famine he made the decision to go in a direction God did not tell him to go (Genesis 12:10-20).

- Moses was selected by God for an incredibly important task but doubted himself and made excuses (Exodus 4:10-17).
- David was a fierce warrior and follower of the Lord but fell into deep immorality (2 Samuel 11:2-5).
- In Peter we see an impetuous man, who put himself in the wrong place at the wrong time and denied the Lord (Matthew 26:69-75).

And now we see Paul, a Pharisee and religious zealot who after receiving Christ suffered untold persecution and challenges. And yet, he could muster enough strength to write a letter of love from a Roman prison.

All of that is why God gives us context in His word. It is this context - the backdrop - that often helps us more effectively apply the Bible's passages and narratives to our own lives. That's why a study of context will make our study of Philippians literally come to life.

Author and Timing:

The human author of this letter was the apostle Paul. We know this from his introduction in Philippians 1:1 ***“...1. Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ...”***. But as with all Scripture the words recorded by Paul are not his own. As Peter confirms they are in reality words inspired by the Holy Spirit through a human scribe, ***“...20. knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21. for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”*** (2 Peter 1:20-21). But as the words of the Holy Spirit they are the words of God, as Paul reiterated in his instructional letter to Timothy confirming that, ***“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God...”*** (2 Timothy 3:16a). In other words, the letter Paul wrote to encourage his brethren in Philippi, is actually a letter the Lord wrote to all of His children. First to the believers in the Greek city of Philippi and then to us. Paul wrote several letters while in prison, which is why they are commonly called the “Prison Epistles” (Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon). This particular letter to the church at Philippi was probably written around 60-62 AD when Paul was first imprisoned in Rome. We see indications of his location when he references the ***“...palace guard...”*** (Philippians 1:13), and the believers ***“...who are of Caesar's household...”*** (Philippians 4:22). Although Paul was in prison several times, both of these references point to Paul's location being in Rome. Acts chapters 21 through 28 provides more detail about Paul's arrest and transport to prison in Rome. Interestingly, even though Paul was incarcerated he was not a normal prisoner. That's partly because he was a Roman citizen, which gave him legal rights and protection other Jews did not have, but also

because the Roman judicial system had not found him guilty of any real crime. He was imprisoned at the request of Jewish leadership (Acts 23:20) but since he was a Roman citizen he was given an opportunity to present his case before a Roman court. First Paul made his case to governor Felix (Acts 23:24) and later to his successor governor Festus (Acts 25:9). He then met with king Agrippa, who along with the others, concluded that Paul had not broken any Roman law, so he agreed to honor Paul's request to take his case before Caesar in Rome (Acts 26:31-32). This review process took over two years during which time Paul remained in custody. His trip to Rome required a long sea voyage across the Mediterranean and through Malta. It was a trip beset by delays and storms before Paul finally arrived in Rome months later (Acts 27). Once there he was treated differently than the other prisoners because of his Roman citizenship, so even though he was held in confinement under the eye of a Roman guard, Paul was allowed to stay in a rented house that served as his cell for two years (Acts 28:30). This arrangement gave him the freedom to meet with other believers and share the gospel. It was there he ***"...explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets [the Old Testament] from morning till evening."*** (Acts 28:23).

I think this is an important lesson for us. Paul had committed no crime, yet he suffered a long and frustrating journey only to end up in prison. But instead of fighting back or trying to escape he used the situation to share the gospel. The Lord could have seen fit to have Paul released from prison or made his journey much easier, but He didn't. Instead, the Lord strengthened Paul by using his situation as a powerful platform from which he could witness and encourage others. Likewise, many of us sometimes take what seems to be a long and difficult journey in life that is no fault of our own, and we find ourselves feeling shipwrecked and imprisoned by our situation. When that happens we could revolt, get mad at God and turn from our faith. Or...like Paul, we can use our difficult circumstances to strengthen our testimony and use it to share Jesus in an even more powerful way. We should also remember, Paul was not a superhero. He was human and had no special power to overcome the challenges of life. In fact he suffered much more than many of us ever will. But he had faith our Lord would carry him through any trial he had to face. That's why he could say with joy, ***"9. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*** (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). My prayer is that each of us can find this type of strength in our own testimony.

empire like none other in the ancient world. And as its empire grew the term "Rome " came to mean so much more than just a collection of people and buildings in a geographical location. Rome became a world-wide power that stretched from North Africa to Northern Europe. Along the way it conquered, occupied, subjugated and enslaved most of the known western-world's population. To the point its gift to art and architecture was overshadowed by the sin and lust of its vile inhabitants who were pagan in every way. Through their leaders and the people's insatiable hunger for sin, Rome became a tool in satan's hands as he pursued Israel and persecution of the early Christian church.

But in its heyday Rome was more than the name of a city. *"All roads lead to Rome"* was a common expression focusing on the fact Rome was the source of art, architecture, government and great military power that stretched across the known western-world. From a primitive village on the Palatine Hills, Rome grew into an empire like the world had never seen before. Extending from North Africa, to Northern Europe, west to England, and as far east as modern Russia, the Roman Empire conquered and absorbed dozens of kingdoms, thousands of villages, millions of people and made all the world to be like Rome. As the empire spread, so did its art, architecture and system of government. Rome brought each conquered territory under their control with their unrelenting vice-like power and then sought to make them like Rome. But eventually Rome's glory came to an end as opposing empires overran its outposts and outlying cities. In time Rome as an empire imploded on itself and was no more. What had once been the largest and most powerful empire on earth became known for its decaying ruins.

But even to this day the influence of the Roman Empire is more far reaching than we might believe. Hundreds of villages and cities across Europe started as a Roman settlement and remain today. Paris (Parisiorum), Salzburg (Iuvavum), Zurich (Tuticum), Vienna (Vindobona) and London (Londinium) are all modern cities originally founded or expanded by Rome as the empire sought to control the known world.

Rome - It's Geography:

Located in West/Central Italy, Rome sits on seven hills - the Aventine, Caelian, Capitoline, Esquiline, Palatine, Quirinal and Viminal. Like many ancient cities Rome began as a small farming community that grew over time, because the moderate climate and good soil made it a productive area for sustaining a permanent settlement. Likewise, its location on the Tiber River provided access to the Tyrrhenian Sea, and from there to the larger Mediterranean Sea, and through Gibraltar to the Atlantic Ocean. From that point sea travel was possible to Spain, Greece, Africa, Western Europe and the Middle East. This strategic central location made Italy, and Rome in

particular, a key east-west sea-bridge to other regions. To the north of Rome lie the Italian Alps - running east and west as a natural defensive wall between Italy and mainland Europe. To the east are the Apennine Mountains running roughly north and south. These two rugged mountain ranges afforded the city some strategic protection against invading armies.

Rome - It's History:

What would eventually become the city of Rome and the capital of the Roman Empire, started as an agricultural settlement in the 8th or 9th century BC. Archeological evidence on Rome's hills indicate Neolithic people settled along the Tiber River at a place where it was fordable. Over time these villages were fortified and laid the foundation for the future city. Early cultures included a number of Italic speaking groups, but throughout its development Rome was also heavily influenced by the Etruscians from the north and the Greeks from the east.

The Roman Empire's ancient history is generally divided into three periods - the Monarchic, Republic and Imperial.

- Monarchic Period - Early mythological legend contends Rome was founded in 753 BC by two orphaned brothers, Romulus and Remus, who were abandoned near the river Tiber and raised by a she-wolf. More accurately, what would become Rome was a collection of farmers and shepherds who settled in an area near a river crossing. These villages collectively developed into a community with a regional king as their ruler. Legend says early Rome had seven kings but historians do not agree on how many kings there actually were or who they were. This period lasted until 509 BC when Rome came under the rule of a Senate whose members were typically part of society's aristocracy. Together they functioned somewhat as a democratic republic.
- Republican Period - Around 509 BC the last Monarchic king was defeated and Rome's government reverted from a monarchy to a republic. Two Consuls were elected each year to work with the Senate to create and enforce laws. It was during this period when Rome began to expand its borders and influence. Between the 5th to 3rd centuries BC Rome conquered most of the Italian peninsula, but Rome's military advance was thwarted by the Gauls who came across the Alps to sack the city. Then between 264-146 BC Rome also came under attack from Carthage who wanted to control Rome's vital trade routes. Rome eventually defeated the Gauls and Carthage and accelerated its offensive

efforts conquering Sardinia, Corsica, Syria, Macedonia and parts of Asia Minor. As the republic defeated and assimilated these cultures into the empire they adopted elements of their art, architecture, philosophy, technology and religions making Rome into a true multinational society.

- Imperial Period - This is the era we typically think of as "The Roman Empire". In 48 BC a leader emerged whose name has become synonymous with Rome - Gaius Julius Caesar. A successful general and statesman, Julius became embroiled in a civil war with his son-in-law Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus. A highly decorated military commander who became known as "Pompey the Great". Caesar's victory propelled him to become a dictator and ushered in his Imperial government. But his success was short-lived and he was assassinated four years later. His successor, his grand-nephew Caesar Octavian Augustus (Augustus Caesar - aka "The Exalted One"), is also the leader who defeated Anthony in the battle of Actium in 31 BC, and led the empire until 14 AD. He is considered the Roman Empire's first true emperor and was the leader in power when Jesus was born. (Luke 2:1) It was Augustus who ordered the census of the entire Roman "world" in order to register military age men and to establish a basis for taxes. That was the action that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem so they could be counted in the census for their home area. Augustus died in 14 AD at the age of 76. Over the next 500 years he would be succeeded by 41 emperors. Among them were some of the most bloodthirsty and vile men who ever ruled on earth. Including emperor Vespasian and his son Titus who destroyed Jerusalem and most of Israel in 70 AD. But the once strong empire began to implode. Wracked by civil war and invading armies from the north - the Huns, Visigoths and Alerics - Rome began to decentralize. Under Emperor Constantine the empire was divided into Eastern and Western sectors and the capital was moved from Rome to Constantinople - modern day Istanbul Turkey. By 493 AD the Western Roman Empire had collapsed, leaving only the ruins of its former self.

Rome - It's Religion

Rome was pagan in every way. Their religion was polytheistic which means they worshiped multiple gods and goddesses. Most homes had private shrines where families could worship gods of their own choosing, but a more nationalistic view focused primarily on gods derived partly from Greek mythology. Emperor worship was also common and specific emperors were believed to be god's. But whatever belief system was popular at a given time, all Roman religion was pagan, based on idolatry that in some cases reverted to vile and immoral practices. Paul saw this clearly when

he visited Athens (a Greek city under Roman rule) and, ***"...was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols."*** (Acts 17:16 NKJV) But he used this occasion to spread the gospel of Jesus. ***"22. Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23. for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:."*** (Acts 17:22-23)

Once introduced, Christianity quickly took root, and although only a small percentage of the total population became Christian, the new "Way" spread rapidly to nearly every region of the empire. So much so, when the Roman Empire eventually collapsed, Christianity remained behind having taken a foot-hold across Europe. From there it would eventually migrate to America and to the rest of the world. But Christianity was unwelcomed in Rome and over time the murder of Christians became a government sponsored sport. It is believed several million Christians were killed by the Roman Empire, including an estimated 400,000 just in the Colosseum alone. This last figure clearly illustrates how barbaric the populace had become, particularly given the fact these public murders were considered to be "entertainment". Several of the apostles are believed to have been executed by Rome, and even John, the one apostle who appears may have died of old age, was in his 90's when banished to a Roman penal colony on the Island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9). The place where he would record the glorious end-times Revelation of Christ.

In many ways the Roman Empire has gifted the world with an amazing contribution to art and architecture of great historical significance. Yet, as their culture prospered it grew more barbaric. To the point it became obsessed with immorality. Sadly, as we saw in our study of Revelation, Rome became one of the empires Satan used in his efforts to destroy Israel and later the early Christian community. This is the vile world into which the apostle Paul carried the message of Christ.

Rome in the Biblical Context and its History With Israel

For nearly a thousand years the Roman Empire controlled most of the known western-world. Their conquered territories spread from Africa to Northern Europe and included a wide sweep through the Middle East -- which of course included Israel. By the first century AD it is estimated that as many as seven million Jews lived in the Roman Empire. Not only in the Middle Eastern sector, but throughout the villages and cities of Asia Minor, Macedonia and what is now Europe.

Throughout history Israel has been the world's most hotly contested region and over the centuries many nations have sought to destroy her. Jerusalem alone has been besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, recaptured 44 times and destroyed twice. Though their enemies have been many, there were six specific ancient empires who sought to wipe out the Hebrew people.

But why?

- Geographically – Israel occupies a key strategic location on the north/south route between Asia Minor and Egypt. It also borders the Mediterranean Sea on the west which provides harbors and access to important trade routes. Even today Israel continues to be viewed by its enemies as a potential source of natural resources. Most recently, the rich Leviathan gas fields found off its coast have attracted the attention of other nations. Some commentators believe these resources could be the **“...hooks into your jaws...”** in Ezekiel 38:4 that will bring northern armies against Israel in the future Ezekiel War.
- Politically – Israel has been a hotbed of conflict since ancient times. As the world's only Jewish nation Israel has always had cultural and ideological differences with its neighbors who were historically pagan and today are predominantly Islamic.
- Biblically – Israel, more than any other nation on earth, plays a prominent role in God's plan for mankind. As His chosen nation and intended messenger to the world, Israel has come under relentless attacks from satan as he has focused on the destruction of God's plan, defeat of God's Son and disillusionment of God's chosen nation Israel. As a result, Israel has come under his intense focus for centuries because it was through them the Messiah would come to earth. But satan has failed over and over to physically destroy Israel so to this day he seeks to influence its people to turn away from God so they will not be the source of God's redemptive gospel message to the world. But a day will come when God's future plans for Israel will be fulfilled, and at that point, **“they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.”** (Zechariah. 12:10b)

Of all the empires satan has used to persecute Israel, the most powerful were Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Most conservative scholars believe these are the kingdoms described in Revelation chapter 17, as the beast with seven heads, who John tells us, **“...are also seven kings...”**. Let's look at this amazing passage, starting in verse 9, to see how it might give us some past and future context for our study: --- **9. “Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are**

seven mountains on which the woman sits. 10. There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time." (Revelation 17:9-10). Here in very complex imagery John describes the seven heads of the beast, the antichrist and his future empire, as seven hills. This has led some to believe John meant the seven "hills" of Rome, but that explanation seems too simple because he tells us that an understanding of this passage calls for a **"...mind which has wisdom."** (Revelation 17:9). In other words, the meaning of this passage is not as straight-forward as it might appear so we need to apply spiritual wisdom in order to understand it. Or said another way, simply interpreting these seven hills as the seven hills of Rome is just too easy of an answer because it wouldn't require spiritual wisdom to figure that out. As we see in Revelation 17:10, the seven hills refer to seven kings. These probably represent the leaders of the seven empires who over the centuries have sought to destroy Israel. They were certainly not the only kingdoms who warred with Israel over time, but they were the most powerful of the ancient empires who sought to control the world of their day.

Of these empires John says:

- **"...Five have fallen..."** --- These would have been the five warring nations that were already destroyed prior to John's time --- Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece.
- **"...one is..."** --- Here John is speaking in the present tense because he wrote Revelation while the Roman Empire was still in power.
- The five who had already **"...fallen..."** plus the one who **"...is..."** equals six. That leaves one future seventh empire.
- The seventh empire, **"...has not yet come..."**, indicating a future kingdom which most conservative scholars believe will be the empire of the antichrist. A future empire that will exist during the Tribulation period and will be destroyed by Christ at the Second Coming. (See Revelation, chapters 13, 18 and 19)

All of these ancient nation-states sought to control most of the known world of their day. They swept through regions, destroyed their cities, killed or enslaved their people and brought harsh rule on all they conquered. But the fifth empire, Greece, was different. In 338 BC the 20 year old son of Phillip of Macedonia (who incidentally conquered Philippi and gave the city its name), Alexander the Great, conquered most of the Middle East, including Israel and Judea. But unlike prior conquering nations Alexander took a different tact for subjugation. Rather than killing their captives and destroying their cities Alexander instead sought to psychologically conquer the people by luring them to adopt the Greek way of life. By the time he died at 32 years old Alexander had set the stage for the Hellenistic Age which sought to **"Make all Things Greece"**. As a result, conquered nations often adopted the Greek model of government, studied Greek philosophy, worshiped mythological Greek gods, and in

many cases changed their traditional local language to Greek. In fact, the first non-Hebrew translation of the Bible, the "Septuagint", was written in the Greek language because so many Jews spoke Greek by that point. That's also why the New Testament was written in Greek instead of Hebrew. Although Alexander's approach was to assimilate rather than destroy, it was ironically the bloodthirsty Syrian-Greek commander, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who attacked Jerusalem in 168 BC, desecrated its temple, abominated the altar and set the prophetic stage for the antichrist to do the same thing during the Tribulation. (Daniel 9:27 / 11:21 / 11:31 / 2 Thessalonians 2:4 / Matthew 24:15).

The Greeks ruled the Middle East from 338 to 166 BC when they were eventually conquered by the expanding Roman Empire. Rome quickly became the most powerful empire on earth and arguably the most powerful of all the ancient cultures. Over time they conquered and occupied the territories previously controlled by the Greeks and expanded their rule south into North Africa and all the way to what is now Northern Europe and through the Middle East -- an area of almost two million square miles. Although Roman rule would prevail, Greek culture continued to influence Roman society, art, architecture, and philosophy, so that by the time Paul made his missionary journeys through the empire most of the people he met were Greek speakers.

The Roman Empire conquered the Greek-held area that included Israel during the period between the Old and New Testaments. In 63 BC General Gnaeus Pompeius "Pompey" Magnus (106 BC to 48 BC), son-in-law of Julius Caesar, conquered Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, adding Israel and Judea to the empire. But it appears Pompey ordered the temple to be purified, restored the position of high priest and allowed the people to bring offerings to God as was required by Jewish law. He also rebuilt several cities and restored others to self-government. This period of relative peace became known as the "Pompeian Era". Yet, at the same time, Israel was firmly under the control of Rome, subjugated to its laws and ruled by a series of regional Prefects, Procurators and Governors appointed by the Roman senate. Among the earliest of these was Herod the Great, the so-called "king" of Judea (Luke 1:5) who ruled from 37 BC to about 1 BC. Probably not a Jew, Herod is thought to have been an "Idumen". A people group descended from Esau through the Edomites, and therefore a traditional enemy of Israel whose people were descended from Jacob. A ruthless leader, Herod was hated by the Jewish people for his heavy-handed reign. It was Herod for example, who met with the Magi as they searched for the baby Jesus and later ordered the massacre of all Jewish boys in Bethlehem under two years old in an attempt to kill the child the Magi thought was a Jewish King and a potential threat to Herod's rule (Matthew 2:16). But Herod is also known for his massive building program including the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. At his death the Romans divided Israel amongst his three sons, Herod Archelaus, Herod Phillip and Harold Antipas.

Archelaus was an ineffective leader and was quickly replaced by the Pontius Pilot as the governor of Judea. Herod Antipas is the ruler most spoken of in the gospels, and it was this Herod who ordered the beheading of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12) and cross-examined Jesus prior to His crucifixion. (Luke 23:6)

By the time Jesus was born, the long occupation of Israel by Rome firmly entrenched their culture into nearly every aspect of Jewish life. In fact, it was a Roman ordered census of the entire empire that required Joseph and Mary to return to their hometown of Bethlehem to be counted. (Luke 2:1-7). This move - carried out by Rome, but planned by God - enabled Jesus to be born in the place that brought fulfillment of the prophecy, **““But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel,**

Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.”” (Micah 5:2). Although Rome allowed the Jews to worship as they pleased, Roman administration, laws, taxes and culture were all part of being an occupied territory. This so infuriated Israel's civil and religious leaders that their hatred of Roman rule eventually distracted them to the point they totally missed the prophesied Messiah when He came to earth. They were desperately looking for a powerful warrior king who would rid their land of the foreign invaders and establish His promised kingdom on earth. They were not looking for a lowly Carpenter who carried a message of love and forgiveness. As a result, the Jewish people misunderstood who Jesus was, viewed Him as a fraud, and demanded the Romans crucify Him. This was still the prevailing attitude amongst Jews as Paul began his ministry, and frankly, is the view of most Jews to this day. For the most part both Jews and Gentiles saw Jesus as an upstart martyr to a failed religion. This is a perception Paul had to change, which is why in the Book of Romans he spends so much time connecting Jesus to Old Testament Messianic prophecies the Jews were familiar with.

But Jesus foreknew the future and warned Israel their disobedience would be their downfall, **“41. Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, 42. saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! [recognition of the Messiah] But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, 44. and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”** (Luke 19:41-44). And that is exactly what happened. On April 9th, 70 AD, the Roman General Titus - son of future emperor Vespasian - laid siege to Jerusalem and surrounded the city. They cut off all supplies and literally starved them out. The city fell in September and afterwards was almost completely destroyed. Just as Jesus had foretold, citizens were

slaughtered by the tens of thousands and the temple was demolished. Millions more were captured and sold as slaves. Some destined to the arenas in Rome where they were publically murdered for entertainment. Why? ***“...because you did not know the time of your visitation...”*** The Messiah had come, just as He promised, but the Jewish leadership was so preoccupied with rejecting the Romans they instead rejected God. Even as the Lord Jesus stood in their midst, healed their sick, raised their dead and fulfilled scripture right before their eyes, they refused to accept Him as their King and instead had Him crucified.

Titus' attack was a result of the “Great Jewish Revolt”, sometimes called the First Jewish-Roman War (Ha-Mered Ha Gadol). This was the first of three major rebellions by Jews against Rome's occupying forces. From 66 to 73 AD a series of wars erupted that were eventually brought to an end by the sheer size and power of Roman forces. The Roman historian and Jewish military commander Josephus (Yosef ben Matityahu - 37-100 AD) estimates that during this period 1.1 million non-combatants died in Jerusalem, 100,000 in Galilee and another 97,000 were taken in slavery. The revolt began during the reign of the corrupt and psychopathic emperor Nero as a result of escalating taxes and the continued pressures of occupation. Nero ordered Vespasian to crush the rebellion, and his son Titus became second-in command. During the lengthy campaign Vespasian was recalled to Rome to assume the role of emperor. With his departure, Titus took command and laid siege to Jerusalem for over seven months. After the destruction of Jerusalem the city lay in ruin but remnant Jews continued to live in Judea. But resistance to Roman rule would continue.

The last of the Jewish-Roman wars is called the “Bar Kokhba Revolt”, which the Romans referred to as “The Jewish Expedition”. From 132 to 136 AD forces under Simon bar Kokhba fought against the Roman invaders, but in the end it was a decisive victory for Rome. Six full legions and portions of six additional legions of Roman soldiers under General Sextus Julius Severus combined with soldiers from outposts in Syria, Egypt and Arabia. This resulted in a large-scale annihilation of the Jewish people by Roman troops, suppression of the Jewish religion and barring Jews from living in Jerusalem. The emperor prohibited Torah Law and the Hebrew calendar, and executed many Jewish scholars. All in an attempt to destroy the spiritual strength of the people. It is estimated that 600,000 more Jews were killed during this war and over 950 villages were ravaged. The destruction of Israel was so great many historians consider the results to have been genocide, and from that point until 1948 the nation of Israel largely ceased to exist.

Eventually the Roman Empire imploded on itself and was split into Western and Eastern sectors. The Eastern Empire was controlled by Constantine, who allowed Jews to mourn their defeat once a year at the temple's Western Wall.

Rome in the Days of Paul

The Roman Empire was the vile society into which Paul would bring the gospel of Jesus. For roughly two hundred years the empire enjoyed a time of “Pax Romana”, or “Roman Peace”. An era in which Rome gained superiority over most of the known western-world and for a period did not see widespread military action - with some notable exceptions as we have already discussed. This period ran from the time of Caesar Augustus in 27 BC to the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 AD. A time when the population of the total Roman Empire is estimated to have been over 70 million people who, for the most part, lived in relative harmony. But it was also a time that saw the emergence of a new religion. A belief system originating in Judaism but focused on the worship of a man who claimed to be the promised Messiah. The Romans could care less about this Man or His ministry, but His message stirred up hate and discontent among the Jewish leadership and that caused issues for the Roman governor Pontius Pilot who was tasked by Rome with avoiding any insurrection among the people. So Pilot reluctantly became involved in the matter and had the man executed to calm the agitated Jews. Ostensibly, the movement should have ceased when its leader, a carpenter named Jesus of Nazareth, was executed by the Romans, but it was not to be. Instead, the religious movement grew exponentially despite severe persecution from both Jewish and Roman officials who sought to stop the new “Christian” belief from spreading. It was during this period that Paul, also known by his Hebrew name Saul, a Pharisee and leader in the Jewish community, became focused on destroying the followers of Jesus. Saul was authorized to arrest, imprison or even execute any Jew found to be a follower of the Carpenter, and he did his job very well. Like most Jews, Saul saw Jesus as a fraud who was determined to make trouble by disrupting the traditional Jewish faith with new ideas. It was only after Saul’s encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4-15) that he realized Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. Saul immediately converted to Christianity and began to spread the message of Christ throughout the Roman Empire. Ironically, it was the relative “peace” of Pax Romana that allowed him to travel throughout the empire on his missionary journeys. Yet, Saul / Paul quickly became the target of those who still sought to eradicate the new Christian movement. Several times he was imprisoned and tortured for disturbing the “peace” by disrupting not only the Jewish faith but also converting those of Roman pagan beliefs. Eventually Paul was arrested and sent to Rome where it is believed he was executed under the orders of the sadistic emperor Nero (37 to 68 AD). A ruler known for his hatred of Christians, it was Nero who blamed the Christian community for the fire that devastated Rome in 64 AD. Rumored to have been set by Nero himself (although that is highly unlikely), the fire spread for nine days and destroyed two-thirds of the city. Looking for someone to blame, Nero used the

Christians as a convenient scapegoat and initiated widespread persecution against Jews and Gentiles of the Christian faith. A period of mass persecution ensued that would last for almost four hundred years. What started as punishment for their suspected but unfounded role in the fire, led to a bloodsport like the world has never seen before or since. Estimates vary about how many Christians were killed by the Roman Empire, but as each successive emperor established their own plan for persecution it is probable that millions were martyred for refusal to renounce their faith. This led the Roman people to develop an insatiable appetite for bloodthirsty entertainment as hundreds of thousands of men, women and children were publicly murdered in the empire's sports arenas where the citizens cheered as the Christians were killed by gladiators or even wild animals. It is believed Paul was executed around 67 AD, and shortly thereafter Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD and the Jewish people were scattered across the empire. It is believed all of the original apostles were martyred, with the exception of John who near the end of his life was sent to the Roman penal colony on the island of Patmos because he preached, ***"...the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."*** (Revelation 1:9).

Rome - A Future View

Although the Roman Empire ceased to exist by the 5th century its legacy endures. When Rome fell to successive invaders the land of Israel came under Byzantine rule until 636 AD, Arab rule until 1099 AD, Mamluk rule until 1516 AD, and finally Ottoman rule until World War I. After the Allied victory in 1918 Israel was occupied by British soldiers until the United Nations granted re-establishment of a Jewish state on May 14th 1948. But the influence of the Roman Empire -- the idea of nationalist consolidation and world-wide control -- has continued. In the 1930's Adolf Hitler began a political and military campaign to take control of all Europe, and by extension the whole world. He called his efforts the "Third Reich"; using the term "Reich", which means "Realm" or "Empire" to describe his government. In many ways Hitler emulated the Roman Empire and called his proposed infrastructure "The Thousand Year Empire", which in itself seems to be a resurrection of the Roman Empire which he defined as the "Second Reich". But most troubling was not Hitler's desire to control the world, but his psychotic focus on annihilating the Jews of Europe. He was relentless in his efforts to pursue and murder every Jew he could find in every country his army occupied. To the point that capturing new territory seemed to be a way to expose and arrest more Jews. By the end of the war he had orchestrated the murder of over six millions Jews across all of Europe and Russia, and did so in barbaric ways that defy imagination. To do this he developed a complex infrastructure of death whose singular role was the systematic murder of as many Jews as possible. What resulted was a large cadre of soldiers, prison staff, death squads and agents whose sole mission and

desire was the execution and mass murder of every single Jew. These men and women were sadistic beyond understanding. So much so that Hitler himself became concerned about how these vile murderers could ever assimilate back into “normal” society once he had control of the world. His intense desire to exterminate the Jews resulted in a subculture even he could not control. The role Hitler played in the attempted genocide of the Jewish people was more than just a move to politically control Europe. It was demonic beyond understanding and represents another effort of Satan to destroy God’s chosen people. But even today vestiges of this attitude prevail. The world, and Europe in particular grow more antisemitic every day. Efforts are underway to block Israel from occupying territory clearly designated to them by God, neighboring nations rally against Israel, anti-Israeli protests are seen almost daily in major cities around the world, and it is only their own internal Islamic theological differences that keep the adjoining Muslim nations from joining forces against her. Russia and Turkey both see Israel as a source of natural resources, but most troubling from an end-times perspective is the emerging globalist agenda that seeks to form a single one-world government and economic system. Through such efforts Israel has become more and more segregated from the world. The US remains her only strong ally but until recently even our current progressive-leaning government is pulling away from Israel at a record pace. Prayerfully that will change.

But don't panic. All of this is known to God and therefore is part of His end-times plan. As we see in Revelation a seventh and future empire will emerge. The empire of the antichrist (Revelation chapters 13-18) will exist during the Tribulation period and seek to consolidate all religions and nations under a single government as their demonic leader focuses intently on destroying Israel and everyone else who believes in God. Some see the antichrist's empire as a resurrected Roman Empire seeking to control the entire world. Many scholars believe it will rise in Western Europe, fed by a globalist agenda whose goal is to bring the world's population under singular control. But wherever it forms the antichrist's empire will, like the Romans, turn on God's people with vengeance as it seeks to focus the world's attention on worship of its leader, the antichrist (Revelation 13:7). But the Lord will prevail and destroy the final demonic kingdom before Jesus establishes His forever Kingdom for His followers (Revelation chapters 19 and 20). And with that future view, we can be encouraged.

Note: For more information on the historical role of Rome and the end-times emergence of the antichrist please refer to our Revelation Study notes.

Lesson #3 - Paul's World - Philippi

Philippi : (see map in Lesson #2)

Philippi - Its Geography:

Originally called “Krenides - or “Little Fountains”, the ancient city of Philippi is located in present day Greece in an area settled by Grecian Thasian colonists along an ancient trade route called the “Via Egnatia”, the “Egnatian Way”, which links Europe and Asia Minor. The city is located at the foot of Mount Orbelos (current Mount Lekani) and adjacent to the Aegean Sea, in the region of Thrace which is bounded by the Balkan Mountains to the north and the Aegean Sea to the south. Philippi lies about ten miles inland from the coastal city of Neopolis and therefore would have had a significant trade advantage. Today the area encompasses northeastern Greece, Southeastern Bulgaria and parts of Turkey. This area was so important to the ancient Greeks that some early Greek scholars divided the whole world into four parts: Asia, Libya, Europa and Thracia. In ancient times the region around Philippi included a large marsh which was partially drained by Phillip II in order to better use the land. The area was also known for its gold mines and a Greek mint was established there.

Philippi - Its History

The original city of Krenides, or “Crenides”, was conquered by the Greek Macedonian king Phillip II in 356 BC, renamed Philippi in his honor, and became part of the Roman Empire in the second century BC. In 42 BC the city was the site of the Battle of Philippi between the forces of Antony and Octavian, and Brutus and Cassius. One of the largest of the Roman Empire's internal conflicts, the battle included over 200,000 soldiers, of which, an estimated 40,000 were killed. A number of the surviving soldiers of Anthony's victorious army settled in Philippi, which in time became known as a “Little Rome”, with fortified walls, a theater, temple, forum, acropolis, gymnasium and other Roman buildings. A school of medicine was also located there and may have been the school where Luke was trained. The city was given much autonomy and adopted Roman law, customs and language, but with the fall of the Roman Empire Philippi was largely abandoned by the 14th century AD. Today the site is the village of “Filippi”.

Philippi - Its Religion:

Like all Greco-Roman settlements Philippi was pagan and would have worshiped like the Greeks or Romans, largely dependent on who was in power at the time. Archeological findings indicate the worship of both Apollo and Artemis, but Philippi also included a small temple dedicated to a “Hero Cult” which was also common in ancient Mediterranean cultures. But Philippi is best known as an early starting-point of the Christian religion. In fact, the church established there by the apostle Paul in 50-51 AD may have been the first Christian church in the world and became a hotbed of the new Christian religion after Paul's visit. This was during his second missionary journey when the Holy Spirit called Paul to Macedonia (Acts 16:8-10) and he traveled there with Silas, Timothy and Luke. When they arrived in Philippi Paul found there was no synagogue. This may have been because the small Jewish population did not have the required ten heads-of-households to establish an official meeting place. So Paul met Lydia of Thyatira and other Jewish women worshiping near the river. He shared the gospel, led them to the Lord, and through them began a relationship with the future believers of the city (Acts 16:14-15). Paul visited Philippi again during his third missionary journey (2 Corinthians 8:1-5 and Acts 20:6).

Philippi in the Biblical Context and its History With Israel

Other than commercial trade, and of course the influence of the new Judeo-Christian religion, Philippi did not have a direct connection to Israel. Philippi was truly a Roman city in every way, so both Jews and Christians would have come under persecution. But as the site of the first Christian church founded by Paul in Europe Philippi would play a pivotal role in the expansion of the gospel.

Philippi - In the Days of Paul:

Paul visited Philippi on several occasions. During his second missionary journey he established a church there, baptized Lydia (Acts 16:12-15) and drove the demonic spirits from a possessed slave girl. This last event resulted in Paul and Silas being arrested, beaten with rods and thrown in jail (Acts 16:22-23). Later that night Paul and Silas began to sing praises to God. When they did, an earthquake opened the prison doors and broke all the prisoner's chains. Seeing this, the prison guard, fearing he would be blamed for allowing the prisoners to escape, sought to kill himself. But Paul and Silas intervened and the guard cried out, “**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**” (Acts 16:30).

Paul maintained an excellent relationship with the believers at Philippi which he acknowledged near the end of his letter, ***“Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia [Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea], no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only.”*** (Philippians 4:15). Paul also commended them for their generosity because even in their own poverty they gave to the suffering church in Jerusalem, ***“1. Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia [including Philippi]: 2. that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, 4. imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.”*** (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

Later when Paul was in prison in Rome the believers in Philippi sent support, hand carried to him by a man named Epaphroditus. But he became seriously ill so Paul sent him back to Philippi to recover. To ensure the church understood Epaphroditus did nothing wrong Paul asked him to carry his letter to the church which included the explanation, ***“25. Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; 26. since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. 27. For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. 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; 30. because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.”*** (Philippians 2:25-30)

And with that historical context we will now focus on the apostle Paul and then his beautiful letter to the Philippians.

Lesson #4 - The Apostle Paul

Our first three lessons provided an historical context of the Roman Empire, the city of Rome and the city of Philippi. I hope this brief familiarization with Rome and Philippi will help us understand the cultural mindset of the people Paul wrote this letter to. For the most part his readers were part of the new Christian faith which was increasingly unpopular with both Jewish traditionalist and Gentile pagans. The people Paul wrote to lived in a world dominated by oppression, sin and idolatry, and more than likely many of those who read or heard his original manuscripts were later persecuted or killed for their faith. It's important for us to understand this because as American Christians we live in a privileged cocoon where we can legally gather together, openly study God's word and share His gospel message without fear. But that is not the case in many places in the world today and it was certainly not the case in the Roman Empire. As Christianity spread, so did the resistance to its growth. To the point where Christian martyrs became fodder for the empire's thirst for blood. Many of those persecuted were Jews who had converted to Christianity, making them a double target. We see this in Acts 18 which chronicles Paul's first meeting with two Jewish-Christians, Aquila and his wife Priscilla who were exiled from Rome, **1. "After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them."** (Acts 18:1-2). This is in reference to emperor Claudius who around 49 AD issued a decree forcing all Jews to leave Rome. Some scholars believe the decree may have actually been directed more towards Christians than Jews because the Romans viewed Christianity as an offshoot of Judaism so they included all Jews. Until that time Jews lived in relative peace in the empire, but the preaching of the new gospel was seen by many as disruptive to society. This may be why Paul and Silas were arrested in Philippi on a very similar pretense, **"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."** (Acts 16:20-22). The **"...customs..."** they advocated was the worship of a Jewish Carpenter, Jesus of Nazareth, who claimed to be the Son of God and a Jewish King. This infuriated the Jewish leadership who in turn caused an uproar in their community which caused civil unrest amongst the Romans.

Paul, the Zealous Jew

Paul was born around 5 BC. Also known as Saul (Shaul), his Hebrew name, Paul was a Jew from the Tribe of Benjamin, (Philippians 3:5) and a native of Tarsus (Acts 9:11). A city in the region of Cilicia, which is in modern-day southeast Turkey. It was annexed into the Roman Empire around 64 BC by Pompey the Great, but had been under influence of the Greek Empire for over three hundred years prior to Roman occupation. Although Paul was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37 / 22:28), he was evidently raised in a devout Jewish household. Calling himself **"...a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law..."** (Philippians 3:5), he was a Pharisee and appears to have descended from other pharisees in his family, **"6. But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!"..."** (Acts 23:6 / 26:5). He may even have been a member of the Sanhedrin because he stated, **"I cast my vote..."** in reference to persecuting Christians. (Acts 26:10b). Apart from his pre-Christian religiously justified political activities it appears Paul was a leatherworker or tentmaker by trade. We see this in his initial encounter with Aquila and Pricilla where we learn, **"...he [Paul] stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers."** (Acts 18:3).

As a young boy from a devout Jewish family, Paul was sent to Jerusalem for rabbinical studies. There he studied under the celebrated rabbi Hillel Gamaliel, one of the most respected scholars of his day. Ironically, it would be Gamaliel, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, who at the trial of the apostles made an appeal for them that probably saved their lives, **"33. When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them. 34. Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. 35. And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. 36. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, [c]joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. 3.7 After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. 38. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; 39. but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God." 40. And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go."** (Acts 5:33-40). Under the tutelage of Gamaliel the young Paul was, **"...taught according to the strictness of our fathers'**

law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today." (Acts 22:3). But it was his zealousness for God that actually turned him against God. Just as other Jews did, Paul saw Jesus and His followers as detrimental to the Jewish faith and society as a whole. In Paul's eyes this poor, humble Man - clearly not a king - claimed to be the promised Messiah and Son of God. But that was blasphemy of the highest order which was punishable by death. So Paul became the zealous leader of a death squad of sorts who were licensed to hunt down and persecute those of this new faith. **"I persecuted followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison."** (Acts 22:4). He did this because, **"I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it."** (Galatians. 1:13). And it was Paul who guarded the clothes of the murdering mob as they stoned Stephen to death. **"At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, [Stephen] dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul."** (Acts 7:57-58). Apparently they had asked Paul (Saul) to watch over their cloaks while they stoned Stephen. Probably to keep them from being splattered with blood. I have often wondered if the horrible sights and sounds of that day grieved Paul later in life. It would certainly be an event he would see in a different light once he became the one being persecuted. But when it happened he was not an innocent bystander but obviously someone in authority, **"And Saul approved of their killing him."** (Acts 8:1)

But all of that would change on a road to Damascus...

Acts chapter 9 chronicles a very unique meeting between Jesus and Saul. A meeting so profound it not only changed Saul's life, but set the stage for the worldwide spread of the gospel. Let's read the account in its entirety.

"Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes,

Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah." (Acts 9:1-22)

This is such an amazing passage of scripture I think we should take a few minutes to discuss it.

Paul was on his way to Damascus with the intent to destroy Christians. His attitude is clear because he was, "... **breathing out murderous threats...**" in his zeal to root-out, arrest and prosecute or kill both men and women who were following Jesus. His intent also gives us an indication of how his zeal for serving God became misdirected and turned him to murderous sin. Permission to search-and-destroy came directly from the Jewish high priest. Basically the same group who insisted Jesus be crucified by the Romans (Matthew 26:57-67 / John 18:19-24). They gave Paul legal permission to arrest anyone in Damascus "...**who belonged to the Way,...**". The term "...**Way...**" is of course speaking of the new Christian faith. Of all the people in Israel who should have recognized the Messiah these are the men who were the most blinded. (John 12:37-40 / Isaiah 6:10), and they continued to be blinded as they watched the growth of Christianity emerge.

But along the road, at about noon (Acts 22:6) something extraordinary happened that would literally change the course of human history. Paul, the self-righteous and

murderous Pharisee, was literally knocked off his feet by a light from heaven. The light was Jesus in His glorified state, who is so often described as light (John 12:46 / Luke 2:32 / John 1:1-9), and now we see how His presence literally knocked this upstart hunter to the ground. And yet, there was more than light because Paul also heard the very voice of God call out, "**...Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?...**". Notice, He doesn't say, "*Why do you persecute these Christians?*", or "*...these people?...*". Instead, He says "**...why do you persecute me?**". Jesus was speaking of Himself, in the same vein as His parable of the sheep and goats when He said, "**...whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me...**" (Matt. 25:45). In other words, by persecuting the people of God - the bride of Christ - Paul was in effect attacking Jesus Himself. But Paul's response was totally out of character. Instead of resisting or asking "*Who are you?*", Paul says, "**...Who are you, Lord?**" He added the word "**...Lord...**" because he recognized he was being addressed by God. A fact validated when Jesus said, "***I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,***" **he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."** So Paul did as he was told. Blinded by the light and therefore helpless, the men with Paul had to guide him to Damascus where he was left at the house of a man named Judas on Straight Street (modern day Darb el-Mustaqim Street). Paul was there for three days, during which time he did not eat or drink. That may be an indication of the emotional shock he experienced in going from a brash young man with a murderous heart to realizing he had been blinded by God.

But the Lord, in His supreme authority, already had a plan. In Damascus there was a follower of Christ. A man named Ananias, "**...a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there.**" (Acts 22:12). Although he was a devout Jew he was also a convert to Christianity. We know this because Luke calls him "**...a disciple...**" and Ananias tells Paul it was, "**...Jesus, who appeared to you on the road...**". The Lord called to Ananias in a vision and directed him to find Paul and restore his sight. But understandably Ananias was frightened because he had, "**...heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people...**". But the Lord insisted and then clarified His intent, "**Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.**" --- What an understatement that would prove to be.

So Ananias went to Paul, healed his blindness (of course through the power of God) and told him what Jesus had said. Paul believed and accepted Christ as his Savior. This is indicated by the fact he was immediately baptized, not as a means of salvation, but as a public, and very risky, affirmation of his faith in Jesus.

Paul was now a part of The Way.

So how is it possible for a man like Paul, who had spent his entire life studying Rabbinical teaching and scripture, completely miss the fact Jesus is the Messiah? Similarly, how could the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law watch Jesus perform miracles and fulfil scripture right before their eyes and yet insist He be crucified as a fraud? At the core of their failure was disbelief resulting from a lack of true faith. They were looking for something tangible. A sign to prove Jesus is who He said He is (John 2:18), but they lacked the faith required to see Jesus for who He really is (Hebrews 11:1). Even Thomas, who walked with Jesus throughout His ministry sought physical proof of His resurrection (John 20:27). Seeing Jesus was simply not enough.

I think two issues stood at the root of their unbelief:

Jesus came in a disguise

The Jewish leaders and those who followed them were looking for a warrior king. For centuries, they had been under the rule of multiple empires who sought to occupy or destroy the land of Israel. Egypt, Medo-Persia, Assyria, Babylon, Greece and now Rome in the time of Jesus, ruled over Israel and brought their people under severe oppression. As a result, Israel believed their Messiah would come as a warrior and destroy those who persecuted them. But why did they believe this?

- They read what Isaiah had said, ***“6. For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”*** (Isaiah 9:6-7).
 - Certainly this was speaking of a powerful king who would establish His government in Israel forever.
- Or they thought of Zachariah and his prophecy of the mighty warrior who would fight their battles and set them free, ***“14. Then the LORD will be seen over them, And His arrow will go forth like lightning. The Lord GOD will blow the trumpet, And go with whirlwinds from the south. 15. The LORD of hosts will defend them; They shall devour and subdue with slingstones. They shall drink and roar as if with wine; They shall be filled with blood like basins, Like the corners of the altar. 16. The LORD their God will save them in that day, As the flock of His people. For they shall be like the jewels of a crown, Lifted like a banner over His land.”*** (Zechariah 9:14-16).
- Or, they thought of the great war prophesied by Ezekiel when the Messiah would destroy their enemies and restore Israel to glory, ***“3. Then I will knock***

the bow out of your left hand, and cause the arrows to fall out of your right hand. 4 You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured.” (Ezekiel 39:3-4).

- They read all of this and thought of the day when their Messiah would come to earth and ***“...His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east...”***. (Zechariah 14:4).

It's easy to understand how they could read these passages and believe the Lord intended to free them from Roman rule. But they failed to understand the timing of this prophecy and the fact the Messiah would come to free the entire world of sin and satan, not to free just the nation of Israel. So Jesus didn't come to earth as a warrior king. He came as a poor Carpenter, born in a manger in a small and unassuming town. He lived a normal life. The life of a commoner. Working with His hands and dutifully waiting to start His short ministry on earth. A ministry focused on freeing the world of sin, not freeing Israel from Rome. And in the guise of a lowly, homeless Carpenter it took one thing to see Him as the Messiah. It took faith. Enough faith to understand Who He is and What He is, not what He can do to free Israel from oppression. We can only imagine the turmoil in the minds of the Pharisees who saw Jesus perform miracles and knew He was somehow different, and yet, they could not tell Rome their King was a homeless Carpenter who spoke of love and forgiveness (John 3:2). Jesus came in a disguise to ensure those who believed in Him did so through faith and not because He wore the armor of a soldier.

Jewish leadership confused the issue

Let's go back a bit in history to quickly understand how Israel became a nation. Generations before there was a Nation of Israel God promised to make Abraham the father of a great people, and through them the whole world would be blessed (Genesis 12:2-3). This promise was carried through Abraham's son Isaac, and through Isaac to his son Jacob, and through Jacob to his twelve sons. Jacob's name was changed by God to Israel (Genesis 35:10) and his twelve sons became twelve tribes. But famine would come and the sons of Jacob would flee to Egypt where there was food. There their descendants stayed for over 400 years, becoming slaves of the Egyptians and drawing away from God. But God brought them out of Egypt and took them to the Promised Land in Canaan (Exodus 12). But they were still not a nation. As a result of living under slavery for over 400 years the Hebrew people did not know how to act like a nation. They had no infrastructure, no established government, no laws, or rules, or civic vision. So God gave them what they needed to function as a nation. He gave Moses the first five books of the Bible - called the Torah - or "*The Law of Moses*". These books gave specific instructions on how to live a life obedient to God. They also

told the people how to organize, how to govern, even instructions on agriculture, personal hygiene, family relationships, legal proceedings, and any other element of life needed to function as a nation. This was the “*Law*” by which Israel would live, and over time it has become the guidepost for the whole of mankind to live by. This Law consisted of ten primary Laws - “*The Ten Commandments*” - under which over 600 other laws were linked giving the people a complete guide to how to live their lives in community. Keeping these Laws did not bring inherent righteousness, but living by these Laws was the expectation God put on His people.

Central to these Laws was the Tabernacle. Starting as a portable “Tent of Meeting” in the wilderness, the Tabernacle eventually became the Temple in Jerusalem. It was here Israel would bring sacrifices and offerings to show their faith in God’s promised redemption. It was also here Israel was to honor God by reflecting on their sin and asking for forgiveness through a blood sacrifice of an innocent animal. These sacrifices pointed to the coming Messiah who would give Himself for the sin of mankind (see Isaiah 53). But sadly, Israel failed. They failed to carry God’s message of redemption and be a light to the world (Isaiah 42:6), and they failed to honor God through obedience to His commands. As a result, Israel fell into cycles of obedience and disobedience, and the resulting blessings and curses. It was during times of great apostasy that God would punish Israel. Often by enabling their enemies to persecute them or even exile them to a foreign land until they would be faithful again. It was during one of these periods of disobedience when the First Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians around 586 BC and Israel was taken captive and forced into exile. In time the Temple was rebuilt and used until 70 AD when the Second Temple was destroyed by Rome. This is important to understand because the Temple was the singular backdrop for the sacrificial system and showing obedience to God. Without a Temple Jewish leadership believed the entire infrastructure of Israel’s belief system and worship would collapse. So, the Second Temple was destroyed and has not yet been rebuilt, and the people of Israel were scattered throughout the world just as God said they would (Deuteronomy 4:23-27). From 70 AD until 1948 the Nation of Israel basically ceased to exist because her people were scattered by God.

But what’s interesting about Jewish people is their resiliency. Most cultures when they immigrate into a new land begin to take on the characteristics of their new home. For a generation or two their accent may be different and they may follow some of their cultural practices, but in time they will generally assimilate into their new culture. At least to some degree. But not so much with Jews. Whether Jews immigrated to Europe, Asia, the Americas, or any other location, they typically worked hard to remain Jewish. They practice their faith, despite severe persecution, remain fairly homogeneous as a people and tend to retain many or most of their traditional Jewish observances, holidays and practices. Why? Possibly, because even if they don’t realize

it, God promised to bring them back to Israel to once again be His people in the land He gave them (Deuteronomy 30:1-6). And that's what we've seen happening since 1948 when Israel was re-established as a sovereign nation – Just as God said they would.

So how did the Jewish people retain their Jewish traditions without their single source of corporate obedience in the Temple? With the Temple destroyed and not yet rebuilt how would they continue to honor God without the sacrificial and Levitical systems? They did so by focusing on the Law and the requirements God had given them. But over time this effort went in the wrong direction. The religious leaders of Israel sought a way to stay obedient to God, but rather than relying solely on the 613 commandments presented to them by God in the Torah they began to add more requirements. In doing so they sought righteousness by adherence to the Law rather than focusing strictly on the requirements God had given them. This resulted in a dependence on actions instead of faith. Temple worship transitioned to worship in the synagogue and Rabbinical teachers began to add hundreds of new requirements to the Laws God had already established. These new requirements came primarily from Rabbis who gave their opinion - their own commentary - on what the original Laws actually meant and how the Laws were to be followed in a non-Temple society. These "Oral Laws" that came from Rabbinical teaching were recorded and compiled and over time provided volumes of extra ordinances not found in the original Torah Law. These new laws were collected and codified in two primary texts - the "Mishnah" and the "Talmud". These texts are highly revered by the Jewish people to this day, but they are not scripture. They are the opinions and commentary of Rabbis recorded over time as they sought to explain how the Jewish people were to live outside of a Temple-based belief system that no longer relied on the sacrificial system.

But unfortunately, by the time Jesus came to earth the Rabbinical system had become so focused on these extraneous "laws" they no longer adhered strictly to the Torah Law provided by God. This created a great deal of confusion as people attempted to follow hundreds of non-Biblical rules imposed on them by their spiritual leaders. And that created a conflict with Jesus who taught only from the Torah-Law (His Law) and not from the rules written by man who sought self-righteousness through strict adherence to their own laws. We see an example of the conflict between the Torah Law versus Oral Law in Mark chapter 7:

- ***"7. Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. 2. Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. 3. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. 4. When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are***

many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches. 5. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?” 6. He answered and said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 7. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ 8. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.” 9. He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. 10 For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ 11. But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban”—’ (that is, a gift to God), 12. then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, 13. making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.” (Mark 7:7-13)

Let's break this down a bit.

The Pharisees saw Jesus and his disciples eating bread without washing their hands. So they tried to catch Jesus breaking the “law” by asking Him why He allowed His followers to eat without washing. Now understand, they were not talking about personal hygiene. They were referencing an Oral Law which required ritual cleansing prior to eating similar to how the Levitical priests would do ritual cleansing prior to making a sacrifice in the Temple. But this hand washing requirement was not part of God’s Torah Law, but was a **“...tradition of the elders...”** passed down through Rabbinical Oral Law. In other words, they were accusing Jesus and His followers of breaking man’s law as if it was God’s Law. Then the Pharisees went even further and asked, **“...“Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders...”**. Again, they were not quoting God’s Law but asking Jesus why His followers did not live by, or **“...walk...”** by, the additional Oral Laws imposed by man. So Jesus replied with a passage they should have recognized, **“13. Therefore the Lord said: “Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men.”** (Isaiah 29:13). In other words, in their zeal to seek self-righteousness the Oral Law had replaced God’s Torah Law in the hearts of men, so much so it, **“...removed their hearts far from Me...”** because they taught the **“...commandment of men...”** instead of the commandments of God. Jesus then quotes one of the real commandments and admonishes them because their focus on

the Oral Law made, ***“...the word of God of no effect...”*** in their hearts because of ***“...your tradition which you have handed down...”***. The conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders came down to the fact they were seeking righteousness through adherence to the Law - instead of faith in God's promises - and had overcomplicated the Torah Law through the addition of Oral Law to the point they no longer understood what God's Law actually meant. But they should have known better. Centuries before God told them through Moses, ***“1. ‘Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you. 2. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.’”*** (Deuteronomy 4:1-2). In their zeal to conform they had done exactly what God told them not to do. They had added to God's word to suit their own needs and had lost the true meaning of the Laws He had given them. In doing so, the spiritual leadership of Israel had failed the people as God had warned would happen, ***“6. Therefore be careful to observe them [His Law]; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”*** (Deuteronomy 4:6). God had warned them that a ***“...great nation...”*** would be one who observed His Law, which would bring them ***“...wisdom...”*** and ***“...understanding...”***. But Jesus pushed back on these Oral Laws and traditions. He had given them everything they needed to be obedient. Even without a physical Temple they could still adhere to the Law and remain faithful to His commandments. His resistance to the Oral Laws was seen by Jewish leadership as an affront to their authority and the grip they had over the people. It was seen as rebellion against the new status quo even though His message was directly in line with the Laws God had given them.

So men like Paul and the Pharisees saw Jesus as a fraud and an interloper. Not only did He not look like a king or act like a king, He resisted the Oral Laws and traditions they had worked so hard to put in place. Not only that, He insisted that eternal life and immortality depended on simple faith in a homeless Carpenter and not on the hard-earned credit they sought through adherence to the laws they had put in place. Those two elements - His looks and His attitude - created a barrier they could not overcome. Looking like He did and talking like He did meant He certainly must not be their Messiah. And if that was the case, they needed to move Him out of the way as quickly as they could before He created any more confusion and led too many people away from their authority.

That would have been the mindset of Saul before his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Paul - Apostle to the Gentiles

So, is the apostle's name Saul or Paul? Actually it's both. We know this because Acts 13:9 says he was called, **"...Saul, who was also called Paul..."**. Jesus, Ananias, Luke and the Holy Spirit all called him Saul (Acts 9:4&17 / 13:2), but to most readers he is more commonly known as Paul. So why is there a difference? To begin with, I don't think the name change from Saul to Paul represents a shift from evil to good as some would contend. In fact, the name Saul is used eleven times in the Bible after he converted to Christianity. More likely it is because Saul/Paul lived in a bilingual society. Saul was not from Israel. He was born in Tarsus Cecilia which is in modern day Turkey. An area that had been part of the Greek Empire and had adopted the Greek language and culture. Paul is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Saul, so as a Greek speaking Jew he could have been called by either name, and obviously was. I believe the transition simply highlights the fact Saul was a Hebrew appointed as the apostle to a largely Greek speaking region of the world.

Either way, Saul/Paul was from a devout Jewish family who lived in what is now southeast Turkey. As a youth he traveled to Jerusalem where he trained under the celebrated rabbi Gamaliel. There he became, **"...a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the Law..."** (Philippians. 3:5), and at some point became, **"...a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees..."** (Acts 23:6 / 26:5). But his zeal for serving God became grossly misdirected and he developed a hunger for Christian blood. It was Saul who approved the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1), and it was Saul who, **"...persecuted followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison."** (Acts 22:4). And as he did he, **"...persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it."** (Galatians 1:13).

But as we have seen, all of that changed on the road to Damascus. There Saul met Jesus and through their unique encounter he was changed from a devout Jew to an unequaled warrior for Christ. Although he was temporarily blinded his eyes were opened to the truth of the gospel. That's when he found out he had been selected by God to be Christ's, **"...chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel."** (Acts 9:15).

Saul was now a believer in Christ and immediately became an enemy of the Jewish infrastructure he once served. In modern America Christians don't understand what a potentially dangerous decision this would have been for him. We are sheltered in a "free" society and for the most part can practice whatever belief system we want without fear of retaliation. But Saul's decision to follow Christ would have been like publicly accepting Jesus today in North Korea or Iran. Society would shun you, your

family would probably disown you and the government might even kill you. That's the type of change Saul would now see in his life.

After Saul was saved and regained his strength he, ***"...spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, 'Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?'" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.***" (Acts 9:19-22)

Two things stand out to me in this passage:

- ***"...At once he began to preach in the synagogues..."*** Here is a man who just a short time before denied the divinity of Christ to the point he killed His followers. Now ***"...At once..."*** and without delay he began to preach, and he did so with knowledge and confidence. Going first to the Jews in their synagogues, and then branching out into the Gentile community. Yet how did he become so knowledgeable so quickly that he could convince devout Jews, ***"...that Jesus is the Son of God..."***? Let's look at a similar story in Luke 24:13-32. Here we see Jesus after He had risen from the tomb. As He walked along the road to Emmaus He came upon two men who were probably both Jewish and Christian. They were disturbed because Jesus had been crucified and they had lost hope in Him as the Messiah. ***"...He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?'" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'"...*** Did you notice how Jesus taught them who He is? He didn't perform miracles or call legions of angels from heaven to prove His divinity. Instead, ***"...beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself..."***. He used Old Testament scripture - here described as ***"...Moses..."***, the first five books of the Bible and ***"...all the Prophets..."*** - to show them the Messianic prophecies, ***"...concerning himself..."***. And when

that happened their eyes were opened and they made the mental connection between the ancient Messianic prophecies and the Carpenter from Nazareth! That revelation is why they found their, **"...hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"...**. All Jesus did to open the Scriptures was to show them evidence in the Old Testament that He is truly the Son of God. Paul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus had the same outcome as the disciples' encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. He made the connection, and when he did, the story came together and made perfect sense. Basically what Saul was now teaching was simply using very familiar Old Testament scripture to help them see the truth. In this way Saul, **"...grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah."** (Acts 9:22b).

- The second thing that stands out to me is Saul had a reputation that preceded him -- a really bad reputation. As he began to spread the gospel the people, **"...were astonished and asked, 'Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?...'"** (Acts 9:21). Saul was known for his hatred and murderous zeal to persecute Christians. Now he was one which understandably confused people. I suspect this probably hampered his ministry at times because many he witnessed to would have remembered his prior life and questioned his motives and intent. But the dramatic change may have also helped his ministry once the same people started seeing the fruits of the new man he had become. This can give us encouragement that no matter what we've done in the past the Lord will still use us if we give our hearts to Him. But Paul's life was now totally changed. From a devout Pharisee bent on the destruction of the Christian faith, to a devout soldier in the army of Christ, Paul's ministry literally **"...turned the world upside down..."**. (Acts 17:6). As a result, the Jewish infrastructure he had abandoned sought to kill him. So much so at one point Paul's testimony before the Sanhedrin caused a dispute that, **"...became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces...."** This resulted in, **"...some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul..."** (Acts 23:10 & 12) Even the disciples in Jerusalem, **"...were afraid of him, not believing he really was a disciple..."**. That is until Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus, also known as the **"...son of encouragement..."** took him to meet the apostles and told them how he had **"...preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus..."** (Acts 4:36 & 9:27).

But there may be more to Paul's instruction in the gospel than simply applying Messianic prophecies. It appears He was personally instructed by Jesus and therefore

became known as an "apostle"; a term in Greek that basically means *"one who is sent"*. In the broadest terms the word could be used to describe a missionary, but the term apostle was also applied more specifically to the small group of men who were personally selected by Jesus to follow Him during His earthly ministry. Men who would both learn directly from Jesus and suffer with Jesus. In Luke 6:13 we are told, ***"...When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles:..."*** Clearly Jesus had more than twelve followers, because in Luke 10:1 Jesus ***"...appointed seventy-two and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go..."***. But the twelve were different. ***"...When Jesus had called the Twelve together he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick..."***. (Luke 9:1-2). Although the "disciples" and other followers were a key component of Christ's ministry it is clear the twelve were given a more defined role with greater authority. They were with Jesus when He fed the five thousand (Mark 6:35), when He calmed the storm (Matt. 14:22), when they sat on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24:1-3), when He washed their feet (John 13:5), at the first communion (Luke 22:14), when He met with them after the resurrection (John 20:19) and when He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:2). Given these examples, it seems to me this close personal relationship with Jesus during His ministry and having been instructed by Him is what defines a true "Apostle". The original twelve apostles were personally trained by Jesus as they traveled with Him for about three years; learning and being imparted with unique gifts. Even the replacement for Judas - Matthias - was selected from those, ***"...who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living amongst us..."*** (Act 1:21). So how could Paul, a killer of Christians be qualified as an apostle? I think in a couple of ways. First, he was personally called by Jesus. As Jesus told Ananias, ***"...This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles..."*** (Acts 9:15). Then we get an indication Paul may have been personally instructed by Jesus. In Galatians 1:15-18 Paul explains an unusual encounter with God that may have been a time of instruction, ***"...But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human beings. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see any of those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem."*** Logically you would think Paul would seek counsel from the remaining apostles for spiritual training. Who better to train him about Jesus than the men who learned it directly from Jesus? But that's not what Paul did. Instead, he did not ***"...consult any human beings..."*** but appears to have gone into the Nabatean Arabia desert where he was instructed by the Lord. We don't know how long he was there but it was three years before he finally went to Jerusalem. But even then, ***"...I saw none of the other apostles - only James, the Lord's brother..."*** (Galatians 1:19). Many

believe the comment in Acts 9:23, **"...After many days had gone by..."** may indicate the three year period in Arabia before he returned to Jerusalem.

But there is another unique event that may indicate divine teaching. In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul describes a man in the third-person, but is presumably speaking of himself, and tells us this man was apparently taken into heaven, **"...I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows -- was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, or because of these surpassingly great revelations..."**. (2 Corinthians 12:1-7) The term **"...third heaven..."** is often thought of as a way to describe God's heavenly home (1 Kings 8:30 / Psalm 123:1). Compared to the first heaven, the earth's atmosphere (Genesis 8:2 / 1 Kings 8:35) and the second heaven, defined as space (Genesis 15:5 / Psalm 8:3). Paul alludes to this when he says the man (presumably him) was, **"...was caught up to paradise..."**, where he saw **"...and heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell..."**. Things that were, **"...surpassingly great revelations..."**. The Bible speaks of **"...paradise..."** as synonymous with heaven. In Revelation 2:7 Jesus speaks to the church at Ephesus and says, **"...To the one who is victorious, I will give the tree of life, which is in paradise..."**. And, as we know from our study of Revelation the **"...tree of life..."** is in heaven. (Revelation 22:2). Likewise, when Jesus comforted the repentant thief on the cross He said, **"...Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise..."** (Luke 23:43). In each of these examples the Greek root for paradise is **"Paradiso"**, which appears to be from an ancient Persian word for a beautiful garden.

So given this context and the background of his Arabian studies, Paul appears to have been taught by Jesus. Had he been instructed by the apostles or disciples his listeners could have rejected his message as repeating something told to him second-hand by another man. But the fact he gained his revelation and instruction from the Lord did two things. First, it allowed him to teach what he had learned directly from the source, and second, it qualified him as an apostle because he had been instructed by Jesus Himself.

And with that preparation Paul was ready to carry the Lord's message to the world.

Paul - The Political Prisoner:

So how many times was Paul imprisoned? The Bible doesn't say, but we get an indication in 2 Corinthians 11:23b, where Paul tells us he was ***"...in prisons more frequently"***. Paul's ministry was not an easy one. On selecting him to be His apostle to the Gentiles Jesus said he would suffer (Acts 9:16). And suffer he did. As we see most clearly in his own words, ***"...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:..."*** (2 Corinthians 11:24-28a). By providing this list Paul isn't bragging about his challenges, but he is simply doing what we've talked about so many times. He helps us understand how the trials in our own lives can be used to glorify the Lord. The suffering Paul describes here both strengthened his faith and brought credibility to his testimony in front of a doubting world. Rarely would a Jew with Roman citizenship, particularly a member of the Pharisaical Jewish leadership, be persecuted, but Paul was, and severely. Simply because he was willing to endure punishment for the sake of the gospel. Certainly the Lord could have prevented these trials and made the way smooth for Paul. But think about how much we are encouraged in our own lives by seeing the joy in Paul's testimony even as he was suffering. He was living proof of the words of encouragement from James, ***"...2. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3. knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing..."*** (James 1:2-4). This is why Paul now found himself in a Roman prison waiting for trial.

So to better understand Paul's journey let's review a ministry timeline to see where his letter to the Philippian church fits in.

Paul - The Missionary and the Martyr:

Paul was now ready to face the world. Trained and confident, he would accomplish four mission trips around the Mediterranean region. In those days and prior to modern transportation these trips would have been extremely arduous. Thousands of miles would have been trod on foot, by donkey or boat and could often take weeks between stops. Along the way Paul would often be hungry, tired and probably slept many nights on the ground. At times he saw great victory as the gospel was accepted and

congregations grew, but there were many other times when he was pursued, beaten, arrested, stoned and imprisoned. Yet he persisted, and during a period of over 20 years he covered an area that today stretches from Israel through modern day Syria, Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Italy and maybe even Spain. Along the way Paul planted churches, appointed pastors, instructed believers, endured hardship and wrote thirteen letters that would become a significant portion of what we now know as the New Testament.

As difficult as it was, Paul's efforts to share the message of Jesus spread rapidly through the Roman world and as the empire expanded so did the gospel. The book of Acts and the epistles of Paul chronicle these journeys and the victories and hardships along the way. But the scope of his ministry is so complex and widespread it would take volumes of commentary to even scratch the surface. So, as context for our study I have provided a brief timeline of key events in Paul's life. This will give us an idea of the scope of his ministry and how his letter to the church at Philippi fits into the big picture.

A note on the timeline:

This timeline does not provide enough detail for an in-depth study but it gives us enough to understand the scope of Paul's amazing mission journeys and several key events along the way. But I need to add a disclaimer of sorts to explain how the dates were derived.

Scripture does not provide exact dates for specific events. People in ancient times had a very rudimentary understanding of how to measure time and would not have known what terms like "BC" and "AD" would later refer to. Instead, they would often measure time by linking it to the reign of a king or the timing of a significant event. For example, 2 Kings 16:1-2 describes the reign of king Ahaz in this way, ***"...In the seventeenth year of Pekah son of Remaliah, Ahaz son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign. Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years."*** We now know king Ahaz began his reign in 735 BC. We know this because centuries later calendars were established allowing us to calculate when specific events might have occurred in the past. I tell you this to clarify that the dates assigned to Paul's ministry below are not recorded in scripture but have been deduced over time by scholars linking his actions to the timing of known historical events. For that reason you may find slightly different dates across multiple commentaries. So the dates provided here are just to give us an approximate chronological time span of events and to help us put them in context.

- 35 AD - Paul's encounter with Christ and his conversation on the road to Damascus. (Acts 9:1-19)

- Through this event Paul was saved and converted to Christianity.
- 35-38 AD - Paul apparently spent time in the Arabian desert receiving divine instruction. (Galatians 1:17)
- 38 AD - Afterwards he went to Jerusalem where he met with Peter and stayed with him for fifteen days. He also met James (Galatians 1:18-19 .
 - Grecian Jews tried to kill so him he fled to Tarsus. (Acts 9:26-30)
- 38-44 AD - Paul conducted a localized ministry in Syria and Tarsus Cilicia. (Acts 9:30 / Galatians 1:21)
 - This was during a short time of relative peace for the early church. (Acts 9:31)
- 44 AD - Barnabus went to Tarsus to retrieve Paul and bring him to Syrian Antioch. They stayed there for a year preaching to the local believers.
 - These were the first congregations called "Christians". (Acts 11:25-26).
- 46-48 AD - First Missionary Journey with Barnabas (Acts 13:2-14:28).
 - Paul and Barnabas returned to Jerusalem with several co-workers bearing a gift for the church who was suffering through a famine. (Acts 11:30).
 - Among them was Barnabas' cousin John, who was also known as Mark. (Acts 12:25) This is the same Mark who would write the Gospel that bears his name.
 - It was at this time the Holy Spirit called for Paul and Barnabas to be sent out on mission. John-Mark went with them. (Acts 13:2-5)
 - From Syrian Antioch they went to Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch (a different city named Antioch), Iconium, Lystra, Derbe and returned to Syria.
 - Paul's teaching quickly infuriated the Jewish leadership (Acts 13:44-52), but many Gentiles believed and were baptized. (Acts 13:47-48)
 - In Lystra Paul healed a lame man and the people watching proclaimed him to be a god from Zeus. They caused a great disturbance which infuriated the Jews who stoned Paul. They left him for dead but he survived. (Acts 14:8-20)
- 48-49 AD - Paul may have written his letter to the Galatians while in Syria.
- 49-50 AD - Legalistic Jewish-Christians were causing confusion by teaching that circumcision was a part of salvation. Paul and Barnabas were appointed to go to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and to gain a ruling on legalistic views of Jewish traditions and Gentile salvation. This resulted in the Jerusalem Council's letter to the churches in Acts 15:23. (Acts 15:1-29 / Galatians 2:1-10)
- Following this there was a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over Mark because Mark had previously abandoned the group. (Acts 13:13). Barnabas and Mark separated from Paul and sailed for Cyprus. (Acts 15:39)
- Timothy joined Paul and Silas, another co-laborer, **"...commended by the believers..."** (Acts 16:1&40)

- 50-52 AD - Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:40-18:23)
 - This was a long and arduous journey from Syrian Antioch west by foot to Tarsus, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch, Tross (Troy), Samo-Thrace, **Philippi**, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus and then back to Jerusalem.
 - It was on this trip when Paul was prevented by the Holy Spirit from going into Asia Minor. He had a vision of a man from Macedonia who asked him to come preach there. (Acts 16:9). This move would eventually take the gospel into what is now Europe and from there to the rest of the world.
 - It was at **Philippi** where Paul led Lydia to Christ. (Acts 16:15)
 - Paul and Silas were then imprisoned after an encounter with a demonic woman. That night an earthquake shook the jail and they were freed. They then led the jailer and his family to the Lord. (Acts 16: 31)
 - It was in Athens Paul made his impassioned speech about the unknown god. (Acts 17:23)
 - At Corinth Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish/Christian refugees and tentmakers exiled from Rome. Paul, who was also a tentmaker, stayed and worked with them. (Acts 18:1-3).
 - It is believed Paul wrote 1st and 2nd Thessalonians from Corinth
 - Paul traveled to Ephesus with Aquila and Priscilla. It was there they instructed Apollos. (Acts 18:24-28)
- 53-57 AD - Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23 - 21:17)
 - This was another long and arduous journey that took Paul from Syrian Antioch to Tarsus, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch, Ephesus, Troas, Neapolis, **Philippi**, Amphipolis, Apologia, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth. He then returned along the same land route, then by boat to Rhodes, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea and Jerusalem.
 - It was during this time, ***"...all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."*** (Acts 19:10)
 - It is also during this four year journey Paul is believed to have written:
 - 1 Corinthians at Ephesus
 - 2 Corinthians in Macedonia
 - Paul's ministry created a stir in Ephesus because the sale of pagan idols declined. Paul then left for Macedonia and passed through there to Greece. (Acts 20:1)
 - At Troas Paul raised Eutychus from the dead. (Acts 20:9-12)
On his return he stayed at the house of Phillip in Caesarea. The people pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem, but he said, ***"...I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus..."*** (Acts 21:13)

- It may be from Corinth where Paul wrote the Book of Romans. In Romans 16 (16:1, 23) he mentions Phoebe, Gaius and Erastus, who were all associated with Corinth.
- 57 AD - Paul arrived in Jerusalem. (Acts 21:27 - 26:32)
 - There he met with James and other leaders. He learned the Jews were angry because he taught Gentiles not to follow the law of Moses.
 - Angry Jews stirred the people against Paul and a mob drug him from the temple and tried to kill him. The disturbance was so great a Roman commander and troops were sent to stop the riot. They arrested Paul - basically to protect him - and took him to their barracks. Paul then spoke to the crowd, in Aramaic, which calmed them down. He told them who he was and of his conversation with Jesus on the road to Damascus, and the fact he had been sent by Jesus to the Gentiles. When the crowd heard this they rioted again and demanded Paul be killed. The Romans planned to flog him to make him explain why the people were so angry, but when they found out Paul was a Roman citizen they had to let him go because it was not legal for them to punish a Roman without cause. The next day Paul was then taken before the High Priest, the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin. This resulted in a great uproar and a group of Jews vowed to kill him. Paul was then taken through a series of trials so the Jewish leadership could bring charges against him. But because Paul was a Roman citizen he was afforded the right to stand trial before the Roman governor. First he went before Felix, governor of Judea, then Festus, then king Herod Agrippa II (son of Herod who killed James, grandnephew of Herod of the gospels and great-grandson of Herod who was king when Jesus was born.). They all found him innocent of any crime deserving death.
- 57-59 AD - Paul sailed for Rome as a prisoner of the Imperial Regiment.
 - Their journey went from Jerusalem to Caesarea, Sidon, Syrian Antioch, Myra, Cnidus, Crete (Titus 1:5), then by sea voyage to Malta, Syracuse Sicily, Rhegium, into Italy and Puteoli, Appius, Three Taverns and finally Rome.
 - They were shipwrecked along the way and washed ashore in Malta (Acts 27:1 - 28:16).
 - It was there Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake but showed no ill effect, so the people thought he was a god. (Acts 28:3-6)
 - They wintered on the island and left after three months.
- 59-61 AD - First imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:16-31)
 - Paul was under house arrest and allowed to stay in a rented home with a Roman guard. There he was allowed to meet with both Jews and Gentile Christians. People came in large numbers to hear him speak. **Paul**

stayed there for two years, "...and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ - with all boldness and without hindrance." (Acts 28:30-31)

- It is from here, while Paul was in prison he is believed to have written:
 - Ephesians
 - Colossians
 - Philemon
 - Phillipians
- These are often called the *"prison epistles"*.
- 62 AD - Paul was released from the Roman prison.
 - Shortly after it is believed he wrote I Timothy and Titus
- 62-67 AD - Paul's final journey to Rome (Titus 1:5)
- During his second Roman imprisonment (2 Timothy 1:16 / 4:6-8) Luke was with him and asked that Mark be sent to him as well. (2 Timothy 4:11)
 - From the Mamertine Prison he wrote 2 Timothy, shortly before his death.
- 67-68 AD - Trial and execution.
 - The Bible doesn't say where or when Paul was executed. There are lots of theories and church history contends he was beheaded, possibly during the persecutions initiated by the emperor Nero. Some believe his execution occurred at a place on the Ostian Way just outside of Rome. But whenever and wherever it occurred Paul was prepared. He had ***"...fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."*** (2 Timothy 4:7)

So why was Paul so singularly focused on sharing the gospel despite the hardships and persecution? On one hand he had been personally selected by Jesus - by God - to be His ambassador to the Gentile world. But I believe Paul also recognized the failed mission of Israel and the task they should have embraced centuries before.

So before we move to chapter 1 let's investigate this thought just a bit...

The apostle Paul had been selected by Jesus to be His messenger to the Gentiles. That's a huge undertaking for a single man considering the fact the population of the world during his time was estimated to be around 300 million people, including about 8 million Jews. Interestingly, in Romans chapter 10 Paul makes an impassioned plea for Israel's salvation, ***"..Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that***

they may be saved...". So why would Paul, who according to Jesus should be focused on 300 million Gentiles, be so interested in 8 million Jews? Because Paul knew Israel had been tasked by God to carry the same message he was - the message of redemption through a blood sacrifice.

Let's think this through:

- God told Abraham - **"2. I will make you a great nation; [Israel] I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. 3. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** (Genesis 12:2-3 - underline added)
 - Here God declares Abraham will be the father of a great nation
 - The nation of Israel
 - And through that nation God said He would bless **"...all the families of the earth..."**
- But how did Abraham know what God intended to do?
 - Because to some degree Abraham understood God's plan of redemption. We see this in his response to Isaac in Genesis 22:8a, **"8. And Abraham said, 'My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering...'"**
 - Abraham understood God would provide the atonement of sin through a substitutional sacrifice. Just as He had illustrated through the substitute given for Isaac.
 - Abraham's belief - his faith - in God's promised atonement, was his source of redemption because **"6. And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."** (Genesis 15:6)
- Over time God established a process by which sin was forgiven by faith in His promises as represented by a sacrificial offering. God then established the tabernacle and its furnishings to help Israel illustrate the severe penalty that must be paid for sin. A payment made in innocent blood. This was the purpose of the tabernacle, the brazen altar and the sacrificial system.
- So Israel was chosen to be God's messengers to the world to bless them through His plan for the atonement of sin. In this role they became a messenger - a light - to the whole population of the earth. As God would testify through Isaiah, **"6. Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones**

of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ” (Isaiah 49:6)

- But having knowledge of the gospel message gains little traction unless it's shared with others. As Paul (quoting Isaiah) reminds us in Romans 10:14-21, ***“14. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15. And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who [b]preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” 16. But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “LORD, who has believed our report?” 17. So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. 18. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: “Their sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world.” 19. But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: “I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.” 20. But Isaiah is very bold and says: “I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.” 21. But to Israel he says: “All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people.”***
- Generations later Simeon recognized this when he saw the infant Jesus in the temple. ***“25. And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. 27. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, 28 he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: 29. “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; 30. For my eyes have seen Your salvation 31. Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, 32. A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.” (Luke 2:25-32)***
 - Not only had Simeon been given insight from the Holy Spirit to recognize the infant Jesus as the Messiah, but also to recognize He was the promised ***“...light to bring revelation to the Gentiles...”***.
- But Israel failed to recognize what Simeon saw and therefore did not understand their role as God’s messengers. Even when Jesus reminded them what they were supposed to share, ***“I am the light of the world...”*** (John 8:12) and as

His messengers, **14. “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”** (Matthew 5:14-16)

- In other words, don’t hide the light, but be the light, go share it with the world and tell them My story so, **“...all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”** (Genesis 12:3), because **“...I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”** (Isaiah 49:6b)

- But rather than sharing God’s redemptive plan for atonement Israel hoarded it, overcomplicated it with Rabbinical rules and turned it into their own plan for glorified self-righteousness. This so blinded them that when the Messiah finally came they did not recognize Him because of their religious arrogance. That’s why Jesus said to them, **“...42. saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.”** (Luke 19:42)
- Israel failed to carry out their assignment, even though they had been given everything they needed to recognize the Messiah and carry His message of redemption. As Paul reminded them, **“4. who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5. of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.”** (Romans 9:4-5)
 - Israel had been fully equipped to carry God’s message. They were made a nation, given God’s glory, the recipients of His covenants, the keeper of His word, the grantee of His promises, descendants of the patriarchs, and...the birth-people of the King of kings who had come to establish His kingdom.
- But they failed, and instead of being the light bearer to the world they had become a blinded gathering of Pharisaical fools. As Paul admonished them, **“17. Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, 18. and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, 19. and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20. an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. 21. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? 22.**

You who say, “Do not commit adultery,” do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23. You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? 25. For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” as it is written.”
(Romans 2:17-24)

- Those who should have been sharing God’s redemptive plan with the world had become foolish as they continued in their own self-righteousness.
- But how? How did Israel completely miss the assignment given to them through Abraham? Very simply, ***“31. but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.”*** (Romans 9:31-32 / see also Isaiah 8:14, Psalm 118:22 and 1 Corinthians 1:23)
 - Israel pursued self-righteousness through adherence to the Mosaic law and their heritage to Abraham. In doing so they failed to see the fact salvation must come through faith in His promise of a blood sacrifice God had illustrated so many times before. The sacrifice in the garden, the offering of Abel, the lamb of Abraham, the passover lamb in Egypt, the lamb in the tabernacle and the Lamb of God on the cross. This was the message Israel was to carry. But sadly, they will not do so until the Tribulation, when 144,000 Jews - 12,000 representatives from each tribe - will finally share the message they had been given so long ago, ***“...These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.”*** (Revelation 14:4-5)

This is what Paul wanted to see. Redeemed Jews of Israel, saved by faith in the blood of the Lamb, and carrying the message of redemption throughout the world. That’s why Paul was willing to trade his own eternity for Israel’s, ***“...3. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,”*** (Romans 9:3). It’s also why he always started a new ministry in the synagogue, and why he was so interested in seeing all Israel saved. Paul was looking to recruit 8 million Jewish evangelists who could help him reach 300 million Gentiles. He knew Israel had been chosen for the task, prepared for the journey and given every opportunity to succeed. But they had failed over and over again and now Paul was given their task by himself - one man versus 300 million. So Paul wanted Israel to finally recognize Jesus as the Messiah so they could accomplish the task they had been given centuries before. That’s why he was willing to be beaten, stoned and imprisoned, with the hopes ***“...14. if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those***

who are my flesh [Jews] ***and save some of them.***” (Romans 11:14). He wanted the Jews to see what the Gentiles had obtained by faith, so Israel could finally become the light God had asked them to be.

And with that, we now begin our study of Philippians.

Lesson #5 - Philippians Chapter 1, verses 1-11

A reminder – Like the rest of the Bible, Paul's writings to the church at Philippi would have originally been a stand-alone document. In this case, a letter that could be circulated amongst believers and churches to spread the word. Centuries later these letters and scrolls would be collected, faithfully and accurately copied, and bound into a single volume we now know as the Bible. Then, in the Middle Ages, chapter designations and verses were added to make the text easier to study and reference. So what we see today as chapter divisions didn't exist in Paul's time.

Quick Recap:

Jesus gave Paul a singular task – go share the gospel with the Gentile world. But what a huge task that was. Paul was about to broadcast the message of Jesus to the world with a population estimated to be about 300 million people. People who for the most part were pagan and would not welcome an interloper with a message so different from what they believed. Paul's near-term mission field were the countries around the Mediterranean Sea and into what is now southern Europe. To accomplish this task Paul was relentless. Traveling thousands of miles and enduring untold hardships and persecutions he moved forward with one thing in mind, to **“...preach Christ crucified...”** (1 Corinthians 1:23). His travels took him to many places in order to reach a wide spectrum of lost souls. That journey included the city of Philippi where his brothers and sisters in Christ were under persecution. But rather than complain about being in a Roman prison, Paul would now write them a letter of love and encouragement to help sustain their journey.

Now with a lot of historical and cultural context under our belt let's go to the beginning of Paul's letter in chapter 1.

Philippians chapter 1 verses 1-11

Verses 1:1-4

Paul begins his beautiful letter with a soft and encouraging tone, **“3. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4. always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy...”** (Philippians 1:3-4). This is an amazing salutation considering the fact Paul was writing his letter from a Roman prison. So let's be honest.

In his situation most of us would probably complain and feel we had every reason to share our ill-fortune with other believers. Yet, Paul chose instead to encourage his readers and strengthen them through their own struggles. His comment, “**...every remembrance of you...**” attests to the fact he was writing to friends. Fellow believers, who like him, suffered for their faith in Jesus. Paul knew first-hand how the church at Philippi struggled. We see this in his discussion of the churches in Macedonia, which included Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. Churches cited for their poverty, and yet, they were willing to share what little they had, “**1. Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2. that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing...**” (2 Corinthians 8:1-3).

Paul wanted to encourage them, so he reminds them he is praying for them with “**...joy...**”. An encouraging word Paul uses over and over in his letter. This positive attitude in the midst of negative circumstances is typical of Paul’s greetings in other letters.

Let’s look at a few examples:

- To the persecuted church at Rome Paul said: “**7. To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 8. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. 9. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, 10. making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.**” (Romans 1:7-10)
- To the church at Corinth: “**2. To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: 3. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4. I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, 5. that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, 6. even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, 7. so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8. who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our**

Lord Jesus Christ. 9. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:2-9)

- To the church at Thessalonica: **“2. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 3. remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father,”** (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)
- To the church at Ephesus: **“...1b. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: 2. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** (Ephesians 1:1b-2)
- To the church at Colosse: **“2. To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Their Faith in Christ. 3. We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.”** (Colossians 1:2-3)
- To Timothy: **“2. To Timothy, a beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3. I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, 4. greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, “** (2 Timothy 1:2-4)
- And to Philemon: **“1. To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, 2. to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: 3. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4. I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, 5. hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints.”** (Philemon 1:1b-5)
- And at the end of his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul leaves them with encouraging words, **“6. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7. and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”** (Philippians 4:6-7)

In each case, even when his letters were written to rebuke an action of the church or an individual, Paul began with a greeting of love. For us this paints a beautiful picture of the love we must show when we share the gospel, when we help someone grow in

their faith or even when we help a friend recognize sin in their lives. It must all be done with love.

Here in his greeting to the Philippian believers Paul mentions Timothy, a faithful coworker who he considered like his own child. We see this in his second letter to Timothy where Paul affectionately referred to him as, ***“...Timothy, a beloved son...”*** (2 Timothy 1:2). Timothy was from Lystra in Galatia which is where Paul first met him, ***“Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek.”*** (Acts 16:1). Timothy was the son of a Jewish woman named Eunice, who with his grandmother Lois were converts to Christianity. These were women of faith Paul recognized in his second instructional letter to Timothy, ***“...when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.”*** (2 Timothy 1:5). It appears Timothy may have already been a believer when Paul met him because Paul addressed him as ***“...a certain disciple...”***, and because Timothy ***“...was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium...”*** (Acts 16:2). But Timothy's father, ***“...was Greek...”***, or in other words, a Gentile, which means he may have been a pagan idol worshiper at some point. But as the son of both a Jew and a Gentile, Timothy would be uniquely qualified to share the gospel in either cultural context. That made him ideally suited to be a trusted co-laborer with Paul and as such he would travel with him throughout his ministry - even in prison (Hebrews 13:23). We also know from Paul's first letter to Timothy, the young preacher was in Ephesus where he had been challenged by Paul to, ***“3b. ...remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, 4. nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.”*** (1 Timothy 1:3b-4). This was an important assignment, to codify the doctrine of salvation through faith in Christ alone in order to circumvent the myriad of off-shoot beliefs being presented in the first years of Christianity. This was the prelude to a warning Paul would give Timothy that still applies so powerfully to the fallen “church” today. ***“3. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4. and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”*** (2 Timothy 4:3-5). This reminder applies as much to us as it did to Timothy because the growth of aberrant doctrines like the Prosperity Gospel and similar movements are being used by the enemy to draw those in with ***“...itching ears...”*** who fall victim to good-sounding ***“...fables...”***. How? By drawing the listener away from a focus on Jesus to a focus on themselves.

But Paul discounts any self-centered focus on his part by referring to himself and Timothy as “**...bondservants...**”. A term signifying a willingness to belong to someone else - just as we willingly belong to the Lord. Paul uses the same term in the introduction to his letter to the church in Rome (see Romans 1:1).

So for continuity, let's look back at a short excerpt from our previous study of Romans Chapter 1 to further investigate the term “**...bondservant...**”.

Excerpt from our Roman's study - Lesson #8

*“...Paul tells us what he is, not just who he is, **“...a bondservant of Jesus Christ...”** Before he introduces himself as an apostle Paul declares himself to be a servant of Jesus. There are a couple of common ways this verse is interpreted:*

- *On one hand the word **“...bondservant...”** can be interpreted as a slave. Bought and paid for - as in this case by the blood of Christ - and therefore under servitude to that person.*
- *But there may be another way to look at this title. Paul uses the word “doulos”, a term that in Greek can mean, “a slave, one who belongs to another without any ownership rights of their own”. But in this application it could also mean more than we would generally think of when we hear the word slave. In Greek “doulos” can also describe someone who willingly commits himself to serving his master. In the Hebrew mindset this could be a servant who, **“...plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out free...’** (Exodus 21:5). It can be a term used with dignity to describe Paul's willing desire to live under Christ's sole authority. In the feminine tense it is the same word used by Mary when she was informed she would bear God's Son, **“Behold the maidservant of the Lord!” Let it be to me according to your word.**” (Luke 1:38). Her response shows Mary's willingness to serve God without question, but not because she was forced to. By using this term Paul may signify he is more than just a bonded servant. He is a man who was once a true slave to sin (John 8:34) but is now a willing slave of the Lord Jesus. A transition he will describe later in Romans 6:6, **“...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin...”**.*

Paul's use of the term “**...bondservant...**” attests to the fact he is all-in and sold-out to Jesus. Despite the beatings, stoning, persecution and imprisonment, Paul is living up to the qualification Jesus said of him when He chose Paul to be His apostle to the Gentiles, **“15. But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16. For I will**

show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." (Acts 9:15-16). Jesus pulled no punches. His calling on Paul to minister the gospel included a promise of the persecution ahead. In the sense the title of **"...bondservant..."** was an important part of Paul's credentials because he was writing his letter to **"...all of the saints..."** (believers) in Philippi, including their leadership, the **"...the bishops** (pastors) **and deacons..."**, and he wanted them to know he understood their suffering firsthand. So Paul's reference to himself and Timothy as **"...bondservants..."** shows their humility, gives them credibility as those who understand the suffering the Philippian believers were experiencing, and it would encourage them to stay strong.

Paul also describes the believers as being **"...in Christ Jesus..."**. This is a clear indication of their salvation by faith alone in Christ alone. It's a term Paul used over 160 times in his writings because it clarifies who we are as believers. Being **"...in Christ..."** is much more than just believing "about" Jesus. Instead, it expresses the fact we are **"...in Christ..."**, or a part of Jesus. Not just "with" Christ or "about" Christ, but **"...in..."** Christ. And as such, we are a part of Him, because **"...in..."** Him we are made new, **"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** (2 Corinthians 5:21). Paul also discussed our unique relationship with Jesus in his letter to the church in Rome where he talks about our spiritual adoption and the position it places us **"...in..."** the Lord, **"14. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, [to salvation] these are sons of God. 15. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' 16. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17. and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."** (Romans 8:14-17). Here Paul clarifies our position **"...in Christ..."** is because we are **"...joint heirs with Christ..."** as **"...children of God..."**. That's why it is only through our faith in the righteous works of Jesus can we be made righteous in God's eyes and become part of His family.

Verses 1:5-11

In verse 5 Paul highlights **"...your fellowship in the gospel..."**, further clarifying their sound doctrine and the fact they had not fallen prey to the false teaching so prevalent in Paul's day. This was an important distinction because early Christians were coming out of either traditional Judaism or Gentile pagan beliefs and were easily led astray by emerging aberrant belief systems. We see this in Paul's letter to the church at Galatia where he warns them about false teachers, **"6. I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7. which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be**

accursed. 9. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."

(Galatians 1:6-9). In this case the early Galatian believers were turning away from the true gospel to a false teaching popularized by a group called the Judaizers who taught Christianity must be combined with legalistic Jewish laws and customs. In other words, the Judaizers' teaching drew people away from simple faith in the work of Jesus, and back to a law, ceremony and works based faith of self-righteous religion. So Paul warned them to accurse anyone, even an angel, who taught any other gospel than redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ.

But are people any different or any less susceptible to the false narratives of the enemy in our own time? Absolutely not. In fact, the advent of social media and liberal mainstream media today allows the transition of false teaching more effectively, and more dangerously, than ever before in history. Add to that the prevailing self-centered attitude of most people today, plus their tendency to believe whatever they see on social media, and the combination spells disaster.. Given that, we can see why heretical doctrine such as the Prosperity Gospel movement is so popular. These teachings - while they may sound "good" and encouraging - are actually false and unBiblical because they focus attention on who you are and what you do rather than focusing on who Jesus is and what Jesus did on the cross. This is a false "gospel" and a message of forbidden fruit for those with **"...itching ears..."** (2 Timothy 4:3). For that reason, Paul clarifies the true basis of the gospel is only **"...in Christ..."** which results in their **"...fellowship in the gospel..."**. Something many churches today would struggle to understand.

Here Paul uses an interesting word to describe their faith in the gospel; **"...fellowship..."**. In the original Greek, the word "*Koinonia*" is defined by terms like "a Partnership", "Contributory help", "Participation", "Sharing" and "A fellowship in the spirit...". All of these describe the unique relationship believers have with one another when we are **"...in Christ..."**. It doesn't matter who we are, where we're from, or how far apart we might live, there is a beautiful connection that exists between true followers of Jesus. It's much more than just an acquaintance or even a close friendship. The association of believers is unique because **"...where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them..."** (Matthew 18:20). As believers, Jesus is always with us individually through the indwelling Holy Spirit (Romans 8:11), but when multiple indwelt believers are gathered together **"...in My name..."** to worship, praise, teach and learn, Jesus works amongst us, in us, and through us to collectively strengthen us and draw us closer to Him. Certainly, if we were stranded alone on a deserted island we could still worship and communicate with the Lord, but something unique occurs when believers congregate in the Lord's name because we become one body with a singular focus on Jesus. Our togetherness and fellowship brings unity as we seek God's will through our collective lives. As the

Psalmist says, “**...1. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!**” (Psalm 133:1). And as the Lord directed through Peter, “**..all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous...**” (1 Peter 3:8). It is when we’re together, focused on Jesus, seeking unity and striving to be “**...of one mind...**” we become the “**Body of Christ**” – the collective gathering of believers as one entity, “**...5. so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.**” (Romans 12:5). But we need to keep in mind, the term “**...one body...**” doesn’t mean a church, a denomination or even a group of religious people. It means the gathering together of true born-again followers of Jesus Christ. No matter who they are or where they are. That’s because even though we as individuals are indwelt by the Lord, something extraordinary happens when we come together “**...in My name...**”. Paul describes this unique relationship in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

- “12. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink [q]into one Spirit. 14. For in fact the body is not one member but many. 15. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? 16. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? 17. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? 18. But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 19. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? 20. But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 21. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” 22. No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 23. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, 24. but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, 25. that there should be no schism [conflict] in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. 27. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.”**

It is when we gather together as a body we are the strongest. It is then we can feed off each other's joy, celebrate each other's victories, fight each other's battles and support one another through the triumphs and difficulties of life. As the “Body of Christ”

we are a force to be reckoned with. A source of love, strength and devotion that cannot be overcome. That's why the Lord tells us, **"...24. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25. not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching..."**. (Hebrews 10:24-25). The **"...assembling of ourselves together..."** is critically important because it is the **"...assembling..."** that results in the **"...fellowship..."** Paul is talking about. Just imagine how encouraging this would have been to the persecuted believers in Philippi. Believers living in an age of severe moral decline, where followers of Christ were the minority in a hedonistic and sinful world. — Much like the society we live in today. Therefore, his reference to their **"...fellowship..."** would be encouraging and strengthening for them. Just as it is for us.

To further encourage his fellow believers Paul then touches on our eternal security by comforting them with the fact our Lord has **"...begun a good work in you..."** which will continue until the **"...day of Jesus Christ..."**. Here **"...a good work..."** is not talking about work to earn salvation, but is talking about our service to the Lord. The fruit of our life and the process of **"sanctification"** that occurs in a believer's life once we're saved (John 17:17). Sanctification simply means to be set apart and describes the growth of our faith as we draw closer to our Lord and obedient to His will. By combining **"...a good work..."** in the same passage with **"...fellowship in the gospel..."** also reminds us that sanctification is a partnership. As we worship together, teach, study, and disciple each other, we are all sanctified through our growing knowledge of the Lord. In relating this process to the **"...day of Jesus Christ..."** Paul probably isn't talking about the end-times **"Day of the Lord"** described in Revelation and other prophetic passages (see Joel 2 / Zacheriah 12-13 / Revelation 19), but is speaking of the day when we will join Jesus for eternity. Either at our death, or on the day of Rapture as Paul described to the church at Thessalonica,

- **"15. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18. Therefore comfort one another with these words."** (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18).

This passage describes the glorious day when Jesus, the Groom, will return to gather His church, His bride (John 14:1-4), so **"...we shall always be with the Lord..."**. Until then Paul confirms the Lord who **"...has begun a good work in you will complete it..."** (Philippians 1:6a). He was reassuring the believers at Philippi - and us - that God

works through us, to sanctify us, and we will not be complete until He says we're complete.

This whole idea about God doing **"...a good work in you..."** is such an encouraging thought we should probably investigate it a little more. So let's look at a few verses to help get our head around the fact God already knows the **"...good work..."** He is doing in and through us.

Hebrews 4:12-13 tells us:

- ***"12. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account"***
- The Lord sees all things in our lives.

Hebrews 4:15-16 should comfort us that Jesus, who took our sin to the cross, understands our life far better than we understand it ourselves.

- ***"15. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."***

Matthew 6:8b - Here Jesus tells us when we come before the throne of grace, what God already knows.

- ***"... For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him."***

Isaiah 46:9-10 tells us,

- ***"9. Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, 10. Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'"***
- The Lord knows all things, past, present and future. Including the tasks He has for us to accomplish and even the difficulties we will experience as we do them.

Ephesians 2:10 tells us,

- ***"...For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."***
- This isn't talking about **"...good works..."** as a way to gain righteousness. It speaks to our life after we are saved, and the way our life should be lived. It

says our Lord has **"...prepared..."** these things **"...beforehand..."** which means He knows the events of our lives, good and bad, and will equip us to do His will as we seek to use our tasks and challenges to glorify Him

Psalms 90:12 says,

- **"So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."**
- This Psalm recognizes our days on earth are limited and numbered, but rather than viewing this negatively we should view it as an opportunity. In other words, it's like saying, — *"Lord, I know my time on earth is relatively short so please teach me what You want me to do with the time You have given me and how to carry the load I must bear."*

Psalms 139:16 tells us,

- **"Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them."**
- This verse has so many applications in today's fallen society, but for the purpose of our study let's focus on our days and how we function through them to glorify God. Here the Psalmist speaks of God's perfect knowledge about our lives; even before we were born. Which includes the things He has tasked us to do. David expresses this beautifully in Psalm 139:1-3 when he declares, **"O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways."**

In other words, our Lord knows us. He has always known us. Down to the most minute details. That's why Paul can say the Lord who **"...has begun a good work in you will complete it..."**. But not only that. David confirms our days are written down **"...in Your book..."** and were, **"...fashioned for me..."**. In other words, our limited days are not only numbered but are **"...fashioned..."**. A word that in Hebrew, "yussaru" can be interpreted, *"to form, to make, as clay and a potter"*. But it also means our days are not haphazard. They are given to us with intentionality and with purpose until we **"...complete it..."**. That means our days as a believer are not a meaningless string of uneventful twenty-four hour periods. They are given to us and numbered so each day includes tasks that are **"...fashioned..."** for us to do. As Jeremiah 29:11 tells us, **"...For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."**

So wrap your head around all of that. God, in His supreme omniscience knows every day we will live and He has intentionally made those days for us to serve and glorify Him. Nowhere does He say this only applies to good days or days when we have no

load to carry. We must trust Him every day, with every task and every load as we seek to find how we can use the challenges in our lives to glorify Him. That's what Paul meant in Romans 8:28 when he said, ***“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”*** Please note, Paul doesn't say all good things work for good. He says ***“...all things work together for good...”***. That's ***“...all things...”***, good and bad can work in our lives to bring glory to God when we view them ***“...according to His purpose...”*** and not ours.

That's also why Paul could encourage the believers at Philippi by reminding them God will sanctify them and sustain them until those things are complete. Think about the joy it must have brought Paul to say that to people he knew were being persecuted. People who understood his plight of being ***“...in my chains...”*** and yet he was still preaching ***“...in the defense and confirmation of the gospel...”***. He makes a similar statement to the church at Ephesus when he reminds them to be, ***“18. praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints — 19. and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20. for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*** (Ephesians 6:18-20). Even in the chains of a Roman prison Paul was singularly focused on sharing the gospel message of Jesus. No matter the cost. How encouraging that must have been as he reminded them, ***“For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.”*** (Philippians 1:8)

Paul ends this portion of his letter by reminding his readers they are constantly in his prayers. That's also why prayer was a constant theme through these first verses.

- In verse 3 he thanks God ***“...upon every remembrance of you...”***.
- In verse 4 he reminds them they are ***“...always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy,...”***
- And in verse 9 he says, ***“9. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment,...”***
- And throughout his prayerful introduction Paul uses terms of encouragement like, ***“...grace, peace, joy, fellowship, being confident, good, I have you in my heart, I long for you, affection, love, excellence, sincere, fruit of righteousness, and the praise of God.***
- He also encouraged their spiritual growth and sanctification. Something they might find difficult living in such a harsh and sinful world. He encouraged them to ***“...abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment...”*** by growing in their faith and love, and their knowledge of the Lord. That way they can ***“...approve the things that are excellent...”*** and do it sincerely while

“...being filled with the fruits of righteousness...”. This fruit is more than just service or religious activities we do. Our fruit is our testimony. It is our life lived before the world to show them Jesus is real. Our fruit is our character. As Paul told the church at Galatia, ***“22. ...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23. gentleness, self-control...”***. (Galatians 5:22-23) This is what Paul was showing the church at Philippi, and what he wanted them to show the world.

Paul put all of this encouragement into just a few short verses while sitting in prison. No wonder the Book of Philippians brings us such joy.

But before we leave this section let's spend a few minutes discussing the truth of our eternal security. The fact our Lord has ***“...begun a good work in you...”*** which will continue until the ***“...day of Jesus Christ...”***. The Lord explains this through Paul in Ephesians 1:

- ***“12. that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. 13. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14. who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”***
(Ephesians 1:12-14)

So let's first look at this passage in reverse order to see the gospel message revealed:

- We are a ***“...purchased possession...”*** through the blood of Jesus
- And as such our eternity is a ***“... guarantee of our inheritance...”***
- Because we are ***“...sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise...”***
- Because we ***“...believed...”***
- ***“...the gospel of your salvation...”***
- When we ***“...heard the word of truth...”***
- And ***“...trusted...”***
- ***“...In Him...”***
- Because we ***“...first trusted in Christ...”***.

Here Paul confirms the process of salvation and the assurance of our eternal security, by clarifying as a believer ***“...you were sealed...”*** by God ***“...with the Holy Spirit of promise...”*** and with, ***“...the guarantee of our inheritance ...”***.

Let's break this down:

- ***“...we who first trusted in Christ...”*** - Salvation comes through faith in Christ in whom we trust.

- **“...after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation...”** - Our faith comes through God's word expressed through the gospel.
- **“...having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,...”** - Once we believe and are saved, the Holy Spirit seals us with the **“...promise...”** of eternal life. The fact our **“...promise...”** is **“...sealed...”** indicates the permanency of our salvation because God's word is true and He would never **“...promise...”** something and then take it back (John 17:17). Otherwise, it would not be **“...sealed...”** and it would not be a **“...promise...”**.
- **“...who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession ...”** - To illustrate God's ownership of a believer, Paul uses the Greek term *“arrabon”* which is translated in English as *“guarantee”*. In other words, a guarantee of **“...our inheritance...”**. This clearly indicates a guaranteed or permanent redemption because we are a **“purchased possession”**. Purchased by Jesus who paid our ransom in full for all of our sin and made us heirs to God with Him for eternity. God's word confirms this again in Ephesians 4:30b (KJV) where it declares the guarantee, **“...until the redemption ...”** at our death or the Rapture.

This is not a promise of temporary grace, nor a promise made to be taken away. This is a promise from God whose grace cannot be earned, but once gained by faith, it cannot be lost. The promise of our salvation is sealed and guaranteed by the indwelling Holy Spirit. An eternal security He confirms through scripture given to both Peter and Paul:

- **“4. to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,”** (1 Peter 1:4) - Peter speaks to our **“...inheritance...”**; which is our position as a child of God - and clarifies that it does not change nor **“...fade away...”** because it is permanently **“...reserved...”**.
- Paul also speaks of our eternal security as an inheritance when he calls us **“...heirs...”** in Titus 3. **“7. that having been justified by His grace [saved] we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”** (Titus 3:7). This doctrine of believers being an **“...heir...”** of God is also seen in Galatians 4.
 - **“6. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” 7. Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”** (Galatians 4:6-7)

Lesson #6 - Philippians Chapter 1, verses 12-14

Quick Recap:

Paul began his letter with a beautiful greeting, **“3. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4. always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy...”** (Philippians 1:3). This is an amazing comment considering the fact Paul wrote this in the confines of a Roman prison. And yet, rather than complain about his circumstances it was Paul's desire to encourage his persecuted brothers and sisters in Philippi. In doing so he repeatedly speaks of his prayers for them, for **“...your fellowship in the gospel...”** (Philippians 1:5) and how the Lord **“...who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;...”** was working in and through them to accomplish His will (Philippians 1:6).

Now Paul will encourage them further by explaining the singular focus of his ministry, **“...the furtherance of the gospel...”** (Philippians 1:12).

Philippians chapter 1 verses 12-14

Verses 1:12-14

In verse 12 Paul talks about **“...the things which happened to me...”**. This is a long list of **“...things...”** as we see in 2 Corinthians 11:23b-28, **“23b. ...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.”** Paul knew his trials and challenges would strengthen him and fortify His testimony of the gospel. But his journey to Rome was certainly not what he expected. He yearned to go to the large city and capital of the Roman Empire, so he could witness to hundreds-of-thousands of people from every walk of life. But the outcome was not exactly how he envisioned it would be. Instead of traveling to Rome to witness, Paul went to Rome in chains. It was a long and very difficult journey punctuated by persecution and even a shipwreck (see Acts 27). And yet Paul realized it was sometimes his suffering that helped the gospel spread more effectively. He expresses this foreknowledge in Acts 20:22-24, **“...22. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that**

will happen to me there, 23. except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. 24. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.“ Here, just as he did in his letter to the Philippians, Paul described his challenges and persecutions as ***“...the things that will happen to me...”***. These ***“...things...”*** were not a surprise. Jesus had already warned Paul of future persecution (Acts 9:15-16), so too the Holy Spirit also warned him of the perils ahead. But rather than avoiding these risks, Paul saw his sufferings and persecution as a unique platform for sharing the gospel because they took him to places he might not normally go and introduced him to people he might not have otherwise meet. That's why he said in verse 12, ***“...the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel,..”***. His use of the word ***“...furtherance...”*** has an interesting meaning in the original Greek. It comes from the word *“prokope”* which can be defined as *“In front of”*, or to *“Cut and chop down”*, and literally means – *“Advancement by chopping down whatever impedes progress”*. And that's exactly what Paul was doing. Despite the obstacles in his way he sought to advance the ***“...furtherance...”*** of the gospel no matter what he had to do in order to stay out front with his message. In a sense He was a gospel pioneer as he sought to spread the truth of Jesus in places it had never been before.

This reminds us of the story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis. Joseph was one of the twelve sons of Jacob and highly favored by his father. That made his brothers increasingly jealous so they sold him as a slave to a caravan headed to Egypt and told their father he had been killed by a wild animal. Once in Egypt Joseph went through several years of slavery and even imprisonment, but eventually rose to a prominent position in the Egyptian government. Years later his sinful brothers came to Egypt seeking food in order to avoid a famine in Canaan. Unbeknownst to them, the Egyptian official who gave them food was actually their brother Joseph. At first they didn't recognize him, but once Joseph revealed who he was, his brothers understandably feared his retaliation. But Joseph forgave them and shared the fact God had allowed him to go before them into Egypt and endure years of slavery and exile in order to prepare him to eventually help his father's family. ***“3. Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph; does my father still live?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. 4. And Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come near to me.” So they came near. Then he said: “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. 5. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. 7. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the***

earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 8. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 45:3-8 underline added - see also Genesis chapters 40-45). Joseph understood how God worked through his exile and persecution to achieve His will. As a result, the descendants of Joseph's family would stay in Egypt over 400 years and grow into a nation. Over time the twelve sons of Jacob became the twelve tribes of Israel and were gathered by Moses during the exodus. This was all made possible in part by Joseph's suffering.

Undoubtedly Paul, a learned Pharisee, would have known of this story. So now he shares a familiar view as to why he was in prison, **“12. But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, 13. so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; 14. and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”** As with Joseph, Paul understood his persecution and imprisonment enabled the Lord to work through him in ways that might not otherwise be possible. In prison he was able to share the gospel with the **“...whole palace guard...”**. These were soldiers in the royal entourage of the emperor who otherwise might have never heard the truth. These guards would rotate duty stations several times a day which gave Paul a constant flow of men to witness to. Also, it is conceivable that as the Roman Empire expanded throughout what is today modern Europe the gospel would spread with these guards, or others they had witnessed to, who carried the gospel with them into the far reaches of the empire. That's one way Christianity spread throughout Europe and remained there after the Roman Empire fell into obscurity. Then from Europe the gospel spread to America and from there to the rest of the world. All of that may have been possible because one man witnessed to his guards in a Roman prison. He also witnessed **“...to all the rest...”** which may indicate others in the royal court and their household, staff and servants. Another opportunity to expose influential pagans to the truth of Jesus Christ. We'll see another indication of Paul's influence in prison when he recognizes **“...those who are of Caesar's household...”** (Philippians 4:22). Obviously, Paul's imprisonment resulted in **“...the furtherance of the gospel...”**.

So Paul took advantage of his situation to share the message of Jesus. As a Jew he normally would not have been invited to the royal household or to socialize with Roman soldiers, but through his imprisonment God put him in a place where he could lead some to Jesus. The Bible doesn't tell us, but I wonder if Paul ever reflected on his **“...chains...”** as a tool for sharing the gospel? He describes them as, **“...my chains are in Christ...”** (Philippians 1:13) which indicates he recognized the unique position

he was in and how his chains worked to his advantage. Maybe he thought about the staff of Moses God used to show His power to Pharaoh or to gather water from a rock (Exodus 7:19 / 17:6) Or maybe he thought of the sling of David and the stones from the river God used to bring down the giant Goliath (1 Samuel 17:40-51) In one sense Paul's chains were his staff and sling because they enabled him to share the gospel in ways he would not be able to do under normal circumstances, and in doing so he would show the power of God in his life.

This perspective can be applied to our own life because it helps us understand how the Lord often works through our own challenges to show His power. As we've discussed many times in class it is our testimony – our life lived for Jesus – that often shows the lost world Jesus is real. We can certainly share the gospel in words, but it is often our actions that are most noticed by the lost people around us. That's because how we act, how we talk, and how we deal with the challenges we face - our **"...chains..."** - can be our greatest testimony. Recall it was Paul who said, **"...9b. Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."** (2 Corinthians 12: 9b-10). Paul realized God was not going to remove his challenges but would instead walk through the suffering with him, so his testimony would show the power of God in his life. So here in Philippians Paul explains how his situation in a Roman prison would embolden other believers who watched him and drew strength from his courage. In this way **"...the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear..."** (Philippians 1:14) By watching how Paul used his trials to further the gospel, his Brothers and Sisters in Christ would be strengthened to share the gospel through their own persecution and therefore would be able to share the gospel more effectively themselves. This reminds us of the early church who under great persecution asked for strength to share the gospel in spite of the risk, **"...29, Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word,..."** (Acts 4:29).

May we all have the same desire. To be in the game and be ready to reach the goal the Lord has put before us.

So let's think about this from the perspective of our own lives. All of us have challenges and trials. These often become our **"...chains..."**, our burdens, as we struggle to deal with the stress and weight of life. But when we realize Jesus has always known about our trials we can view them from the same perspective Paul did, **"...that my chains are in Christ..."** (Philippians 1:13). Keeping this perspective in the

forefront of our minds will help us consciously think about how we can use our challenges to strengthen our testimony and further the gospel.

Given all this, let's think about the story of Ruth and Boaz and the heavy load he asked her to carry. Through her story we see another example of a heavy load – our **“...chains...”** – and how both Ruth and Paul learned to carry them as part of their testimony.

15. Also he said, “Bring the shawl that is on you and hold it.” And when she held it, he measured six ephahs of barley, and laid it on her. Then she went into the city.” 16. When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, “Is that you, my daughter?” Then she told her all that the man had done for her. 17. And she said, “These six ephahs of barley he gave me; for he said to me, ‘Do not go empty-handed to your mother-in-law.’” (Ruth 3:15-17)

The Book of Ruth is an incredible story of love, but if you peel back the onion just a bit it reveals the story of God's redemptive grace and points to Jesus as the source of our redemption. Ruth, was a Moabite widow who went to Israel with her mother-in-law Naomi. There she gathered scraps in a barley field so she could provide food for herself and her widowed mother-in-law. But what started as a simple task for survival soon revealed the providential hand of God, because when Ruth worked in the barley field she met its owner, a man named Boaz. A prominent Jewish landowner and a relative of Naomi's husband. As an in-law, Boaz was permitted to marry the widowed Ruth and give her a new life. In that role Boaz became known as her *“Kinsman-Redeemer”*. In other words, a person who could redeem someone by giving them a new life and a new identity. Just like Jesus, who gives us a new life and a new identity when we come into God's family through our faith and become part of the Bride of Christ. In essence, this is the message of the Book of Ruth. A story of redemption from an earthly life of spiritual poverty to an eternal life of spiritual riches. A life we can have through our faith in Jesus.

But let's look again at verses 15 to see an interesting twist:

15. Also he [Boaz] said, “Bring the shawl that is on you and hold it.” And when she [Ruth] held it, he measured six ephahs of barley, and laid it on her. Then she went into the city.”

Once Boaz agreed to redeem Ruth he asked her to bring a shawl to use as a basket. He then gave her six measures of barley, which was a very heavy load. A load much too heavy for one person to carry without difficulty. And yet he gave it to her and **“...laid it on her...”**. This indicates she had to carry it on her back because the load he

gave her was so heavy. And yet....he still gave it to her. Fully aware of the weight and fully aware of the difficulty she would have carrying it. In other words - in his efforts to help Ruth, her redeemer gave her a load he knew was very difficult to manage, and yet he gave it to her anyway. So Ruth had several possible options to consider: She could reject his gift. Or, she could ask Boaz to carry it for her. Or, she could ask him to give her no more than she needed for herself. Or frankly, she could get angry because Boaz gave her a heavy load she didn't ask for. But she didn't do any of these things. Instead, verse 15 simply says **"...she went into the city..."**. In other words, Ruth took the load she was given and carried it, no matter how difficult it might have been.

By why? Why did Ruth agree to bear the heavy load? A load she didn't ask for. A load too heavy for her to carry. Because she thought of Naomi, who had no food, and she recognized the gift Boaz gave her was enough to bless them both. In other words, Ruth took the heavy load (her **"...chains..."**) and made it part of her testimony so she could proclaim the message of what Boaz had done to redeem her. She didn't complain about the weight. She simply picked up her heavy load and returned home to share the "good news" of the gift with Naomi. Just as we can use our heavy load to fortify our testimony and share the "good news", the gospel message of our Redeemer.

So let's think about it this way: Ruth approached Boaz as a widow, poor and hopeless, but he felt compassion for her and offered to redeem her life. Likewise, we approach Jesus as lost sinners, spiritually poor and hopeless. As Paul says in Romans 5:8, **"8...while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** And, as we're told in Psalm 103:4, the Lord **"...redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies..."**. So, just as Boaz accepted Ruth in her hopeless condition and offered to be her Kinsman-Redeemer, Jesus accepts us in our sinful and broken condition and offers to redeem our soul. And yet...the fact is...even in our redeemed state we often have a heavy load to carry or **"...chains..."** to bear. Just like Ruth, our Redeemer knows about our weight and He asks us to carry it anyway because He knows the way we carry it can glorify Him. That's because our life lived for Jesus, particularly during difficult times, can be our most powerful testimony. As we tote our burden in front of a lost world and show them how Jesus comforts us even in our most difficult circumstances. In that way we can show the world Jesus is Someone they need to help carry their loads, and we can show them this by the way we carry ours.

That's why the apostle Paul boasted about his load – his **"...chains..."** when the Lord refused to remove it – but offered to carry it with him, **"...9b. Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am**

strong." (2 Corinthians 12:9b-10). Paul understood two things: First, he knew God could remove his load if He wanted to. But if He didn't, Paul knew God would give him the strength to use his load, his **"...chains..."**, to glorify the Lord by using Paul's weakness to show God's power.

That's why Paul was able to say **"...the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel..."**. (Philippians 1:12) Paul realized it is often the trials we endure in our lives that teach us and strengthen us, and when they do, they draw us closer to Jesus, draw us deeper into His word, and draw us more fervently into prayer. Places we might not be if it weren't for the **"...chains..."** and trials in our lives. Likewise, the prison where Paul witnessed to the guards and royal household was a place he would not be if it were not for the **"...chains..."** he had to bear. Certainly, God could have orchestrated events so Paul could meet these same people on the streets or in the marketplace, but the simple fact Paul was in prison brought great credibility to his message. That's why Paul could say, **"...the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."** (Philippians 1:14) It was Paul's testimony, from a Roman prison and while chained to a Roman guard, that inspired and encouraged other believers to boldly share the gospel without fear. Paul expressed the same sentiment in his letter to the church at Ephesus, **"19. and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."** (Ephesians 6:19-20)

So how can we muster that same type of faith? The faith to **"...speak boldly, as I ought to speak..."** when he was under so much stress? For that, let's look at James 1:2-4: **"2. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3. knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4. But let patience have its perfect work..."**. On the surface this sounds impossible. Where do we get that kind of strength? How do we find **"...joy..."** in our trials? How do we learn **"...patience..."** when we're suffering? And how can we let our patience become a **"...perfect work..."**? Just like Paul did. By understanding how we can bear our chains in a way that glorifies the Lord. To do that we need to understand the fact our Lord already knows every trial we will ever endure. So He understands our chains and He understands the weight of our trial. And just like Ruth and Boaz Jesus understands the difficulty we bear and how hard it is to carry the load we've been given. We also have to remember that Jesus, as the Son of God, knows all things about us, but as the Son of Man He also understands the chains we bear and the load we carry because He bore our chains and carried our load to the cross when He bore the weight of our sin.

But God, by His supreme omniscience knows every day we will live and He knows every chain we will wear and every load we will bear. So like Paul, we must trust Jesus every day and in every circumstance, and with every load, as we seek to use our trials to strengthen our testimony and find how we can use our load to glorify Him for ***“...furtherance of the gospel...”*** (Philippians 1:12). That's what Paul meant in Romans 8:28 when he said, ***“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”***. Paul doesn't say all good things work for good. He says ***“...all things work together for good...”***. Good and bad things can work in our lives to bring glory to God when we view them ***“...according to His purpose...”***, and not ours. That's why Paul clarifies, ***“...my chains are in Christ...”*** (Philippians 1:13b). Paul wanted his readers to understand he was not in chains for breaking the law. His in chains were ***“...in Christ...”*** as a way to share the gospel in places it might never be shared any other way.

As difficult as that is, it is something we must all strive to do.

Lesson #7 - Philippians Chapter 1, verses 15-30

Quick Recap:

Paul was in a Roman prison but rather than complaining about his circumstances he used it to his advantage because he realized the Lord had allowed his persecution and imprisonment for a reason - for **“...the furtherance of the gospel...”** (Philippians 1:12b). His incarceration placed him in a location he might otherwise not be allowed to go which presented a great opportunity. In prison he was able to witness to, **“...the whole palace guard...”** and **“...all the rest...”** (Philippians 1:13). These were people who may never have heard the gospel if it were not for Paul being in, **“...my chains...”** that **“...are in Christ...”**. Paul recognized his situation not only enabled him to share the gospel but also to set an example for others who **“...are much more bold to speak the word without fear...”**. (Philippians 1:14).

Paul will now bring even more clarity to our own lives lived for Jesus as we see how he dealt with the challenges he had to confront.

Philippians chapter 1 verses 15-30

Verses 1:15-18

In verses 15 and 16 Paul talks about those who **“...preach Christ...”** but not with good intentions. Some preached with **“...envy and strife...”**, possibly because they were jealous of Paul's apostolic gifts. Others preached **“...from selfish ambition...”** instead of a position of humility. In both cases these groups would **“...add affliction to my chains...”**. This **“...affliction...”** would rest heavy on Paul's heart because his sole purpose was to see **“...Christ is preached...”**, no matter the cost (Philippians 1:18). Paul's focus throughout his ministry was based on sharing the gospel through love and unity. To the church at Galatia he talked about the need to exhibit love through the **“...fruit of the Spirit...”**, (see Galatians 5:22-23), and to the church at Corinth he talked about the importance of unity amongst believers, **“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.** (1 Corinthians 12:12). Even so, Paul was no stranger to **“...envy and strife...”**. In fact, conflict seemed to follow wherever he went. There was of course the constant physical persecution he had to endure, but an even greater danger came from a spiritual perspective. Particularly, the constant battle against false teaching so prevalent at the time. That's why Paul clarified the singular focus of his ministry in verse 17, **“...that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel...”**. Not

only did Paul view his ministry task as an amazing opportunity to share the gospel, but he viewed it as an appointment – an assignment he had been given by God. That's a viewpoint each of us must have as well.

But Paul's pursuit to further the gospel resulted in a spiritual battle on many fronts. Let's look at just a few examples:

- As we discussed in Lesson #5 Paul chastised the church in Galatia for listening to false teachers, ***"...6. I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7. which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."*** (Galatians 1:6-9). In this case the Galatian believers had been influenced by a sect called the Judiaziers. They were a group of Jews who claimed to be Christians but taught adherence to the Mosaic law and rituals was a requirement for salvation. This forced Gentile believers to adopt Jewish practices and pulled them away from faith in Christ-alone to focus on religious and physical efforts to earn righteousness. So Paul and Barnabas took their debate to the Jerusalem Council, a group of apostles and elders who provided guidance during the early years of the church. (see Acts 15:1-11). There, Peter, who was part of the Council, spoke in favor of Paul's position affirming salvation comes by faith alone and not through religious activity or works, ***"...6. Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. 7. And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, 9. and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 10. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11. But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."*** (Acts 15:6-11) As a result of their discussion, a proclamation was issued to the Gentile churches to clarify adherence to Jewish practices was unnecessary for salvation (see Acts 15:24-29).
- Then there were the Gnostics. A mysterious sect who combined aspects of Greek philosophy, mysticism and Christianity. They taught salvation comes

through special enlightenment or divine knowledge available only to a select few. Paul confronted this group in his letter to the churches at Colossae and Laodicea (see Colossians 2:1-10). He reasoned with them to understand that all the knowledge they needed for salvation came from scripture, “**2. ...that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, 3. in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4. Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.**” (Colossians 2:2-4 / see also Proverbs 3:5 and Jeremiah 17:9). Paul admonished them to remember it is through the Lord we receive “**...all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge...**” and not through religion, mysticism or philosophy. Paul’s reference to “**...persuasive words...**” reminds us of his warning he gave to Timothy “**3. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4. and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.**” (2 Timothy 4:3-4) Here Paul reiterated what their focus must be, “**2. Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.**” (2 Timothy 4:2) But what a sad commentary that Paul, who was selected by Jesus to spread the gospel, had to “**...Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering...**” those who chose to share a false gospel.

- Understandably, Paul was constantly being criticized by the elite Jewish leadership, of whom he was once a prominent member. These were the same self-righteous Pharisees and teachers who rejected Jesus and had him crucified. Paul debated with them throughout his ministry, but probably no more so than the time he was confronted by a group in Jerusalem who opposed his teaching to Gentiles, “**27b....the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, 28. crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” 29. (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) 30. And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.**” (Acts 21:27b-30). This conflict led to Paul’s arrest, but since Paul was a Roman citizen he was given an opportunity to make his case to the Roman government. Acts chapters 21-25 describe his series of trials with governors Felix, Festus, Agrippa and finally to

the emperor in Rome. And that's why we now find Paul in prison awaiting his trial.

- Paul also had conflict with the Gentile community. Not only did his message of faith in the Messiah aggravate the Jewish community, which in turn frustrated the Roman leadership who were charged with maintaining peace in occupied regions, but it also frustrated the Gentile population who were deeply rooted in idol worship and Greek philosophy. One example of this conflict is a riot in Ephesus which resulted from the impact Paul's ministry had on the craftsmen who made idols for worship, ***“23. And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way [early term for Christianity]. 24. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. 25. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: “Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. 26. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. 27. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.”*** (Acts 19:23-27).
- These, and other examples like them, are why Paul was so singularly focused on ***“...the furtherance of the gospel...”*** (Philippians 1:12b). It is also why he clarified the sole intent of his mission in a profound statement in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25
 - ***“18. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19. For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” (from Isaiah 29:14) 20. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21. For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23. but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24. but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”***

Here Paul is talking about ***“...the wisdom of the wise...”***, the Pharisees, Judiaziers, Gnostics and others who subtracted-from or added-to the truth of scripture to tailor it to their own false beliefs. As Isaiah had prophesied generations before, ***“14. Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work Among this people, A marvelous work and a wonder; For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, And the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden.”*** (Isaiah 29:14). Now Paul, selected by Jesus as His messenger to the Gentile world, would ***“...do a marvelous work...”*** by fearlessly sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. A singular focus he expresses so beautifully to the Philippian believers, ***“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 1:18). This is the joy he had and the joy he wants to share with us despite his circumstances. His joy came from the fact he was ensuring ***“...Christ is preached...”*** no matter what obstacle was in his way.

But false teaching is no different today and may actually be worse now than it was in Paul's day. That's because the internet and social media provide a dangerous platform for false teachers to rapidly spread apostate doctrine around the world. Unfortunately, many believers are drawn to social media and often accept what they see and hear as truth without understanding what the Bible actually says. This, coupled with Biblical illiteracy so prevalent in the church today, results in many well-meaning believers being deceived by the enemy without even recognizing it. That's why false movements such as Prosperity Gospels and “Manifesting” are so popular. They slowly draw you away from Jesus by focusing your attention on yourself. That's also why believers must be equipped in the truths of God's word and able to explain what we believe with scripture. That way we can ***“...Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching...”*** (2 Timothy 4:2b). Otherwise, we are not doing as the Lord has asked us to do by defending His word. But over the centuries mankind has not learned the lesson Paul fought so valiantly to teach. Today false doctrines and aberrant gospels are more invasive and influential than ever before. Particularly given the accessibility to social media and our societies penchant to believe whatever they hear. Sadly, most Christians today are not deep in God's word and in many cases their Biblical knowledge is often limited to only what they hear in the pulpit, what they see on social feeds or read in popular “Christian” books. They seek wisdom from others instead of God's word and as a result they are confused and easily misled. That's why James reminds us, ***“...5. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.”*** (James 1:5-6). So...if you're not in God's word and seeking wisdom from Him, you are at great risk of being influenced by the enemy and being spiritually, ***“...tossed by the wind...”***. — And that is not a good place to be.

Verses 1:19-26

Verses 19-26 are a singularly powerful testimony of Paul's life and witness. They would serve us well to follow them.

Paul was confident of his future **"...deliverance..."**. He was waiting for his trial, which depending on the mood of the emperor, could mean his release or his execution. But Paul's view of deliverance was much more than simply getting out of prison. As a believer in Christ he understood the fact **"...there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."** (Romans 8:1). No matter what decision the Roman government might make, there would be no eternal condemnation for Paul. Warren Weirsbe explains Paul's perspective in a special way, **"...Because of Paul's chains, Christ was known, and because of Paul's critics, Christ was preached. But because of Paul's crisis, Christ was magnified."** (The Wiersbe Bible Commentary). So true. It was Paul's situation, his crisis, and his endurance under those conditions, that made his testimony so powerful and brought credibility to his message.

That's something we should all think about. Does our life magnify Christ? When people watch us or hear us, do our actions and words magnify the Lord, or do they discredit His message? Paul understood the critical nature of this question when he said, **"20. according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death."** (Philippians 1:20). Paul did not view his own life as worthy of magnifying the Lord, but he knew the **"... supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ..."** (Philippians 1:19b) would add strength to his testimony so his life would reflect Jesus and therefore glorify Him. That's why Paul could say, **"... to live is Christ, and to die is gain..."** (Philippians 1:20b). To live was to present the gospel and therefore magnify the Lord and help establish His church, but to die meant he would be in the presence of the Lord. Paul saw advantages to both outcomes which is why he was, **"...hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. 24. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you."** (Philippians 1:23b-24). Yet in verse 25 he confirms his desire to **"...remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, 26. that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again."** (Philippians 1:25b-26). Although Paul's desire was to be with the Lord - which should be our desire as well - Paul knew his work was not done. He had been tasked with sharing the gospel with the Gentile world, and so far he had just scratched the surface. He knew his time would come to depart this life, but until that day he had to focus with single mindedness on one thing, **"...the furtherance of the gospel..."**

(Philippians 1:12b) and let nothing stand in his way. Not even the chains of a Roman prison.

So how do we apply this perspective to our own lives? — Recently I was talking to someone going through a very difficult time in life. In his view life was not worth living and it was time for the Lord to take him home. I certainly understand his sentiment but I asked him to consider another perspective. I reminded him our days are numbered (Psalm 90:12) and, ***“...in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them.”*** (Psalm 139:16). In other words, the number of days we live is already known to God and He has ***“...fashioned...”*** them for us by giving us things to do for Him. He does this even though He knows how difficult some of those days might be. We know that because Psalm 139:1-3 which declares, ***“O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.”*** That means the Lord knows about each of our days - down to the most minute details. It also means our days are not left to chance, luck or fate. They are set before us with purpose. Not as a meaningless string of uneventful twenty-four hour periods, but they are numbered and intentional. Even when we feel they are not worth living. As we're reminded in Ephesians 2:10, - ***“...For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”*** This isn't talking about ***“...good works...”*** as a way to gain salvation. It speaks to tasks we are given in life after we're saved, and the way our life should be lived to accomplish them. That means God has things for us to do and He will equip us to do them by providing the opportunities, abilities and gifts we need. But it also means we must be alert to His movement in our hearts as we seek to magnify Him. Given all that, we can rest assured the Lord knows our days, how many we will live, and how many of them will be easy or difficult. But like Paul, we must also understand the Lord will take us home when He is ready. Until then, we must be alert to the Lord's movement in our heart so we can use our limited days - good and bad - to magnify Him through our testimony.

Verses 1:27-30

So how do we do that? How do we have a personal testimony that magnifies the Lord? Very simply, ***“...let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ...”***. Remember, Paul's focus, which should be ours as well, was ***“...the furtherance of the gospel...”*** (Philippians 1:12b). That doesn't just mean just handing out tracts or sharing the gospel message. It means how we live the gospel through our lives. The

gospel, which is simply the message of redemption through Jesus, is generally looked upon with doubt by the lost world. But it is our life, lived for Jesus that can show the lost doubters the power of the gospel. That's why Paul emphasizes our **"...conduct..."** as it relates to **"...your affairs..."** and by being **"...steadfast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel..."**. (Philippians 1:27). In other words, Paul is challenging the Phillippian believers to conduct their affairs in a way that would bring credibility to the gospel message, and in doing so, also build doctrinal unity. A unity that would make them stronger as a body than they would be as individuals. But then in verses 29-30 Paul reminds us that serving Jesus may bring suffering. That's because conducting ourselves as an obedient follower of Jesus often results in persecution. In the simplest form persecution may mean you lose friends or your life changes so things that used to interest you as a lost person no longer interest you as a believer. But at its most extreme, persecution can mean physical suffering or even death, as millions of our Brothers and Sisters around the world can testify. But also, Paul reminds us of what **"...you saw in me and now hear is in me..."**. So what do we see in Paul? We see a man who was in prison for nothing more than preaching the gospel of Jesus, and yet, instead of complaining, he wrote a letter to the church at Philippi to encourage their difficult walk. And when Paul did that what else was he doing? He was enabling his own **"...conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ..."**.

So given Paul's focus on our **"...conduct..."**, which simply means the importance of our testimony, let's take a few minutes to peel back the onion just a bit and look at a similar passage from Peter.

"8. Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; 9. not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. 10. For "He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. 11. Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. 12. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." (1 Peter 3: 8-12)

This passage from Peter also talks about our **"...conduct..."**, our testimony, but also stresses the need for unity by having **"...compassion for one another..."** and being **"...of one mind..."**. There should be no surprise in the continuity between Peter's writings and Paul's because both passages were actually written by the Holy Spirit and scribed by two different men. So to get our head around Peter's comments let's first review a little context about this passage.

The Book of First Peter was written at a time when the Roman Empire sought to eradicate both Jews and Christians through a process of systematic persecution that

would last for hundreds of years. So Peter wrote this letter to those early believers who were living in a fallen society and suffering for their faith. Much like the Philippians Paul wrote to. Peter wanted to encourage them to remain optimistic in a pessimistic world and to remain faithful to the Lord and fearless in their obedience in the face of overwhelming odds. Even as their society fell deeper into sin Peter wanted these believers to have a personal testimony of strength and joy that reflected their faith in the Lord. By doing this Peter was also being obedient to Jesus who years before told Peter to “**...Feed My sheep...**” (John 21:17). Jesus knew the day would come when He would call Peter to encourage His persecuted followers to stand firm in their faith during difficult times. So, how did Peter feed these persecuted believers? Did he teach them to fight? No. Did he tell them to revolt? No. Did he tell them to run and hide? No. He told them the same thing Paul did. To live their lives as a testimony so their lives would show the world Jesus is real. And in a sense Paul and Peter’s letters should also be encouraging to us as we watch our own society fall deeper into moral decline and watch some of our own liberal leaders try to destroy the empire. We too must remain faithful to the Lord and fearless in our walk with Jesus

That’s what Paul and Peter knew so well – our personal testimony is critically important to the credibility of the gospel. In a society inundated with wasted actions and meaningless words it is often our actions and our words through our testimony that will make the greatest difference in someone else’s life. That’s because the world is searching for answers and we can help them find the answer they seek through Jesus by living our lives as a testimony of our Lord. That’s what Paul is talking about when he says “**...let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ...**”. Our “**...conduct...**” is our personal testimony. It is the story of Jesus told through our daily life as Jesus works in and through us to do His will. Our testimony is our actions, our attitude and our words, because it is our life that shows the world we are followers of Jesus, and no matter how sinful the world might become we will follow Him with joy. That’s why Paul and Peter both emphasized the importance of our personal testimony. In a fallen society who is sick of cultural chaos, the world needs to see substance and our lives can show them that if our lives show them Jesus. So, to help us understand what that means Paul gives us an excellent description of our testimony in Romans 12:1, **1.” I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”** In other words, our life lived for Jesus is not like the dead sacrifice of a temple offering. We are a “**...living sacrifice...**” as we live our life for the Lord and show the world the power of Jesus in our life, no matter how difficult our life may be.

So given that context, let’s dig a little deeper into the passage from 1 Peter 3 and investigate what the Lord instructs us to do so our lives can be a “**...living sacrifice...**” of “**...conduct...**”, that is “**...worthy of the gospel...**”.

In verse 8 Peter says, “***all of you be of one mind...***”. Here Peter is saying basically the same thing Paul did when he said for us to be “... ***...steadfast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith...***”. Both writers speak of unity amongst believers, which is the product of our combined testimonies. It reminds us of Psalm 133:1, “***...1. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!***”. Being in unity doesn’t mean we always agree, but it means we should seek a place where we can agree. It means we have a spirit of cooperation so we can move forward as a single body seeking the Lord's guidance in all we do. It means we strive to function in such a way we support one another through good times and bad as we encourage our fellow believers and as we witness to the lost world. So how do we do this? Peter tells us:

- “***...having compassion for one another...***”
- “***...love as brothers...***”
- “***...be tenderhearted...***”
- “***...be courteous...***”

These are all characteristics of a life lived for Jesus. Basically the same characteristics Paul outlines in Galatians 5:22-23 where he encourages us to walk together in the Spirit, “***...22. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23. gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.***” These are the characteristics of our testimony that will reflect Jesus in our lives and draw people to Him. Characteristics that are diametrically opposed to what people see happening in society, but they are character traits the fallen world needs to see in our testimony. Paul emphasizes this again in Philippians 2:1-2, “***1. Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.***” These are the characteristics - the testimony traits - of unified believers seeking to walk through this difficult world together with a spirit of optimism and joy that comes from our salvation and shows the world the power of Christ in our unity.

But let's be brutally honest...Are these the characteristics people see in us? Do those watching us see “***...Compassion, love, joy, peace, gentleness, longsuffering and self-control***”, or do they see anger, impatience, and a quick temper? Do they see us “***...being like-minded...***”, or do they see conflict, gossip and backbiting? Do they see optimism and joy, or do they see drudgery and doubt? Do they hear uplifting words of encouragement, or do they hear griping and complaining and raised voices? In other words, does a lost world watching our lives see and hear a testimony that shows Jesus is real though our “***...conduct...***”? It's important for us to come to grips with how critical our testimony is in this fallen world because our testimony may be the single

most important variable in someone accepting or rejecting Jesus as their Savior. That's why we must remember, our testimony is what the lost world sees and hears, and therefore, there may be nothing more important for them to see and hear than our testimony of a life lived for our Lord.

But you might be asking, how can my testimony make such a profound difference to the lost world? Simply because our world - just as the Roman Empire in the days of Paul and Peter - is full of harsh people and harsh words. Angry people, angry politicians, angry organizations, angry ideas, angry agendas and angry nations, who all feed off of each other's angry actions and angry words. That's why the Lord tells us through Paul and Peter that our testimony has to be different than the world. As Proverbs 15:1 says, **"...A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger..."**. So in this harsh and angry environment – like our sinful fallen society – our testimony may be the only thing left on earth that can show the world a different outcome is possible and a different way of life is available for them too. But a strong testimony like this can be so difficult to maintain in a fallen world because we often feel mistreated and persecuted, and everywhere we look there seems to be a reason to fight back, to shout louder or just to give up. But, in 1 Peter 3:9 the Lord tells us how to deal with this, by, **"9. not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing."** Here the Lord tells us not to return evil for evil, but to return a **"...blessing..."** on others. Even on those who don't deserve it. But why would He tell us to do something so difficult? Because the Lord says we are, **"...called to this..."**. It is our calling as the Lord's representatives on earth to return strife with sacrifice, return persecution with promise, and return hatred with humility. This is how we can, **"...let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ..."**. (Philippians 1:27)

But Jesus doesn't just say that and expect us to figure out how to do it. He Himself provides the living model for us to follow. We see that in Isaiah 53:7 which prophesied how Jesus would react when He needed to show conduct worthy of the gospel, even as He was being crucified. **"...He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth."** Do we think it was easy for Jesus to do just because He is Jesus? Frankly, Jesus could have called down legions of angels to protect Him, or He could have simply destroyed His tormentors on the spot. Instead, He was silent so that two thousand years later His silence speaks louder than words because His silence reflects His willingness to forgive the most hardened sinners. Even those who put Him on the cross. Sinful people, just like you and me.

So, how can we have a testimony like this? A testimony reflecting the love of Jesus to a world who hates Him, but so desperately needs Him? For that, let's look at verses

10-11 of 1 Peter 3, where Peter quotes from Psalm 34. A Psalm David wrote at a very difficult time in his life, **10. For “He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. 11. Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it.”** There is a key word in this verse that is critical to our testimony. It's our **“tongue”**. Our words. The things we say that others hear. Words that can either build our testimony or destroy it. So here the Lord tells us to **“...refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit...”**. This reminds me of Psalm 141:3, **“Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips.”** And it's basically the same thing Jesus tells us in Matthew 15:18-20, **“18. But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. 19. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. 20. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”**. Isn't that interesting, our words can defile us and destroy our testimony. How often do we think about that when we overreact, raise our voice or say something that's not edifying to another? But we must think about it, because the Bible stresses the importance of our words through a warning in James 3:3-6 where he talks about the impact our tongue can have on others, **“3. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. 4. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. 5. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! 6. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.”**

So what does all that mean? Well...Let's think about the examples he uses: A small bit can turn a thousand pound horse, and a small rudder can turn a giant ship. Likewise, our tongue - our words – can turn our testimony into a witness or... a disaster. That's why James calls our tongue **“...a fire...”**, and **“...a world of iniquity...”**. Because he says it **“...defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.”**. I want us to really catch what he said...The words we say can be like a destructive fire from hell. But how is that even possible? Well, what about when we repeat gossip? Or debate a silly social media post? Or by criticizing someone? Or talking behind their back? Or simply by making a comment that is better left unsaid? Or maybe it's the words we choose, and how we say them, or maybe even the tone of our voice? Our words, possibly more than any other single thing, can damage our testimony and drive our listeners away from Jesus. That's why Paul reminds us in Romans 12:10-12 what our testimony should look like and sound like, **“...10. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; 11. not lagging in diligence, fervent in**

spirit, serving the Lord; 12. rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer..."

So given all of this, how important are the words we say relative to, ***"...let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ..."***? Let's consider Paul's direction in Ephesians 4:29, ***"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impact grace to the hearers."*** Here Paul is talking about our testimony - our ***"...conduct..."*** and telling us how we should act towards one another, and how we should talk to others so we can demonstrate God's grace through our lives. But in doing so, he warns us about the ***"...corrupt..."*** words that ***"...proceed out of your mouth..."***. So what does Paul consider to be a ***"...corrupt word..."***? He tells us a few verses later in Ephesians 5:3, ***"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks."*** Here Paul lists sins like fornication and filthiness and in the same list he includes ***"...foolish talking..."***, and ***"...course jesting..."***. Have you ever really thought about that? How the words we say, even in a joke can be ***"...corrupt..."*** and sinful, and damage our testimony.

So what do we do about that? Paul tells us, ***"31. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."*** (Ephesians 4:31-32). So that's it. The next time we're tempted to share gossip, or even listen to gossip; don't do it. Don't join in needless social media debates. Don't criticize someone. Don't share an opinion that's better left unsaid. Don't raise your voice and don't snap someone's head off. Everytime we do these things we're not letting ***"...your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ..."***. Why? Because when we act like this and then claim to be a follower of Jesus, our claim has no credibility to the lost world. That's what Paul, Peter and James were all trying to help us understand.

But our testimony is so fragile. It has to be nurtured and protected every moment to ensure we can ***"...conduct..."*** ourselves in a way that brings credibility to the message we share about Jesus. I tend to think about our ***"...conduct..."*** by asking myself the question, ***"What takes a lifetime to build but only seconds to destroy?"*** The answer is of course, our testimony. It can take years of obedience to build a strong testimony and just seconds of sin or words to completely destroy it. And when we damage our testimony there will be unintended consequences because the lost souls who see our broken testimony or hear our sinful words may use that example as a reason not to follow Jesus. That's why we need to remember...other than our salvation there is no greater gift from God than our personal testimony. That's because it is our life, lived for Jesus, in front of this fallen world, that helps the world see our King as Someone they need. But living like that requires us to constantly search our hearts and ask ourselves,

what are we doing with our testimony? Are we guarding it, nurturing it, strengthening it, protecting it, and sharing it? Or is their sin in our lives that is damaging it, or maybe even destroying it? And thereby destroy our ability to be an effective witness for Jesus.

That's certainly a lot of discussion about our testimony. But our efforts to ***"...let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ..."*** are critically important in this lost world. So to close this out, let's summarize this discussion with a few more points to understand the importance of our testimony:

- Why was Paul in a Roman prison? – ***"12. But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, 13. so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; 14. and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."*** (Philippians 1:12-14)
 - Paul was in prison for his testimony of Jesus, and his desire was for others ***"...to speak the word without fear..."***. This would be their testimony.
- Why was the apostle John on the Island of Patmos when he recorded the Book of Revelation? – ***"9. I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."*** (Revelation 1:9)
 - John was incarcerated for proclaiming ***"...the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ..."***. That was his testimony.
- How does the Lord describe those who will resist the antichrist during the Tribulation? – ***"11. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death."*** (Revelation 12:11)
 - They will resist and be killed because ***"...of their testimony..."***.
- What did Paul ask Timothy to do? - ***"8. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God,..."*** (2 Timothy 1:8)
 - Paul stressed the importance of our testimony even as he suffered.

So how important should our testimony be to us? Paul not only gives us the answer, but he demonstrates it with his life. That's the real message of Paul's amazing attitude while “*...in chains...*” in a Roman prison. Not only did he share the gospel while incarcerated but he did so while encouraging others with joy. That's what gave his testimony such credibility. And that's what we must do as well.

Lesson #8 - Philippians Chapter 2, verses 1-4

Quick Recap:

Paul was in a Roman prison simply because he shared the testimony of Jesus. But that really didn't matter to him because his singular focus was to spread the gospel, no matter what obstacle was in his path. And by doing this Paul was going to share the gospel with joy. That's why he could look at his incarceration as an opportunity to share the gospel in a place he normally would not be able to go, and to people he normally would not be able to meet. It's also why he was able to write such an encouraging letter to his persecuted Brothers and Sisters in Philippi even though his own persecution was so severe.

But in chapter 1 Paul also gave the Philippian church a warning - false teachers were rampant and sharing aberrant gospels distorting the truth and leading people away from true faith in Christ alone. Paul also warned other churches and Timothy of this situation and encouraged them to stay in doctrinal unity. This same warning applies to us today and maybe even more so than in Paul's day. In our own time the advent of social media and the penchant of many well-meaning Christians to believe what they read results in dangerous waters to sail. It's a warning we should all heed and is a reason why we must be in God's word daily and understand the truth from scripture.

We could have spent months studying chapter 1 and benefit from its many life lessons for ourselves, but frankly, we have just scratched the surface.

Philippians chapter 2 verses 1-4

Verses 2:1-4

When we get to chapter 4 we'll see evidence of possible division in the Philippian church between two women. Paul doesn't explain the source of their disunity. It may have been a personal issue or a disagreement over something in the church, but in either case, Paul admonishes them to ***"...be of the same mind in the Lord..."*** (Philippians 4:2). Disunity of any type is dangerous in the church, but whatever this situation was, the Lord felt strongly enough about it to have Paul mention the women by name and therefore make it public. There must be an important lesson for us in their dispute or God would probably not have included it in His word. So given that we'll spend some time focusing on the importance of unity amongst believers.

The Bible doesn't say, but we can probably assume Paul didn't make this a public issue until either he or someone else in the church followed a process like the "Matthew Principle" in Matthew 18:15-17. There we are instructed to confront someone over their sin in a specific way:

- First we should talk to them one on one to see if we can convince them to give up their sinful ways.
- Second, if that doesn't work, we should talk to them with a friend - a witness - to express our love and concern for them, and point out their sin.
- And finally, if they still ignore us and continue in open sin, we are to make it known before the church.
 - Why? So their sin, and failed testimony, does not discredit the body or influence others to make the same bad choices.
- Initially Paul may have tried to rectify the issue privately or with someone else before finally mentioning them by name before the entire world. But the situation had now come to the point of making their disunity a public example.

So to get to that point in chapter 4, Paul starts here in chapter 2 with a profound statement of love and unity. He uses a string of thoughts intended to encourage us in our own walk with Jesus. Thoughts that emphasize the importance of being in unity with one another. He may have done this to set the stage for the disunity discussion he planned to address later in this letter, or just because unity is so important within the body of believers. (see Psalm 133:1). To emphasize his point Paul uses words and phrases like: **"...consolation..."**, **"...comfort of love..."**, **"...fellowship of the Spirit..."**, **"...affection and mercy..."**, **"...joy..."**, **"...love..."**, **"...being of one accord..."**, **"...lowliness of mind..."**, **"...esteem others..."** and **"...the interest of others..."** to describe the attitude we should show towards one another. You would be hard pressed to find another passage in the Bible with so many encouraging thoughts in one statement. All reminding us of the unity we need to exhibit as a testimony before the lost world.

Given that, let's take a little deeper look at Paul's message to us:

Paul starts with the word **"...Therefore..."** pointing back to his previous comments where he talked about disunity of doctrine and then stressed the importance of our personal conduct (Philippians 1:27). There he talked about our testimony and the importance of being **"...with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,"**. This is talking about the unity required for us to be an effective body of witnesses.

So let's ask ourselves, how do we portray a conduct - a testimony - worthy of our Lord? Paul tells us:

- **Consolation** - In the original Greek the root word “*paraklesis*” means “*encouragement*”. Here Paul tells us to be encouraged “*...in Christ...*”.
- **Comfort of love** - In 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 Paul talks a lot about love by listing attributes we should exhibit in our lives. Things like eloquent speaking, prophecy, knowledge and faith. But these things on their own and without love can be meaningless. Jesus tells us God is love (1 John 4:16) and He tells us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30). It is often this type of love - particularly during difficult times - that draws people to Jesus through us. It is a love that brings us “*...comfort...*” when we need it most.
- **Fellowship of the Spirit** - As believers we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9) and as such we are gifted to present the “*...fruit of the Spirit...*” as part of our testimony (Galatians 5:22-23). It is these character traits - our “*...fruit...*” - the world sees in us, and it is often our “*...fruit...*” more than our words that will draw others to Jesus. But this type of “*...fruit...*” is not automatic. Sometimes bearing “*...fruit...*” seems counterintuitive in some situations, and sometimes it’s really difficult to show “*...fruit...*” to those who are against us. But it is often our “*...fruit...*”, seen through our testimony, that separates us from the world. But “*...fruit...*” like this comes from time spent “*Walking in the Spirit*”, which simply means being alert to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our hearts as we go through our day. This alertness and eagerness to follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance comes from our “*...fellowship...*” with the Holy Spirit as we seek God’s presence in every aspect of our lives.
- **Affection and mercy** – The Bible tells us God loved us before we ever loved Him (1 John 4:19). This is an intensity of love we can scarcely understand. A love that sent Jesus from heaven to earth to willingly give His life for the life of His disobedient creation. Wrap your head around that for just a moment and then think about the “*...affection...*” and “*...mercy...*” the Lord has for us. So much so He would sacrifice Himself even though He already knew the sins we would commit against Him. These are the same traits the Lord expects us to show to others. But we cannot have true “*...Fellowship of the Spirit...*” without “*...affection and mercy...*”. Neither can we have unity without “*...affection and mercy...*”, and we cannot forgive others without “*...affection and mercy...*”. These are key elements of the body of Christ we must show in our lives.
- **By being like-minded, having the same love** - and - **Being of one accord, of one mind** - Here in two similar phrases Paul stresses love again, but this time from the perspective of being “*...like-minded...*” and “*...of one accord...*”. In other words, in unity. He’ll discuss this again in chapter 4 when he asks the two

conflicting women to “**...be of the same mind in the Lord...**” (Philippians 4:2). Peter talks about this as well in 1 Peter 3:8 where he reminds us to “**...be of one mind...**”. As we’ve already discussed, Peter is also talking about the importance of being in unity as a body of believers, as we seek a position from where we can agree. It means we have a spirit of cooperation so we can move forward as a single body seeking the Lord's will in all we do. And it means we strive to support one another through good times and bad as we seek to glorify the Lord. That’s why Peter tells us to show unity by, “**...having compassion for one another...**”, “**...love as brothers...**”, “**...be tenderhearted...**” and “**...be courteous...**” (1 Peter 3:8b). These are all characteristics of a life lived for Jesus as we walk together in the Spirit.

- **Nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit** - So what does it look like when we exhibit character traits like those listed by Paul and Peter? Our lives will reflect Jesus more effectively to a lost world because we are reflecting characteristics diametrically opposed to what people see happening in society. In the iconic verse of Matthew 7:12, often called “*The Golden Rule*”, we are told, “**12. Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.**” That’s basically the same thing Paul is saying here. Being “**...selfish...**” and in some cases having “**...ambition...**” can result in focusing too much on ourselves, and when we do that it leads to “**...conceit...**”, which is basically thinking more of ourselves than we do of others. Paul reminded the church at Corinth of this potential failure when he tells us to think less of ourselves and more of others. (1 Corinthians 10:24). And Jesus Himself illustrated this in the most profound way possible when He left His home in heaven to die for His sinful creation on the cross (Hebrews 9:11-15). These are the character traits the fallen world needs to see in our testimony because they are the characteristics the world needs to see in unified believers as we seek to walk through this difficult world together with a spirit of optimism and joy that comes from our salvation as we show the world the power of Christ in our unity. — But is that what people see in us? Do they see the fruit of the Spirit through our actions and words, or do they see the same characteristics they see in the rest of the world? In other words, does the lost world watching our lives see a testimony that shows them Jesus is real and living in us?
- **Lowliness of mind** - Earlier in his life Paul may have had a hard time thinking like this. Prior to his conversion to Christianity Paul was a Pharisee who had been trained under the very best rabbinical teachers (Philippians 3:5). He prided himself in arresting, imprisoning and even executing those who followed the Carpenter from Nazareth. But now Paul was a humble man and a servant of the Lord. A poor and homeless wanderer traveling the Mediterranean region to share the gospel, and doing so under great persecution. Paul was now a

humble man, giving his life to the work of Jesus, who Himself came to earth with a ***“...lowliness of mind...”***, to offer us His grace, ***“29. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*** (Matthew 11:29)

- ***Esteem others better than himself*** - and - ***The interests of others*** - The result of all these character traits - love, fellowship, affection, mercy, joy, unity and humility - means we will focus more on others than we do ourselves. Jesus explained this in the extreme sense when He said, ***“13. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”*** (John 15:13). What makes that statement even more profound is the fact Jesus said this knowing how wicked we are and how physically painful it would be for Him to give His life for His sinful creation. This is the model we must follow.

These character traits are not simply suggestions. They are the Lord’s desire for our lives. Let’s all strive to show these to a world growing darker by the day and draw them to Jesus. But these character traits are also critical to a unified body of believers. The Lord stresses this in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 where He uses the example of a human body to illustrate how our unity is tied to our function, and our collective ability to serve the Lord, ***“12. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 14. For in fact the body is not one member but many. 15. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? 16. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? 17. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? 18. But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 19. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? 20. But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 21. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” 22. No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 23. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, 24. but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, 25. that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”***

In order to function effectively as a church – the body of Christ – we need to think of ourselves this way. As a collection of interwoven parts, brought together and functioning seamlessly to achieve a common goal. The furtherance of the gospel. When we think about each other that way, we will be less prone to division and more encouraged to be in unity.

Lesson #9 - Philippians Chapter 2, verses 5-11

Quick Recap:

In the first part of chapter 2 Paul began a discussion about unity. This may be leading up to chapter 4 where he will make a public example of two women in the Philippian church who were in disunity, and instructs them to “**...be of the same mind in the Lord...**” (Philippians 4:2). To accomplish this, Paul reminds us to show unity in our testimony by encouraging us to exhibit love, fellowship, affection, mercy, and joy in our lives so we can be of one accord and esteem others more than ourselves.

Now Paul will help us understand the outcome of these character traits and he will do so by discussing the humanity of Jesus.

Philippians chapter 2 verses 5-11

Verses 2:5-11

Here in verses 5-11 Paul provides a beautiful backstory to the gospel. The fact that God - Jesus - came to earth as a man in order to take the sin of man on Himself so God's plan of redemption could be offered to us through Him. Once we understand the sacrifice made by Jesus for our sin, we can make a mental connection between the Old Testament sacrifice of a lamb in the temple and the sacrifice of the Lamb of God on the cross. It is the same story throughout the entire Bible with the New Testament revealing what the Old Testament had already told us. To believers this makes perfect sense, but to those who are unbelievers and influenced by the world, it is a truth that may be easier to reject than to accept.

But why is that? Possibly because Jesus came to earth in a way most people didn't expect. The Jews were looking for a warrior King who would defeat the Roman occupation and free Israel from their grip. Gentiles were looking for other types of mythical “gods” to worship. In neither case were they looking for a poor, homeless Carpenter from a small town. In essence Jesus came in a disguise. That's why the self-righteous Jews, religious zealots and Pharisees didn't recognize Him. They didn't have faith, but were instead looking for a sign.

Verse 5

In verse 5 Paul reminds us to have a mindset like Jesus. A posture of humility exhibiting the character traits he outlined in verses 1-4. These characteristics will result in a testimony that is affirming of Jesus through our lives and can draw others to Him by the example we set. But these traits often require a drastic change in our lives. Paul speaks to this in Romans 6:6 when he reminds us, **“...6. knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.”** In other words, our **“...old man...”** is replaced at salvation by a **“...new man...”** (Ephesians 4:24), which in essence is what is meant when we say we are spiritually **“...born again...”** (John 3:3). This transition, from lost to saved, and old to new, begins a process called **“sanctification”**, which simply means as we mature in our faith we grow closer to Jesus and strive to become more like Him. But sanctification requires effort on our part to adjust our thinking from worldly priorities to focus first and foremost on our Lord. That’s why Paul says, **“...5. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...”** (Philippians 2:5). Our transition to the **“...new man...”** is a drastic change in our consciousness. And it is this change that enables us to have a powerful testimony because, **“24. ...those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”**

Verses 6-8

But then Paul goes a bit further to explain a key element of the gospel by helping us understand what Jesus actually did when He came to earth as a man. He reminds us that Jesus is God - fully God - and as part of the Trinity, is equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. So the phrase **“...coming in the likeness of men...”** (Philippians 2:7) means so much more than we might initially think. Jesus came to earth as a man, by becoming a real human so He could live with us, and live like us (but without sin), and in doing so, take the sin of man on Himself. And then He died in our place. Just like the perfect animal in the garden died for the sins of Adam (Genesis 3:21), the perfect Lamb of God died for the sins of all mankind. In order to accomplish this task Jesus humbled Himself in a way that’s difficult for us to understand. He left His eternal home in absolute glory and allowed Himself to be born into abject poverty. Into the life of a common man, in a common village, who lived a meager life and worked with His hands. A fully human man who felt pain, hunger and exhaustion just like we do, but a man who exhibited the character traits of compassion, love and humility in every circumstance and situation. Even though Jesus is the King of kings, for a time He became a Servant of servants as He sought to draw His human creation to Himself. And in doing so, Jesus took our sin on Himself because He had no sin of His own (2 Corinthians 5:21). He took my sin and your sin as if they were His sin and He took

them to the cross where He gave His life for us. That fact, the truth that our sin put our King on the cross, should cause us to be broken over our sin.

So let's think about how difficult it was for a first-century Jew or idol worshipping Gentile to understand all this. They needed to fully grasp the fact that God would be willing to become a human and suffer and die for His disobedient creation, just so He could forgive us and enjoy our company for eternity. To understand the reality of this they would first have to understand what Jesus did by thinking about the immeasurable difference between the glorious King from heaven and the poor Carpenter from Bethlehem. To do that, Paul reminds us that our sovereign Lord became the ultimate sacrifice, a Lamb, represented by the humblest of animals, who was, ***"...obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."*** (Philippians 2:9). That event, His death and subsequent resurrection, is the most profound example of His servitude and humility, ***"...26. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – 28. just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*** (Matthew 20:26-28)

So here in chapter 2 Paul reminds the Philippians of the suffering Jesus went through and the fact He came as a ***"...bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men..."*** (Philippians 2:7). This would help them understand the true depth and magnitude of the gospel message because of the severe price paid for our redemption. But that fact was not always easy to understand, and it still eludes billions of people today. So let's think about it this way. Paul lived several years after the original apostles and had the benefit of ministering after the crucifixion and resurrection had occurred. That meant he could point back to those actual events when explaining the gospel. But the original apostles didn't have the benefit of hindsight during Jesus' ministry, so understanding how the gospel would unfold was not immediately clear to them. So Jesus sought to help them understand His role by illustrating the connection between Himself and the temple sacrifice they were so familiar with. He did this at the Last Supper, and just prior to His crucifixion, when He took the bread and juice of the Passover meal and used it to illustrate who He is and why His death was necessary, ***"...26. And as they were eating [the Passover meal], Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." 27. Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."*** (Matthew 26:26-28 - underline added). To the apostles, who were Jews and had been raised under a regime of strict Jewish customs, it would have probably sounded really odd for Jesus to take the bread and juice and say they were His body and His blood. Remember, He did this before His crucifixion and resurrection so they did not yet fully understand the whole story. So Jesus used this occasion as an object

lesson to help them understand how the temple sacrifice pointed to Him (Luke 24:26-27 / Isaiah 53). This would help them make the connection between Jesus, who is the **"...the Lamb of God..."** (John 1:29b), the symbology of the sacrificial lamb in the temple, and even back to the animal sacrificed in the garden for the sin of Adam. So He told His apostles, **"...*this is My body...*"** and **"...*this is My blood...*"**, **"...*which is shed for you...*"** (Luke 22:19-20 - Underline added). To make this illustration, Jesus used the Passover elements of bread (body) and drink (blood) to help them make the mental connection between Himself and the sacrifice made for generations in the tabernacle. Culturally it would have been very difficult for them to understand why Jesus was now saying the Mosaic observance of Passover was actually pointing to His body and His blood as the Spotless Lamb, because He had not yet died. Therefore they did not yet understand the significance of the events that would transpire over the next few days.

However, to prepare them for this explanation Jesus had already told His apostles He would be killed and resurrected. And yet, they did not understand the significance of what He said because it had not yet occurred.

We see this in several places:

- Luke 9:43-45– ***43. But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did, He said to His disciples, 44. "Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men." 45. But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying.***
 - Jesus wanted them to understand - ***"...sink down in your ears..."*** - about His coming death and resurrection. But for now, the true meaning was hidden by their lack of understanding because it had not yet occurred.
- John 12:32-33 - ***32. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." 33. This He said, signifying by what death He would die.***
 - Here Jesus is discussing His crucifixion.
- Matthew 17:22-23 – ***22. Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, 23. and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up." And they were exceedingly sorrowful.***

- Here Jesus clearly explains His coming death and resurrection, which they must have understood to some degree because they were ***“...exceedingly sorrowful...”***.
- Mark 9:31-32 – ***“31. For He taught His disciples and said to them, ‘The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.’ 32. But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him.”***
 - Not only did Jesus tell them about His death and resurrection, but He ***“...taught...”*** them. Which means He must have explained it to them.

Clearly, Jesus had informed His apostles about the coming crucifixion and resurrection, but they didn't fully understand the implication of what He was saying because it had not yet physically happened. First they had to get through the mental hurdle of understanding their Messiah would have to die - something they could not imagine. That meant their Savior and King would have to endure humility and death they were not prepared to accept (Matthew 16:22). So using the Passover meal as an illustration Jesus wanted them to understand why He had to die. He wanted them to understand He is the sacrificed Lamb of God and help them make the connection between the object lesson of the temple sacrifice and His own coming sacrifice. He wanted them to understand the sacrifice in the garden (Genesis 3:21), the sacrifice for Isaac (Genesis 22:8) and the sacrifice in the temple (Leviticus 3:7) all pointed to Him (John 1:29b). That was a tough pill to swallow for a group of devout Jewish men who had waited their whole lives for a warrior King.

So how were they able to put all of this together?

I think we see that in Luke 24:44-48, which indicates the apostles were able to understand the essence of the gospel prior to the ascension of Jesus to heaven.

- ***“...44. Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ 45. And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. 46. Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47. and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48. And you are witnesses of these things.’”***

Here Jesus explains it all to them, and in doing so He ***“...opened their understanding...”*** that His death and resurrection was for the ***“...repentance and***

remission of sins...", (salvation) for **"...all nations..."**. Then He told them to go preach this message in His name. This aligns with the *"Great Commission"* in Matthew 28:19, when Jesus told the apostles to **"...Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..."**. --- In both passages Jesus tells them to go to the whole world to preach the message of repentance through His death and resurrection, and to make disciples of new believers. That message is the gospel and it was now clear to them.

In his commentary on these verses from Luke 24 Warren Weirsbe writes,

- *"...Jesus not only helped them understand the law, the prophets and the Psalms, but He also reminded them of what He had taught them, and He explained how it all fit together. Now they began to understand the necessity of His suffering and death and how the cross related to the promise of the kingdom."*

From this we can see the apostles now knew what message to preach because they understood the role of the cross in the **"...repentance and remission of sins..."**. This would help them see Jesus through the lens of the gospel as, **"...The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!..."** (John 1:29b). Interestingly, many years later when Jesus gave the apostle John His revelation of the end-times John saw Jesus in heaven. There, John, who apparently was the only apostle who actually saw Jesus crucified described what he saw as, **"...and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain..."** (Revelation 5:6). John, who may have been the only apostle who saw Jesus alive, dead and resurrected saw Him as only John could - as the crucified and resurrected Lamb of God (see John 19:25-27).

But what we really need to remember is it's been over two thousand years since this was made crystal clear, and yet the majority of people still don't understand Jesus today. That's why it's so important for us to tell them and help them make the same connection the apostles eventually did.

So here in Philippians Paul goes back to the basics of the gospel to help his readers better understand the humility of Jesus who came from heaven to be a **"...bondservant..."** and **"...in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself..."** to become a sacrifice for us. When you think of Jesus this way we can better understand why He is compared to an innocent and unassuming sacrificial lamb. It is a reminder of what Jesus did for His disobedient creation and should have encouraged the Philippian believers to avoid false teaching (Philippians 1:15-18) and disunity (Philippians 2:1-4). It should also help us understand the sacrifice our Savior made for our lives and draw us to, **"...Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus..."** (Philippians 2:5).

Verses 9-11

In verses 5-8 Paul reminds us of the humanity of Christ when He took on the flesh of man and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Now in verses 9-11 Paul gives us a glimpse of Jesus in a different setting. A time when Jesus will reign supreme on earth and then in heaven. A time diametrically opposed to the years He spent on earth as a man. Jesus, who was sent by God the Father as a sacrifice (John 3:16) would now be **“...highly exalted...”** in heaven where He rejoined the Father and Holy Spirit on their throne (Mark 16:19 / Hebrews 12:2). And now, His holy name, which had been ridiculed in the synagogues and streets of Israel would be praised above every name as our Lord, **“...16. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS...”** (Revelation 19:16).

Here Paul speaks of a time when every knee shall bow in worship of the King of kings. (Isaiah 45:23 / Romans 14:11). So when will this occur? I think of three specific times when the world will acknowledge Jesus as Lord and King:

- During the Millennial Kingdom Jesus will reign on earth for a thousand years. At the inception of that reign everyone on earth will be a believer, **“...And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”** (Revelation 20:4 // Zechariah 8:20-22). But after that, for a brief time, a portion of mankind will rebel again (Revelation 20:7-10).
- At the Great White Throne Judgment every lost soul who rejected Jesus in their life will stand before Him to receive their sentencing to hell (Revelation 20:11-15). At that point every disbelieving person will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, but it will be too late.
- In eternity, as we live with Jesus in the New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem, He will reign supreme in our hearts forever, **“3. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. 4. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. 5. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.”** (Revelation 22:3-5) – Thank You Lord Jesus.

Here in chapter 2 Paul mentions God the Father and Jesus, God the Son, but not God the Holy Spirit (Philippians 2:11). So this might be a good point to take a brief side trip for just a moment to discuss our doctrinal belief in the *“Trinity”* of God and the role of Jesus.

To do that we need to understand what the Trinity actually means.

We believe the Bible teaches there is one God - one Supreme Creator - who exists eternally in three equal but distinct persons: God The Father, God The Son and God The Holy Spirit. The three persons of God are three separate and eternal beings who function as one. They are not created and have always existed. They are not angels or any other heavenly host. They are unique and divine, and identical as God, but different in their individual roles. They are equal in divinity, power and glory, and have the same divine attributes and perfections. In their role as the Trinity they function in concert - as One - but in separate and complementary roles. Always in unity and never conflicting.

It's sometimes difficult for us to understand the overall person of God. As Isaiah proclaims, ***"8. 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord. 9. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.'***" (Isaiah 55:8-9). The three persons of God are not created beings. They have always existed through eternity and will always exist in the future. As the Psalmist describes, ***"2. Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God."*** (Psalm 90:2) In other words, before there was any creation as we know it, God the Creator already existed, ***"...from everlasting to everlasting..."***, which means forever and ever. Jesus reminds us of this eternity in Revelation 1:8 when He says, ***"8. 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,' says the Lord, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'"*** Here Jesus declares His power across all time: ***"...who is..."*** [present], ***"...who was..."*** [past], and ***"...who is to come..."*** [future]. As difficult as it may be to wrap our head around this, the eternity of God is a fact we must accept through faith.

God is unique. He is not one God functioning in three roles. He is three distinct persons of God with each having their own role. Yet in their specific duties they function together in perfect unity. Clearly, the three persons of God are eternal, and as such are all-knowing and therefore sovereign over all things; past, present and future (Genesis 1:1-2 // John 1:1-14). But ok, given all this, why do we believe God exists as a *"Trinity"* when the term is not specifically used in the Bible? To answer that question we need to look at scripture. The fact there is one God who exists as three persons is made clear in many verses.

Here are just a few (underlines added):

- Isaiah 6:8 - ***“8. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”***
- Genesis 1:26 - ***“26. Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”***
- Genesis 3:22a - ***“22. Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil .”***
- And in the Aaronic Blessing, Numbers 6:24-26, we see an interesting view of plurality, ***“24. “The Lord bless you and keep you; 25. The Lord make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; 26. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.”*** Here the three references to ***“...The Lord...”*** use the Hebrew root word “Adonais”, which in this grammatical form is interpreted as a “plural of majesty”.

All of these verses speak to the plurality of God by using words like ***“...Us...”*** and ***“...Our...”***. Plural root words that indicate more than one being. Yet even though the Bible speaks of God in a plural sense it does not specifically use the word “Trinity” to describe God's plural nature. But an investigation of scripture reflects numerous examples of God clearly identified as three distinct individuals. For example, in Genesis chapter 1 we see the creation narrative and there we observe two distinct persons of God, ***“1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”*** (Genesis 1:1-2 - underline added). Here we see God described as two persons and in two different roles. First is God the Father, who is seen in the act of creating and who is simply described as ***“...God...”***. This name comes from the Hebrew root word “Elohim”, the plural masculine noun for “divine God”. We also see the ***“...Spirit of God...”***, or the “Holy Spirit”, derived from the word “Ruach” in Hebrew, which in this context means the “Breath of God”. Like God the Father, God the Holy Spirit is described as a distinct person and is seen moving in His creation role alongside the Father, and both are seen taking action in the creation process. But where is Jesus, the third part of the Triune God during creation? For that, let's go to the Book of John, ***“1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2. He was in the beginning with God. 3. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”*** (John 1:1-3). Here we see the ***“...Word...”*** described as God and as the Creator. But who is the ***“...Word...”***? Verse 14 tells us, ***“...14. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory,***

the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Clearly, the “**...Word...**” is Jesus. In the original Greek the term used here for “**...Word...**” is “*Logos*”, which Strong’s Concordance defines as “*...preeminently used of Christ expressing the thoughts of the Father through the Spirit...*”. This is talking about Jesus, who came to earth as a man (“**...made flesh...**”) in order to dwell with man and take our human sin to the cross.

This is the point Paul is making here in Philippians. Jesus could die for the sins of man because He was fully man, and yet at the same time He was fully God, and being God He is equal to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Paul confirms Jesus is God by clarifying He is not only, “**...in the form of God...**”, but is “**...equal with God...**”. But also that He came “**...in appearance as a man...**”, who was “**...in the likeness of men...**” (Philippians 2:6-7). This “**...appearance...**” or form, is the earthly state of Jesus who was “**...made flesh...**” (refer back to John 1:14 above). In other words, Jesus, who is God, came to earth in the form of a man in order to take our human sin upon Himself, “**9. But we see Jesus, [in His human form] who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.**” (Hebrews 2:9). So given all that, we can understand “**...the Word...**” is Jesus, who John also clarifies “**...was God...**” [is God], and He was part of the creation process because, “**...3. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.**” (John 1:3). Taken together with Genesis 1:2 it becomes clear Jesus is God, just as the Father and the Holy Spirit are God, and it clarifies Jesus was part of the initial creation process. Which means, creation was the product of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit working together as One.

But even Jesus’ disciples had some difficulty understanding this distinction as we see in a conversation between Jesus and Phillip in John 14:7-13. There Jesus explains if you have seen Him you have seen the Father, because they are One. In this conversation Jesus is explaining the unique relationship between God the Father and God the Son as two individuals who function as One but in different roles. Specifically, Jesus was on earth to do the bidding of the Father who is in heaven, so that the Father is glorified through the Son so that the triune God is glorified through their combined work. But where is the Holy Spirit in all this? You’ll recall, with the exception of specific applications in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit did not indwell believers until Pentecost and after Jesus had ascended and was replaced by the Holy Spirit, (Acts 2:1-6). Prior to His crucifixion Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come to replace Him, “**26. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.**” (John 14:26). Here Jesus separately references three distinct persons: Himself, “**...in My name...**”, “**...the Father...**” and the “**...Holy Spirit...**”. Again, this

clearly indicates three distinct individuals with distinct names and roles. Jesus reconfirmed this in Acts 1:8 when He identifies both Himself and the Holy Spirit separately. This provides another clear distinction between God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Specifically, once the Holy Spirit comes upon believers we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit to be a witness for Jesus and to glorify the Father. We see this distinction applied in the Lord's commandment to share the gospel. ***"18. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20. teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.."*** (Matthew 28:18-20). We also see this in the Lord's description of how we are indwelt by the triune God through the Holy Spirit in John 14:23, ***"23. Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."***

So here in Philippians Paul confirms the role of God the Son in the plan of redemption. Jesus came to earth as a man, yet was still fully God in order to pay the sin debt of God's disobedient creation. We see this in the second part of John 1:14, ***"14. And the Word [Jesus] became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."*** As we've discussed, the first part of this verse ***"...flesh..."*** describes the human role of Jesus as the Son of Man, but the reference to ***"...His glory..."*** speaks to His divine role as the Son of God. Combined, these two attributes attest to Jesus being both fully man and fully God. To accomplish this, Jesus came in the most humble way. Through a poor human named Mary, but without the intervention of a human Father, (Luke 1:30-35). And yet, even though Jesus, in the form of man, came to earth through a human birth, He was not created. He is divine and eternal just as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. But Jesus' unique earthly role was to live life as a man - but without sin - so He could take the sin of man on Himself, and die as a man, but then be raised victorious as God.

- He came to die for the sins of man.
 - ***"26. Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"*** (Luke 24:26)
- But He was still fully God and sinless.
 - ***"21. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*** (2 Corinthians 5:21)
- And as our perfect sacrifice He became the perfect Great High Priest.
 - ***"15. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."*** (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus is one with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit and is equal in every way, ***“30. I and My Father are one.”*** (John 10:30), but Jesus is the visible representation of God to man, ***“15. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”*** (Colossians 1:15). In this role, Jesus enables man to have a personal relationship with our Savior. A Savior who has lived an earthly life and understands our difficulties and trials, (Hebrews 4:14-15). But to us, His faithful followers, Jesus is the ***“...Word...”*** (John 1:14), who proclaims the voice of God to us (Hebrews 1:1-2), as He does the will of the Father (John 6:39-40), as the sacrificed Lamb of God (John 1:29) who takes away the sins of the world. And most importantly, it is only through faith in the work of Jesus on the cross that man may be redeemed of our sin, ***“12. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*** (Acts 4:12)

Thank You Jesus

Lesson #10 - Philippians Chapter 2, verses 12-18

Quick Recap:

In the first part of chapter 2 Paul emphasized our need for unity. This is critical to our testimony as individuals and as the church, in order to reflect Jesus in our lives and draw people to Him. Paul then explores the humanity of Jesus and reminds us of the sacrifice He made by coming to earth as a human in order to take our human sin on Himself and defeat it on the cross. That reminder should break our hearts over our own sin when we think about what our King of kings did for us.

Now Paul will return again to a discussion about our testimony and how important it is for the lost world to see Jesus through our lives.

Philippians chapter 2 verses 12-18

Verses 2:12

Let's make sure we don't misinterpret verse 12. When Paul says ***"...work out your own salvation..."*** he doesn't mean working *"for"* our salvation, as if to earn it, but working it ***"...out..."*** as we grow in our faith. In other words, it's like approaching a task and saying *"Let's determine how we're going to work this out."* Paul clearly refutes the notion of works-based salvation in Ephesians 2:8-9, ***"8. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9. not of works, lest anyone should boast."*** Salvation can only come through our faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (John 14:6). That's because ***"...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."***, and God's standard for glory is measured by Christ on the cross. Nothing we would ever do could merit enough credit to outdo what Jesus has already done for us. That's why our works are to God like filthy rags, (Isaiah 64:6), because our works, no matter how amazing they might be, pale in comparison to what Jesus did. But writing here to the Philippian believers Paul stresses the importance of our testimony and of the growth and unity of the church. That growth is called *"sanctification"*, which you'll recall from our earlier discussion is the process we go through after we're saved to grow in our faith and become more like Jesus. This growth is not easy and often requires a radical change in our viewpoint, behavior, desires and actions. But this transformation, and the efforts we make to live our lives for Jesus is how we ***"...work out your own salvation..."***. That applies to both individual believers and the body of Christ as a whole. For example, when you study God's word in order to be more spiritually equipped (Ephesians 4:11-16), you are

“...working out...” the knowledge you need to understand the word and apply it to your life. Likewise, when a church works together on Bible study or discipleship they are **“...working out...”** the knowledge and skills they need to grow spiritually and minister to the world. This is not working to earn salvation, but is working to grow in your faith and grow closer to the Lord after we are saved. Paul recognized the Philippian church was under persecution, were being influenced by outside false teaching (see Lesson #5 and 7), and as we’ll see in chapter 4, also suffered from some internal disunity. So Paul stresses the effort to **“...work out...”** the details of their faith so they would be stronger in doctrine and better able to understand how to live as true believers. It is a message that applies to us as well.

Also, working through our spiritual growth **“...with fear and trembling...”** doesn't mean growing in our faith by being afraid of God. In the original Greek this phrase can mean, *“One who distrusts his ability to meet all requirements, but religiously does his utmost to fulfill his duty.”* (Strongs). It means we feel inadequate in our faith but consciously strive to live our life as a testimony for the Lord. Also, the Greek root word for **“...fear...”** can be defined as *“Reverence and respect”*. In both cases, the terms represent the awe and wonder we should have as we approach our all holy God and realize what Jesus did for us. As we seek to grow in our faith and be more like Jesus we should recognize how inadequate we are to meet His expectations, but we should always seek to please Him by seeking to be obedient to His commands. It is this realization of our inadequacy that makes us humble, and it is our humility that allows us to approach our Lord in the right mindset. As Proverbs 1:7 reminds us, ***“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.”***

Verses 2:13

So how is sanctification even possible in our current human condition and with all of our inherent weaknesses? Verse 13 tells us, **“...for it is God who works in you...”**. As a believer we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17) who brings the power of God into our lives (John 14:23), and imparts gifts we can use to edify the body and glorify the Lord (Ephesians 4:11-16). As we seek to live our lives as a testimony God works in and through us to achieve His will. That’s why Paul calls us a **“...living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God...”** (Romans 12:1). Here Paul is reflecting back on the sacrifice in the temple, which was a prophetic testimony pointing to the future Lamb of God on the cross. But he also points out that in our case we are a **“...living sacrifice...”** because our lives are a living testimony of Jesus to the world. A testimony **“...transformed by the renewing of your mind...”** (Romans 12:2b) which again is part of the process of sanctification after we’re saved. But let’s remember, our obedience and service to God should not be focused on us and our achievements, but

instead focused on the Lord and His will for our lives. Paul reminds us of this here in verse 13 when he tells us God works through us “**...for His good pleasure...**” - not our good pleasure. This reminds us of Romans 8:28 which basically says the same thing, “**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**” (underline added)

Pay close attention to what this verse says:

- First, it tells us “**...all things work together...**”. It doesn't say just “good” things. It says “**...all things...**”. That means God can use the trials and challenges in our lives “**...for good...**” if it achieves “**...His purpose...**” .
- Second, it reminds us we are, “**...called according to His purpose.**” Not our purpose, but for “**...His purpose...**”. His will, His commandments, and His direction for our lives.
- Taken together, Romans 8:28 and Philippians 2:13 reminds us God “**...works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.** It is His “**...will...**”, His “**...purpose...**” and His “**...good pleasure...**” we should seek to live.

But far too often we try to fit God into our own plans rather than surrendering to the plans God has for us. But why do we do that? Because we don't think about the fact God already has a plan for us. In Jeremiah 29:11a the Lord tells us, “**For I know the plans I have for you...**”. Likewise, Psalm 139:16 speaks of God fashioning our days before we live the first one. That's amazing. God has a plan and He has fashioned our days to achieve that plan so we can glorify Him. But we often fail to heed that promise and strike off on our own path, and with our own plan, and hope God comes along for the ride. But that simply won't work. God fashions our days for us and prepares plans for us so we can glorify Him “**...according to His purpose...**” and “**...for His good pleasure...**”. Certainly the Lord wants us to live a fruitful and joyful life, but more importantly, He wants our life to glorify Him as a “**...living sacrifice...**” and a testimony for Jesus.

Verses 2:14-16

But being a “**...living sacrifice...**” is not always as easy as it sounds. So how do we actually do that when our human tendency, even as a believer, will allow us to get angry and do other things that damage our testimony? So Paul reminds us to “**...Do all things...**” in a way that reflects the love of Jesus to a lost world. Think for just a moment about what he's really saying. We must do “**...all things...**” in the right mindset and attitude. But have you ever really thought about what “**...all things...**” really means? Sure, all of us strive to some degree to be more like Jesus when we're in church or around other believers, but what about when we're at home, or work, or when faced with a tough situation in life? How do we act and react when no one is looking or when we're frustrated or aggravated? Well... “**...all...**” includes those times

too - the good and the bad. So here Paul tells us to do **“...all things without complaining and disputing...”** (arguing and criticism). All of a sudden **“...all things...”** doesn't sound so easy does it? Granted, I'm sure there are people who can get through the day without finding some reason to complain or argue, but for a lot of folks complaining and arguing is so second-nature they may not even realize they're doing it. What about how we react to stress, or maybe raise our voice, or share gossip, or how we respond on social media? All of that, if done in the wrong way, can be considered **“...complaining and disputing...”** even when we don't recognize it. And all of that can be sinful and damage our testimony or cause disunity in the church.

But why is all of that so important? I mean, is it such a big deal to complain and argue? Yes it is, and Paul tells us why. Because we're **“...children of God...”** and as such we are His representatives on earth. In 2 Corinthians 5:20 the Lord reminds us we are, **“...ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us...”**. Wow. Think about that. As His ambassadors - His representatives - to **“...a crooked and perverse generation...”** (Philippians 2:14b) God pleads through us. That means He pleads with the lost world through our attitude, our voice, our words and our actions. So how does that work when the world sees us **“...complaining and disputing...”**? Is that what the world sees or hears when God pleads **“...through us...”**? I think that's something we need to think about all the time. I know I need to.

But again, why is this so important? Because we are to **“...shine as lights in the world...”**. And not only that, we are to shine in the **“...midst [while living in] of a crooked and perverse generation...”**. In Luke 11:33-36 Jesus reminds us to be the light. Not to hide it under a basket, but to let our light shine to the world and to, **“...take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness...”** (Luke 11:36b). We are the light because Jesus is in us and He is, **“...the light of the world...”**, and those of us who follow Him, **“...shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”** (John 8:12b/c). Simply, we can share the eternal hope of Jesus with a hopeless world headed for an eternity in hell. So as we walk through this ever-darkening world, we must do so as a light for Jesus as we spread the truth of the gospel, and give them the **“...word of life...”**. This is Paul's ultimate desire. To preach the gospel and help others do the same thing (1 Corinthians 1:23). He does so for the same reason we should. So when we stand with Jesus in eternity and see those to whom we shared the message of the gospel we'll know we **“...have not run in vain or labored in vain...”**. As Paul further reminds us in 1 Corinthians 15:58, **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”**

Verses 2:17

In verse 17 Paul says he is “**...poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service...**”. So what exactly is a “**...drink offering...**” and what does it mean to be “**...poured out...**”?

The first mention of a drink offering is found in Genesis 35:14 when Jacob poured out an offering to memorialize his encounter with God at Bethel. Typically during the burnt offering in the tabernacle a cup of wine was poured on or around the altar to vaporize “**...as a sweet aroma to the LORD...**” (Numbers 15:7) (See also, Genesis 35:14 / Exodus 29:40 / Leviticus 23:13 / Numbers 15:1-10). But here in Philippians, Paul is comparing his life to an offering being “**...poured out...**” as a total sacrifice for Jesus. Paul made a similar comment to Timothy near the end of his life, “**...6. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.**” (2 Timothy 4:6-7) Paul had given all he had for the gospel of Christ. He was “**...poured out...**” and to express this fact he uses a sporting analogy. He says he had “**...fought the good fight...**” and “**...finished the race...**” by being faithful to Jesus through all of his trials and persecutions. Later, in chapter 3 of Philippians Paul will use another foot-race analogy to help us understand the end goal of finishing the race for, “**...the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**” (3:14b). But here, to the Philippians, Paul is also helping his readers understand the extent, “**...the sacrifice...**” to which he will go to spread the gospel. He is all in. Not just a bystander, but is totally and completely invested in the work of sharing Jesus as a “**...living sacrifice...**” (Romans 12:1a).. To illustrate his sacrifice Paul uses the term “**...service...**” which in the original Greek, “*Leitourgia*” is defined as a priestly service to the Lord. Such as the rites of a Levitical priest. Paul uses a form of the same word in Romans 12:1 to talk about our service as a living sacrifice. As believers, Peter reminds us we are all part of a “**...royal priesthood...**” who testify to the power of God in our lives (1 Peter 2:9b). Here Paul and Peter are not talking about religious busy-work, but the work of sharing the gospel. Paul’s “**...sacrifice...**” reminds us of what Jesus told Ananias when He selected Paul to be His apostle to the Gentiles, “**...16. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.**” (Acts 9:16). Likewise, the Holy Spirit told Paul “**...chains and tribulations await me...**” (Acts 20:23). So, Paul uses the illustration of a drink offering to help his readers understand the “**...sacrifice...**” required to share the gospel while in the “**...midst of a crooked and perverse generation...**”. (Philippians 2:15b). He wasn’t bragging, but was simply helping them understand the importance of what they did when witnessing for the Lord.

Lesson #11 - Philippians Chapter 2, verses 19-30

Quick Recap:

At the beginning of chapter 2 Paul talked about the need for unity. Both as individuals and in the church as a whole. This may be leading up to chapter 4 where he will discuss division and disunity amongst members of the body at Philippi. Paul then talks about our testimony and shares the example of Jesus who came as a lowly human in order to give His life for us. He continues to stress the importance of our testimony because it is often our actions, rather than our words, that draw the lost to Jesus.

Now Paul will shift gears a bit to talk about Timothy, his faithful helpmate, who Paul planned to send to Philippi to encourage the believers there. He also sends praise for Epaphroditus who had been sent to aid Paul during his imprisonment.

Philippians chapter 2 verses 19-30

Verse 2:19

So who was Timothy? For that, let's refer back to an excerpt from chapter 1 and Lesson #5:

- *Here in his greeting to the Philippian believers Paul mentions Timothy, a faithful coworker who he considered like his own child. We see this in his second letter to Timothy where Paul affectionately referred to him as, **"...Timothy, a beloved son..."** (2 Timothy 1:2). Timothy was from Lystra in Galatia (Asia Minor ,Lycaonia Anatolia) in modern day Turkey which is where Paul first met him, **"Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek."** (Acts 16:1). Timothy was the son of a Jewish woman named Eunice, who with his grandmother Lois were converts to Christianity. These were women of faith Paul recognized in his second instructional letter to Timothy, **"...when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also."** (2 Timothy 1:5). It appears Timothy may have already been a believer when Paul met him because Paul addressed him as **"...a certain disciple..."**, and because Timothy **"...was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium..."** (Acts 16:2). But Timothy's father, **"...was Greek..."**, or in other words, a Gentile,*

which means he may have been a pagan idol worshiper at some point. But as the son of both a Jew and a Gentile, Timothy would be uniquely qualified to share the gospel in either cultural context. That made him ideally suited to be a trusted co-laborer with Paul and as such he would travel with him throughout his ministry - even in prison (Hebrews 13:23).

Much more could be said about Timothy. He is mentioned over twenty times in Paul's letters and eventually replaced Paul when the elder apostle was executed. As a young minister Timothy was trained by Paul and received two of Paul's instructional letters (1 & 2 Timothy - see also 1 Corinthians 16:10). He was a trusted co-laborer, who loved the Lord and the church, and who not only shared Paul's ministry, but also his persecutions. Timothy became a trusted leader in several churches, including Ephesus where Paul stressed to him the common theme of unity and the importance of refuting false doctrine, **"...As I urged you when I went into Macedonia — remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith."** (1 Timothy 1:3-4) (See also 1 Corinthians 4:17 / Philippians 2:19)

And now Paul would send Timothy to Philippi for the same reason. To teach true doctrine and encourage the believers as they sought to, **"...work out your own salvation..."** (Philippians 2:12). But Paul also wanted Timothy to assess the spiritual condition of the church, and **"...know your state..."** so he could better understand their ministry needs. Sadly, Paul admits, **"...I have no one like-minded..."** to send other than Timothy. We see another example of this when he tells Timothy, **"...9. Be diligent to come to me quickly; 10. for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. 11. Only Luke is with me."** (2 Timothy 4:9-11). After all of his travels and being **"...poured out..."** through **"...sacrifice and service..."** Paul finds himself with few allies, and apparently no one but Timothy who was prepared to **"...sincerely care for..."** the church at Philippi. He references this condition in 2 Timothy 1:15 where he says, **"...all of those in Asia [Turkey] have turned away from me..."**. But to some degree that's understandable. Being a witness for Jesus was tough business in the Roman Empire. You were hated by Jews and Gentiles alike and probably faced persecution at every turn. That's why Paul explained to Timothy the importance of finding **"...faithful men who will be able to teach others and endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."** (2 Timothy 2:2b-3).

But all was not lost. Paul would gain other faithful co-workers. We know this because at the end of his letter to Rome Paul recognizes over 30 people by name and describes them with words like **"...beloved, fellow worker, labored much, fellow prisoners,**

approved in Christ, my countrymen, and chosen in the Lord...". (Refer to our Romans Study [on the church website, Lessons #48 & 49]).

But is it any different today? Probably not. We've all heard the term "*Fair Weather Christians*". Those Paul talked about who, "***...seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus...***" (Philippians 2:21). These are folks who put on a good face in church or when around other believers, but their lives are not a "***...living sacrifice...***" for Jesus, because when things get tough they are not the ones you can depend on for spiritual maturity and strength. I recall the first time I ever met a real persecuted Christian. I was in Thailand working with refugees who had been run out of their home countries because of their faith in Christ. When that happens they lose everything they own, but these individuals never lost their faith. I met dozens of these dear Brothers and Sisters but four of them stand out in my mind:

- An older man living in a 10x10 room. When I asked if he had been persecuted, he rolled up his sleeves and on the inside of each arm were large, ugly scars where he had been chopped with a machete. He looked me in the eye and said "*But I never denied Jesus.*"
- A woman who had just witnessed six of her family members arrested by the Immigration Police. They were being taken to the Immigration Detention Center where they might be held for months until someone could buy them out. They had committed no crime other than having an outdated Visa they could not afford to renew. This family had lost everything they owned and were secretly living on the third floor of a Thai brothel. The Mother, who must have been heartbroken at the arrest of her family, looked at me and said, "*I've lost everything, but I've never lost Jesus.*"
- A young pastor who asked me, "*Do you want to see a photo of my church?*" Of course I said yes. I wondered what a Pakistani church looked like. But what he showed me was not what I expected (although I should have). It was a photo of about a group of people sitting on the ground under some trees and the young pastor was standing up-front preaching to them. He told me, "*On their way to church each Sunday the muslims will line the road and beat them with sticks. The next day the women will be beaten in the market and the children will fail their tests in school. But next Sunday they will all be back and bring their friends.*" His comments affected me in a profound way. First, because I thought of the courage it took for them to go to church - knowing we might not do the same thing. But what really shamed me was the fact if he had asked me to show him a photo of my "church" I would have shown him a picture of our new sanctuary. I was so ashamed I could barely move.
- A young man from Pakistan with a beautiful wife and a little boy. Twenty-four members of his refugee family lived in a few hot, cramped rooms in a rundown building. Not five minutes after I met him, and before he even told me his name,

he started to share the gospel with me. I was supposed to be there to minister to his family, but instead, he was ministering to me. At one point he looked at me and said, *"I think God allowed me to be persecuted in Pakistan for twenty-three years so I could come to Thailand and share the gospel in this dark place."*

I went to Thailand thinking I would encourage them with my strong faith. But I came home like a whipped dog because I realized just how weak my Americanized faith really was. I had met people face to face who like Paul were **"...poured out..."** as a total sacrifice for Jesus, and I was ashamed that I was not. But I thought of Paul and Timothy and many others, who like these beautiful people have to, **"... endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."** (2 Timothy 2:3b).

My prayer is that we can be good soldiers too as we live our life for our Savior.

Verses 2:25-30

So who was Epaphroditus? Based on his name, which means *"Charming"* in Greek, it appears he was a Gentile. This could be key because Paul was a Jew and Timothy was part Jew and part Gentile. If Epaphroditus was a full Gentile it would give their team a cross-cultural understanding of how to share the gospel in both communities. Whoever he was, Epaphroditus must have been important to Paul for him to be mentioned so prominently in his letter. We get an indication of this from the fact Paul describes him with terms like **"...brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, and messenger..."** which shows great respect and admiration. Particularly from someone like Paul who had suffered so greatly for the cause of sharing the gospel. We can only imagine what Epaphroditus must have done to be viewed as a **"...fellow soldier..."** in Paul's eyes? Much we can assume. Apparently he was sent by the church from Philippi to help care for Paul in prison, (Philippians 4:18) but while there he fell ill. So ill he nearly died, and not only that, he nearly died by being poured out like Paul, **"...for the work of Christ he came close to death"** (Philippians 2:30a). But he was less concerned about himself than he was about the people back in Philippi who were worried about him, so Paul sent him back to Philippi. Not because he had done anything wrong, but because he had done everything right. He was a loyal companion, a fellow soldier and a trusted soul winner. So Paul asked the church at Philippi to receive Epaphroditus with joy. Although he was a blessing to Paul he must have also been a true blessing to his own church. May we strive to be the same.

Lesson #12 - Philippians Chapter 3, verses 1-11

Quick Recap:

In the first two chapters Paul addressed a number of important topics. He talked about the furtherance of the gospel, he warned the church about false teaching, stressed the importance of our testimony and unity, and shared the humility of Jesus. He also recognized Timothy and Epaphroditus. Two faithful men who played a key role in Paul's ministry.

Now in the third section of his letter Paul scribes some of the most inspiring words we have from God. This is a chapter that will encourage us in our walk as it challenges us to grow closer to the Lord.

Philippians chapter 3 verses 1-11

Verses 1-2

Although Paul starts this chapter with the word “...**Finally...**”, he is far from over. He does this to signify a slight shift in focus, and yet, he starts by repeating a warning he has given us before (See Philippians 1:15-16). A warning to beware of false teachers and their false doctrine. Particularly the Judiaziers who claimed to be Christians yet taught you had to conform to Jewish religious practices as part of earning salvation (See Acts 15). On the surface this might not sound so bad. Weren't the practices they followed part of the Old Testament process God had given Israel? Yes, for the most part. But those practices were to show obedience to God's commands and to illustrate the truth of the coming Messiah, but they never brought righteousness. If they had, that would constitute works-based salvation. Instead, the practices, rituals, sacrifices and other observances in Israel were simply there as a prophecy of the coming Messiah and to emphasize the faith we must have in God's promised redemption of sin. On top of that, the original requirements from God had in some cases been changed and expanded as the Jews searched for more ways to earn self-righteousness. And yet, with all of their focus on doing things they failed to understand salvation comes through their faith, not through their religion. But the Judiazers tried to tie Jewish practices to salvation, and when they did they basically negated the work of Christ on the cross by requiring their own works in an effort to earn salvation.

But the enemy creates that same confusion today doesn't he? Things like prosperity gospels, works-based gospels and reliance on church-initiated observances and ceremony. All of this may sound good and seem appropriate, but in reality they draw us away from the simple truth of the gospel of Jesus, the cross and the empty tomb. They

are also unBiblical but those who practice them don't even realize that. Because of this Paul refers to these false teachers as **"...dogs..."** and **"...evil workers..."** and describes their teaching as spiritual **"...mutilation ..."**. He pulls no punches in describing the risk these people and their "gospel" pose on the faithful church. That's why he told the church at Galatia, **"...As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed..."** (Galatians 1:9). It would do well for modern day pulpit charlatans, and social media influencers, to read these words and understand the risk they take by watering-down the gospel of Jesus and replacing it with a feel-good message. In doing so, they tread on dangerous ground.

Verses 3-6

So Paul clarifies our position as true believers by using the term **"...circumcision..."**. This word can be used to represent a physical change (see Genesis 17:10-14), but here Paul uses it to describe the spiritual change and separation we experience when we're saved. It is symbolic of separating us from the rest of the world, and separating our old life in sin from our new life in Christ. He explained this to the church at Colossae, **"11. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12. buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead."** (Colossians 2:11-12). This describes our change of heart, and change of position, when we accept Christ and are changed from the **"...Old Man..."** to the **"...New Man..."** (Ephesians 4:22-24). As a result, we have no confidence **"...in the flesh..."** or our ability to gain righteousness through our own efforts, so rituals like physical circumcision play no part in salvation. Neither do observance like baptism or the Lord's Supper. They are NOT required for salvation, but are simply a sign of obedience and represent the spiritual change in our lives.

To help us better understand this separation Paul uses the word **"...flesh..."** to describe our human condition and our sinful nature before we are saved. As he confesses in Romans 7:18, **"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find."** Paul uses himself as an example to illustrate the fact he must fight his fleshly desires just like everyone else does. He is very transparent and opens up his past to help others understand why we cannot earn righteousness no matter how gifted or religious we might be. Paul called himself **"...a Hebrew of the Hebrews..."**, which means he was fully qualified as a highly educated Jew, having trained under the tutelage of the celebrated Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He also came from the tribe of Benjamin, a favored son of king Jacob, and had become a Pharisee. In other words,

when it came to Jewish heritage and rituals Paul knew exactly what the Judiazers were talking about because he had lived it and taught those same practices as a Jewish leader. Even to the point of imprisoning and executing those who followed the Carpenter Jesus who he saw as a threat to Jewish traditions (Acts 22:4). But Paul had given all of that up in order to live his life for the Messiah. Admitting his Jewish heritage to his readers gave Paul credibility, both as a Jew and a Christian, which helped him defend his faith against false teachers. That's because his rabbinical education and role as a Pharisee would be viewed by many as a guaranteed route to heaven. But Paul knew better, and he wanted his readers to understand that all of our religious efforts are from the **"...flesh..."** and none of it would earn a single credit of righteousness. That's why he could say we **"... rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."** (Refer to Lesson #4 for a detailed discussion of Paul's early life and education).

Verses 7-11

So what did it cost Paul to be **"...poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service..."**? (Philippians 2:17). In his case he gave up everything. His rabbinical teaching, his celebrated position as a Pharisee, and probably all of his earthly possessions. Compare this to the attitude of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22. When Jesus asked him to forfeit his earthly wealth for a life of service to the Lord, **"...he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."** (Matthew 19:22). In reality Jesus didn't want or need the young man's possessions. Jesus simply wanted him to be obedient and understand the eternal value of following Jesus instead of following the world. That's why Paul explains his **"...loss..."** with one of the most profound statements in all of his epistles. He **"...counted..."** his **"...loss..."** by declaring it as a **"...gain..."**. He did this because everything he gave up in his earthly life was a **"...gain..."** because he had lost it **"...for Christ..."** and exchanged it for a heavenly reward. Like a modern day missionary who leaves the luxuries of the world to live deep in the jungle, Paul gave up everything he owned or had earned in order to carry the gospel to the world. And yet, when he looked at all the things he had lost - his home, his position, his comfort - he considered them as **"...rubbish..."**, because they were of no value or merit when compared to his eternal faith in Jesus Christ. This takes me back again to those refugees in their hot, cramped quarters in Thailand. People who had lost everything they owned, and yet, they could still say, *"I've lost everything, but I've never lost Jesus."* (Refer to Lesson #11).

To emphasize this point, Paul uses the words **"...count..."** or **"...counted..."** several times. This indicates he took the time to consider how his life had changed and what he had given up. By "counting" he was making an assessment and then comparing the temporary value of his earthly possessions to the eternal value of living his life for

Jesus. Given that model, it's so sad when modern-day followers of the Prosperity Gospel movement focus so much attention on their own earthly achievements and possessions when the Lord clearly tells us to focus on Him instead. I often wonder why followers of the Prosperity Gospel think the Lord will expect anything less from them than He did from Paul? The fact is, He won't, and He reminds us not to place value and priorities on earthly things, but instead to set our sights on him and eternal things. ***"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal."*** (Matthew 6:19). He also reminds us of the model He set for us when He said, ***"...And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.'"*** (Luke 9:58) But how many of us fail to do that every day? I admit, I do. Being completely transparent, I have a barn, three sheds and an attic full of stuff I don't need. I mean, I might use it at some point, but for the most part it is a collection of ***"...treasures on earth..."*** I have hoarded and kept (***"...lay up..."***) that eventually ***"...moth and rust destroy..."***. This is the sin of coveting, which is something I am desperately trying to change in my life. Why? Because the reality is, the things I once held dear I now ***"...count them as rubbish..."*** too.

As always, Paul uses every opportunity to stress the core message of the gospel. So he closes this section with verses 9-11 clarifying he is ***"...found in Him..."***, but not ***"...from the law..."*** or by ***"...my own righteousness..."***, but by ***"... faith in Christ..."***. It was important for him to repeat this, as he does in all of his letters, because his audience was largely Jews who believed in righteousness through religion or Gentiles who believed in righteousness through pagan works. Both groups had to come to the realization that righteousness only comes through faith in Christ. So Paul encourages his readers by reminding them of the ***"...power of His resurrection..."*** which is at the heart of our faith in Jesus. We often hear people talk about the life of Jesus and the death of Jesus, but at the core of our faith is belief in the ***"...resurrection..."*** of Jesus, through which He not only defeated sin, but defeated death. That same resurrection power exists in each of us as believers because we too will be resurrected at the Rapture of the church.

Our resurrection is a foundational doctrine we need to understand. So let's take a quick detour for a few minutes to review a part of Bible prophecy that is extremely important but commonly misunderstood – the difference between the ***"Rapture"*** and the ***"Second Coming"***.

For that let's refer back to an exempt from Lesson #6 of our Ruth study on the Feasts of Trumpets

- *The complete text of our Ruth study can be found on the church website under "Resources" and "Bible Studies"*

The Rapture - The Harvest of the Church

From the perspective of the church, the Rapture is the future time when redeemed believers will be gathered by the Lord and taken to heaven. This includes those who came to faith in Christ between Pentecost (Acts 2) and the end of the "Church Age". The time when Jesus will return to gather His bride - the church (Ephesians 5:22-33 / Revelation 19:9). An event spoken of by Paul to the church at Corinth, **"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."** (I Corinthians 15:51-52). This passage describes the "Rapture", not the "Second Coming", which we see in Revelation 19:11. The Rapture is the time when Jesus will return in the clouds to gather His bride and take her home, **"For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words."** (I Thessalonians 4:15-18). Key to understanding this passage is the use of the term **"...caught up..."** which is the English translation of a Latin translation of the Greek word *"Harpazo"*, which means to "catch up or snatch up". This is important because it helps us understand how Jesus will bring us **"...up..."** to Him **"...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."** Not on the ground as we will see at the Second Coming. The Second Coming is a later event when Jesus will return as the Warrior King to avenge His fallen creation and regather His nation of Israel into His earthly Kingdom (Revelation 19:11). Please don't confuse the two events.

The Rapture is a harvest of sorts, when Jesus, the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23) comes to gather the fruits of the gospel seed that have been planted during the Church Age. This is the future fulfillment of the beautiful promise made by Jesus to His followers, **"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."** (John 14:2-3). This speaks to, **"...the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him..."** described in 2 Thessalonians 2:1. The day when believers will be gathered by our Sower and transformed into our glorified eternal state. **"So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. [the Rapture] The body that is sown is**

perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:42-44) The Rapture is the final outcome of centuries of sowing the seeds of the gospel and the harvest of the field of believers (Matthew 9:37). It will be the gathering of believers who have waited through a long "Age of Grace" for the harvest of redeemed souls. Until then, the age we live in has given time for us to plant new seeds so they can grow and mature and be made ready for the final harvest. This is the length of time Peter spoke of when he said, **"The Lord is not slack [slow] concerning His promise [to return], as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.** (2 Peter 3:9) The Lord has given us a long summer season so that more seed might be planted and more crops can mature so the harvest can be full.

At The Feast of Pentecost the Holy Spirit established the church and ushered in the "Age of Grace". The time we live in now. A time of continuous sowing as the gospel is spread throughout the world. A time when we as believers become laborers for the Sower to spread seed while we can. That's why Paul reminds us in Romans 13:11-12, **"And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation [Rapture] is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light."** This is the task we are given during the Age of Grace. To armor up and be a light. To share God's plan of redemptive grace with a dark world so that a larger crop can be harvested. This is why we must **"...awake out of sleep..."**, snap-out of our comfort zone and share the gospel of Jesus with those who are quickly running out of time before the trumpet sounds.

The Second Coming – The Regathering of Israel

Israel is a people chosen by God to be His nation, **"For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.** (Deuteronomy 7:6) But Israel wasn't chosen because of their riches, size or military might. In fact, God was very clear, **"The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples;** (Deuteronomy 7:7). Israel was chosen to carry God's redemptive plan of forgiveness to the world, **"Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'** " (Isaiah 49:6). They were supposed to accomplish the task originally given to the future Israel through Abraham,

"I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:3). But Israel failed and rather than sharing God's plan of redemption they held it close and over-complicated His message. As a result of their disobedience, Israel was scattered throughout the world and persecuted wherever they settled.

But in 1948 something extraordinary happened. Once again, Israel became a sovereign nation. And since that time they have grown culturally, economically and militarily as their people have regathered from around the world to repopulate God's chosen land (See Deuteronomy 30:1-6). For over 2,000 years Israel lay bare and was largely uninhabited but now they are a vibrant, strong and economically stable nation. But there's a problem. The same problem Israel had over 2,000 years ago. They still fail to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. This is particularly sad given the fact we have the benefit of historical hindsight, the full revealed word of God, and can now look back on the Lord's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem and hear the heartbreak in His voice as He reflects on the rejection of His chosen people, ***"Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."*** (Luke 19:41-44). Israel had their chance and failed miserably. The Messiah had come in the guise of a common Carpenter. He healed the sick, raised the dead and fulfilled prophecy right before their eyes. But almost no one recognized Him for who He is - the Messiah - God in flesh. So Israel was destroyed in 70 AD and laid in ruin until 1948. And yet even today, with all the prosperity they have seen, Israel still refuses to accept Jesus.

But that will change. A time will come when a final remnant of Israel will recognize their King and be regathered to Him. The time described in the Book of Revelation as the "Tribulation". Although the Tribulation will bring judgment on the whole world, the prime directive of God will be to regather the remnant of Israel to Him. That's why Jeremiah called the Tribulation the ***"...time of Jacob's [Israel's] trouble..."***, when he spoke of the day when Jesus returns to claim what is His, ***"...Alas! For that day is great, So that none is like it; And it is the time of Jacob's trouble, But he shall be saved out of it."*** (Jeremiah 30:7). This is the time of our Lord's Second Coming. When He will return as a Warrior King, who accompanied by His bride, will bring judgment on the world, ***"Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe***

dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses." (Revelation 19:11-14). This is not the Rapture when Jesus comes as the loving Groom to gather His bride. This is the Second Coming when Jesus comes to earth as a Warrior Judge to enact God's final judgment. But it is also the time when the remnant of Israel will understand the treachery of the antichrist and finally recognize Jesus as the true Messiah, **"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."** (Zechariah 12:10). Yet, sadly, by that point only one-third of Israel will have survived, **"And it shall come to pass in all the land," Says the Lord, "That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, But one-third shall be left in it: I will bring the one-third through the fire, Will refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; And each one will say, 'The Lord is my God.'"** (Zechariah 13:8-9). It is the one-third remnant who will regather to Jesus. A harvest of His chosen crop who will eventually say, **"...The Lord is my God..."**. The time when **"...Then the Lord will be seen over them, And His arrow will go forth like lightning. The Lord God will blow the trumpet, And go with whirlwinds from the south."** (Zechariah 9:14). The day when God will, **"...Blow the trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; For the day of the Lord is coming, For it is at hand..."** (Joel 2:1). This is not the trumpet of man. Neither the silver trumpet of the temple nor the ram's horn shofar. This will be the trumpet of God. Reminding us of John's view of Jesus in Revelation 1, **"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,'..."** (Revelation 1:10-11a).

Lesson #13 - Philippians Chapter 3, verses 12-21

Quick Recap:

Paul began chapter 3 with another warning about false teachers. It's tragic that as often as the Lord used Paul to warn us about aberrant theology, false teaching is probably more prevalent today than it has ever been. Particularly in the age of social media where many well-meaning Christians are so easily distracted or confused by what appears to be "Biblical" when in reality it is simply satan's masked plan to draw people away from the truth of the gospel. So why is that? First, let's go back to our Lord's warning in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, ***"13. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 14. And no wonder! For satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 15. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."*** In other words, what looks good and sounds good may in fact be a cleverly disguised ploy from the enemy to confuse you and lead you away from the truth. But given that, why do so many faithful believers fall for that? It's very simple. Recent surveys show that over 30% of Christians claim they never read the Bible. Never. Add to that those who only read it a few times a month or even a few times a year, and the number is over 50%. That means over half of the people who claim to know Jesus rarely or never read His word. Compare that to the fact 73% of people surveyed say they spend an average of thirty minutes on Facebook every day. It's no wonder Paul's admonishment seems to fall on deaf ears and continues to do so today. But why is that? Because the cost of serving Jesus can be high, and giving up time on social media so you can devote more time to God's word is simply a cost some Christians refuse to pay. So here Paul emphasizes the cost of serving Jesus but does so in a very encouraging way by helping us understand how to ***"...count..."*** our ***"...loss..."*** by comparing it to the ***"...gain..."*** of our eternal reward. Apparently that's something 50% of Christians need to figure out.

Now in the next section Paul will encourage us to change these statistics by focusing more intently on our life lived for Jesus.

Philippians chapter 3 verses 12-21

Verses 12-14

Wouldn't it be nice if the moment we're saved our life was made perfect? No more sickness or worry, no sin or temptation, and no problems or trials. That way we could live a perfect life for Jesus because we could show the world what it's like to live with no challenges. But if that's what happened everyone in the world would want to be

saved too, but not for the right reason. They would want to be saved so they could also have a perfect life with no issues, but they would not want to be saved because they loved Jesus. But that's not what happens is it? When we get saved we are promised a glorious and eternal future with the Lord, but until then we suffer the same challenges we always did, and the same challenges everyone else does. Even the temptation to sin. That means we're not perfected until we are glorified in heaven (See 1 Corinthians 15:42-44). So Paul reminds us of this fact, but then reminds us of something we should never forget; to **"...press on..."**, never giving up, but seeking to glorify the Lord no matter what situation or condition we find ourselves in. What makes this statement so profound is the fact it was written by a man chained in a Roman prison. A man who had given up everything he was or had earned in order to be **"...poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service..."** (Philippians 2:17). Paul does this by getting a tight grip on his faith in Jesus and the truth of the gospel he knows will sustain him through difficult times. He expresses his zeal for the gospel by helping us visualize an athlete who is running for a prize (See Philippians 2:16). He uses the Greek term *"Dioko"* for **"...press on..."**. A word that literally means, *"Of one who in a race runs swiftly to reach the goal."* This is not to imply our efforts are to work for or earn our salvation, but it helps us understand the actions we should take after we're saved so we can grow closer to Jesus and stronger in our faith. This is our effort to **"...press toward the goal for the prize..."**. Not the prize of salvation, but the prize of *"sanctification"* and *"glorification"* as we run our race and draw closer to Jesus and the **"...upward call..."** we seek for our life and in eternity. In the broadest sense this also speaks to our testimony. The life we live as we **"...press on..."** by focusing on glorifying the Lord in spite of our own weaknesses and challenges. In another sense it also reminds us of the judgment we will face when we stand before Jesus to recount how we used our salvation to glorify Him (2 Corinthians 5:9-11). That conversation will undoubtedly highlight both the times in our redeemed life when we threw in the towel and gave up, and the times we made the decision to **"...press on..."** so that Jesus would be glorified. So Paul's goal, as ours should be, is to grow in Jesus to be more like Him. This is the goal we seek to attain in life as we live for the Lord and carry His message of grace and redemption to a lost world. To do that Paul reminds us in verse 15 to **"...walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind..."** so we as the body of believers will be in unity and able to press forward together. But we must also remember not to let our past accomplishments or failures hinder us in any way either. Sometimes pride will step in and cause us to seek credit or accolades for what we do. That can lead to sin because we give ourselves the credit rather than giving all glory and praise to Jesus. When that happens our testimony can be damaged and it impacts our ability to **"...press on..."**. Likewise, we might tend to focus on our past failures and sins and allow them to hamper our growth and sanctification. So in verse 13 Paul reminds us to, **"...forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead..."**. To emphasize his point Paul uses the Greek

word “*epekteinomenos*”, which is translated in English as “**...reaching forward...**” and means, “*to strain after or stretch forward*”. From this we get another mental picture of an athlete striving “**...toward the goal for the prize...**” by stretching forward towards the finish line. And just like in a foot race, he is reaching forward for the prize because he knows he cannot win if he continues to look back rather than looking ahead. The point is, the things we have done - good and bad - are in the past so we need to leave them there and reach forward to seek what the Lord would have us do for His glory. So Paul reminds us we are still in the race too and need to admit, “**...Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected...**”. Even though his ministry is far-reaching and effective, he realizes he is not yet “**...perfected...**” because he is still growing and being sanctified. This type of transparency requires a lot of self-reflection to understand where we stand in our walk with the Lord. It requires us to give glory to God and not to ourselves, and it requires us to look ahead and not behind. Paul realized how easy it is for believers to either set themselves on a pedestal of achievements or bury themselves in the shame of past sin. Neither of which aid in the growth of our faith.

To illustrate this I think of the seven churches of Revelation. These were real churches, with real people, who Jesus used to illustrate our obedience or disobedience to Him. Let’s quickly look at them:

- Of the church at Ephesus Jesus said, “**...“2. I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3. and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.”** (Revelation 2:2-3).
 - On the surface that sounds like a church we’d love to be part of. But not so fast. Jesus had something else to say about them, “**...4. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.**” (Revelation 2:4). They were so focused on “doing” good works they had lost their “**...first love...**”. Their love for Jesus.
- In the case of Sardis, Jesus describes them as “**... “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead...”** (Revelation 3:1b).
 - As a church they had “**...a name...**”, a reputation they were obviously proud of. Maybe they were a large church, a growing church, a fun place to be, but Jesus said of them “**...you are dead...**”. We must be careful not to approach our own efforts looking for accolades and credit when we actually have dead faith.

- The churches at Pergamos and Thyatira were not recognized for their faith, but for their tolerance to false teachers and false theology.
 - To Pergamos Jesus said, ***“...16. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.”*** (Revelation 2:16).
 - And to Thyatira He said, ***“22. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.”*** (Revelation 2:22-23).
 - These churches, like so many today, accepted false teaching and brought on themselves the wrath of Jesus. This is the type of issue Paul was talking about when he said, ***“13. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 14. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 15. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”*** (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Just like Eve in the garden, and so many churches today, Pergamos and Thyatira took the fruit and ate (Genesis 3:1-6).

- And finally, to the church at Laodicea Jesus says, ***15. “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.”*** (Revelation 3:15-16)
 - They too had ***“...works...”***, but they were spiritually benign to the point Jesus said, ***“...I will vomit you out of My mouth.”*** They were sickening to Him.

- But the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia were different because they were faithful. They were the only two churches out of the seven who were obedient to the Lord.
 - Of Smyrna Jesus said, ***9. “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)...”*** (Revelation 2:9a).
 - They were being persecuted and driven to poverty and yet they were ***“...rich...”*** in the Lord’s eyes. What a contrast to the false mindset of the Prosperity Gospel churches today.
 - To Philadelphia Jesus said, ***“8. “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little***

strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.”

(Revelation 3:8).

- They were faithful and obedient and promised an eternity with the Lord.

These seven churches are used in Revelation to illustrate the faithfulness or disobedience of believers. Every church today can be placed in one of these examples. Most were disobedient because they were focused on themselves instead of Jesus or because they welcomed false teaching. Only two of the seven were obedient, one of which was being persecuted. Even though these churches represent a body of believers their examples can also be a gauge by which we can self-reflect on our own walk with the Lord.

We can do this by asking ourselves:

- Are we as individuals working hard at religion, yet have lost our focus and love for Jesus?
- Are we prospering, yet focused on our own prosperity and not the glory of God?
- Are we acting like a faithful follower, yet embracing false teaching? Or worse yet, are we so anemic to God's word we couldn't recognize false teaching if it fell on our head?
- Are we focused on ourselves but in God's eyes are lukewarm? Because we're neither cold and refreshing, or warm and on fire for Jesus.

We can use the examples of these churches to help us understand where we as believers stand in our obedience to Jesus. It's something we should all reflect on from time to time.

Verses 17-21

For some people it might have been difficult to understand Paul's enthusiasm and follow his example. I mean, let's be honest. He was an outcast. Hated by both the Jews and the Gentiles and found persecution waiting wherever he went. Case in point, he was writing this letter to Philippi from a Roman prison and would likely be executed in the months ahead, and yet he was telling them to follow his example. To many people he might not represent a role model you would want to follow. But even so, Paul encourages us to live by “***...following my example...***” and by using his life as “***...a pattern...***” for living our own. He reminds us again of the false teachers who walk a contorted path and clarifies the fact they are “***...enemies of the cross of Christ...***”. That may sound harsh but think about how that still applies today. False teachers in pulpits around the world and on social media spout heretical teaching as if it were Biblical. They tell you a life of prosperity and personal gain is a sign of righteousness.

They line “sick” people up on stage and slap them on the head to “heal” them. Or they tell you to practice ceremonies or rituals as a way to draw closer to God. They may even tell you there are a dozen ways to reach God that have nothing to do with Jesus. But in every case, what are these teachers and preachers really doing? They are drawing you away from the truth of the simple gospel expressed so plainly by Jesus Himself, **“...‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me...’”** (John 14:6b). Very simply, when someone teaches a doctrine or gospel other than the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ then they are **“...enemies of the cross of Christ...”**, because they are spreading a lie crafted by satan. That’s why Paul told the church at Galatia, **“6. I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7. which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”** (Galatians 1:6-9)

But what sets these aberrant “gospels” apart from the true gospel? Very simply, every other form of a gospel message focuses on the work of the person, and not the work of Jesus. The Bible tells us **“...But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.”** (Isaiah 64:6). No matter how religious or honorable our own efforts might be, they are viewed by God as **“...filthy rags...”** when compared to Jesus on the cross. That’s because, **“...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”** (Romans 3:23b) where the **“...glory of God...”** is measured by the work of Jesus to atone our sin through His death and resurrection. As a result, nothing we could ever do in a thousand lifetimes would ever measure up against what Jesus has already done. That’s why He can say, **“...‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me...’”** (John 14:6b). That means no one, no matter how religious or good they might be, can reach heaven except through faith in the work of Jesus. But that simple truth is also why any other “gospel” message and those who preach it are **“...‘...enemies of the cross of Christ...’”**. That’s the fallacy of the Prosperity Gospel movement today and so many other misguided theologies. They don’t focus intently and singularly on the **“...cross of Christ...”**, but instead focus on **“...their belly...”** and **“...earthly things...”** which is their worldly prosperity. And sadly, following these apostate “gospels” has one outcome, **“...19. whose end is destruction.”**

This is a heavy message for sure. Particularly for those well-meaning people who blindly follow false teaching because it sounds and feels so good. So Paul encourages us by reminding the faithful followers of Jesus, **“...our citizenship is in heaven...”**.

That in itself is enough to celebrate for eternity, but for a true believer heaven is not the ultimate goal. Our goal, the **"...prize..."** we **"...press on..."** for is the **"..upward call of God in Christ Jesus."** (Philippians 3:14). Our reward is to live for eternity in heaven, but our **"...prize..."** is to live in heaven with Jesus who we **"...eagerly wait for..."**. When Jesus will **"...transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body..."**. The time spoken of by Paul when, **"42. So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."** (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). This is the time when, **"3. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."** (Revelation 21:3-4). Yes, there are streets of gold and pearly gates waiting for us in our heavenly home. And that's a wonderful thing. But the real **"...prize..."** we **"...press on..."** for is the eternity we will spend living with and worshiping our glorious King.

Lesson #14 - Philippians Chapter 4, verses 1-23

Quick Recap:

Chapter 3 starts with another warning about false teachers. Paul was no stranger to these imposters and spent a great deal of time refuting their claims. So he provides a quick review of his resume – a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin, trained under the best teachers of the day, and functioned as a Pharisee. So Paul had the credentials to know all about the Jewish religion and was uniquely qualified to contrast its focus on religion and tradition, with his focus on the true gospel of Jesus. Paul would go so far as to call the false teachers, “**...enemies of the cross of Christ...**” (Philippians 3:18). But then he encourages us to “**...press on...**” and “**...reaching forward...**” “**...for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus...**” (portions of Philippians 3:12,13,14). But this is not easy, so Paul talks about counting the cost of living for Jesus to remind us that what we lose in this life will be far overshadowed by what we gain in eternity.

He then encourages us by reminding us we are no longer of this world but “**...our citizenship is in heaven...**” (Philippians 3:20). And yet, the Lord leaves us here, in this foreign land, to act as His representatives, to tell the world about our sovereign King (see 2 Corinthians 5:20).

Paul will now close out his letter by encouraging us to continue pressing on for the prize.

Philippians chapter 4 verses 1-6

Verses 1-6

Verse 1

Paul ends his letter by reminding his readers how much he loves them and wants to be with them. That’s certainly the intent of this verse, but I believe we can glean even more from the underlying message. Since all scripture is divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21), these words are actually from God to all of us as recorded by Paul. In that light the Lord is calling us His “**...beloved...**”, and His “**...joy and crown...**”. That reminds me of Revelation 2:10 where Jesus tells the faithful church at Smyrna, “**...Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.**” What a beautiful thought to keep in mind as we read the rest of the letter.

Here we are encouraged to “**...stand fast...**”. This reminds us of Paul’s earlier encouragement to “**...press on...**” by “**...reaching forward...**” to attain the “**...upward call of God in Christ Jesus...**” (portions of Philippians 3:12,13,14). I’m

also reminded of Ephesians 6 and the Lord's direction to, **"...11. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."** (Ephesians 6:11). But why do we need armor, and why do we need to **"...stand fast..."**? Very simply, **"...because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour..."** (1 Peter 5:8). Every day of our lives as believers we engage in spiritual warfare. It might not always seem like it, but we are caught in a battle between our human desire and our desire to serve the Lord. That's why Paul reminds us in Galatians 5:16-17, **"16. I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."** This friction, of **"...Spirit against the flesh..."** is spiritual warfare as we fight against the temptations of sin. So the Lord tells us to armor up, **"11b...that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."** (Ephesians 6:11b-13). Here the Lord tells us to, **"...stand against the wiles..."**, **"...withstand in the evil day..."** and **"...having done all, to stand..."** Obviously, the command to **"...stand..."** bears repeating. So too, Paul tells us in his letter to **"...stand fast in the Lord..."**. Not in ourselves, but **"...in the Lord..."**. This is not easy, but is something we must strive to do every day. That's why you'll often hear us encourage the Body to **"Walk in the Spirit – Moment by Moment"**. As we've discussed many times, **"Walking in the Spirit"** means we are constantly alert to how the Lord is working in and through our lives to do His will. But that doesn't mean we're alert just when we're having problems or when we feel we need the Lord's direction. Walking **"Moment by Moment"** means we strive to be in contact with the Lord every minute of our day. In every action we take, every word we say, even every thought we have should be driven by the Holy Spirit. This takes practice and discipline because when we do this the enemy will do everything in his power to throw us off track. That's why we must **"...stand fast..."** as we **"...press on..."** by **"...reaching forward..."** to attain the **"...upward call of God in Christ Jesus..."**.

Verses 2-3

A lot of people like to see their name publicly recognized. Maybe they dream of having their name impressed in concrete on Hollywood and Vine? Or maybe they'd like to see their **"Name in lights"** like a movie star? Or maybe their name mentioned in the newspaper or in a book? But... seeing your name in print may not be as good as it sounds. For example, consider the case of Euodia and Syntyche. Two ladies in Philippi whose names were included in the Bible by God. I mean think about that. Their names

are mentioned in the same book as Moses, Abraham, David and Peter. But unfortunately, in this case, it was not for a good reason. That's because they are included as an example of disunity in the church. What about? We don't know. Maybe doctrine? Maybe a personal conflict? Maybe they led two opposing factions in the church? Maybe they were spouting at each other on Facebook? (See 1 Corinthians 1:10-13) But either way, the Lord inspired Paul to include their names in writing as an example of disunity.

We briefly discussed this in Lesson #8 so let's go back there for a quick refresher:

Excerpt from Lesson #8

*When we get to chapter 4 we'll see evidence of possible division in the Philippian church between two women. Paul doesn't explain the source of their disunity. It may have been a personal issue or a disagreement over something in the church, but in either case, Paul admonishes them to **"...be of the same mind in the Lord..."** (Philippians 4:2). Disunity of any type is dangerous in the church, but whatever this situation was, the Lord felt strongly enough about it to have Paul mention the women by name and therefore make it public. There must be an important lesson for us in their dispute or God would probably not have included it in His word. So given that we'll spend some time focusing on the importance of unity amongst believers.*

The Bible doesn't say, but we can probably assume Paul didn't make this a public issue until either he or someone else in the church followed a process like the "Matthew Principle" in Matthew 18:15-17. There we are instructed to confront someone over their sin in a specific way:

- *First we should talk to them one on one to see if we can convince them to give up their sinful ways.*
- *Second, if that doesn't work, we should talk to them with a friend - a witness - to express our love and concern for them, and to point out their sin.*
- *And finally, if they still ignore us and continue in open sin, we are to make it known before the church.*
 - *Why? So their sin, and failed testimony, does not discredit the body or influence others to make the same bad choices.*
- *Initially Paul may have tried to rectify the issue privately or with someone else before finally mentioning them by name before the entire world. But the situation had now come to the point of making their disunity a public example.*

So to get to that point in chapter 4, Paul starts here in chapter 2 with a profound statement of love and unity. He uses a string of thoughts intended to encourage us in our own walk with Jesus. Thoughts that emphasize the importance of being in unity with one another. He may have done this to set the stage for the disunity discussion he

planned to address later in this letter, or just because unity is so important within the body of believers. (see Psalm 133:1). To emphasize his point Paul uses words and phrases like: “...consolation...”, “...comfort of love...”, “...fellowship of the Spirit...”, “...affection and mercy...”, “...joy...”, “...love...”, “...being of one accord...”, “...lowliness of mind...”, “...esteem others...” and “...the interest of others...” to describe the attitude we should show towards one another. You would be hard pressed to find another passage in the Bible with so many encouraging thoughts in one statement. All reminding us of the unity we need to exhibit as a testimony before the lost world.

Poor Euodia and Syntyche. Can you imagine their embarrassment when Paul’s letter was read before the congregation! But even more embarrassing was the fact Paul’s letter, with their names in it, was copied and sent to other churches! It was then recorded over and over for centuries, put in the Bible, and read by billions of people! This was not something to be proud of. But why was it so important and why were their names included in writing? They were obviously faithful believers because Paul describes them as “... **women who labored with me in the gospel...**”. They must have done some pretty extraordinary things for Paul to describe their efforts as “...**labored...**”. We also know they were believers because they worked with Paul “...**in the gospel...**” and because Paul mentions them in relation to the only place we really want our names to be, “...**the Book of Life...**”.

So what was so important that God singled them out in the Bible?

Let’s think about that. Every word in the Bible is important to God. They are His words, passed to us to live by. But His word as recorded in the Bible is not endless. They are specific words given to us for specific reasons. So why would God reserve even two of His precious words for the names of people who were in disunity? Because disunity is a tool of the enemy. Whether he attacks societies, marriages, relationships or churches, our enemy wants to segregate and polarize people and ideas. And in doing so, he creates chaos, confusion and disunity. Why? Because disunity results in fractures and conflict, and disunity in the church separates us from each other and eventually clouds our vision and our focus on Jesus. So here, the actual reason these ladies were in disunity was not important. What was important is the fact they represented factions or friction in the church, which if left unchecked, could spread like a persistent mold and affect everything in its path. That’s why unity amongst believers is so critically important. As we grow closer together, more focused on the Lord and more intent on understanding His word, we form a mighty fortress which the enemy cannot breach. But let disunity invade, and the walls will crumble and conflict will follow. And when it does, the enemy gains a foothold and the fortress is

weakened. So Paul implores the church to “**...help these women...**” before their disunity goes too far.

In that light let's all do a little self examination.

Are we in any way involved in disunity? Maybe you have a conflict with another person? Maybe there is something you don't agree with at church? Maybe you don't like how things are being managed? Maybe it was something someone said? Or maybe it is a social media post you just had to respond to in a way that might not be edifying? All of these can breed disunity, gossip and backbiting, and when they do they slowly begin to tear a hole in the fabric of the church – disturbing stone by stone in the walls of the fortress. Think about it this way. The core reason for Euodia and Syntyche's conflict was not important. What was important enough for God to include it in the Bible was the simple fact there was a lack of unity between them. And that was important enough to God to make them an example for all time.

So hypothetically, would He make us an example for the same thing? Let's honestly ask ourselves a hard question. Are we participating in any type of disunity? Any type of conflict, gossip, hard feelings or dissatisfaction? The Bible doesn't tell us what these ladies' issue was, so it could have been any of these things. That's a sobering thought that should encourage us to resolve whatever friction, conflict or disagreement exists in our lives. So if we are in disunity, of any kind, and with any person, let's get that straight.

Verses 4-7

So after broaching the sore subject of disunity – and probably embarrassing Euodia and Syntyche to their core, Paul sets out to encourage us. Sitting in a Roman prison he asks us to “**...Rejoice in the Lord...**”, and he says it twice for emphasis. How many people would look at Paul and say “*So what have you got to be so happy about?*” I mean, let's be honest. Here's a guy who's lost everything in life and is sitting in a Roman prison and yet he's asking other people to follow his lead and be happy about it. But Paul's position is very simple. His joy is not in his surroundings or his possessions. His joy is “**...in the Lord...**”. He is not rejoicing in himself, or his plush surroundings, or because of all of his admirers, or because of his good health. Paul had none of these. He had been scorned, rejected, outcast, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, abandoned and imprisoned. He had given up everything he had earned or owned for the simple pleasure of, “**...being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service...**” and because of this he is asking us to, “**...be glad and rejoice with me.**” (Philippians 2:17b & 18b). So in verse 4 Paul says it again in case you didn't catch it the first time, “**...Again I will say, rejoice!**”

But how? How could Paul rejoice under such difficult circumstances? How did he find joy in a situation that seemed to be anything but joyful? He tells us in verse 5. Because, “**...The Lord is at hand...**”. He knows the Lord is with Him and will never forsake him (Hebrews 13:5), no matter how bad the situation might be. Paul is truly the “**...living sacrifice...**” (Romans 12:1), presenting his life as a testimony for the One who presented His life on the cross. And it is from that truth Paul is able to find joy so he asks us to find the same thing.

But how? How do we shape our lives in a way to find joy in such trying conditions? Paul gives us a formula of sorts. A way to keep our head on straight as we walk through a difficult day and seek to glorify their Lord.

- First he tells us, “**5. Let your gentleness be known to all men.**” The term “**...all men...**” includes both believers and non-believers. This is speaking of our testimony being lived-out before the world. It's the words and actions others hear and see in us as we walk through our day. So Paul tells us to exhibit “**...gentleness...**”, a word that in Greek, “*epipikes*”, means “*equitable, fair, mild*”. In other words, it's how we act, what we say, the tone of our voice and even the inflection on our words. It doesn't mean we're weak. In fact, it takes a great deal of strength to be gentle. It means we should resist our human desire to react in a sinful way and instead, react with calm and measured strength. It is an attitude of both humility and strength that presents an attitude diametrically opposed to what people see in the rest of the world. Why? Because it takes more strength to be gentle than to be angry.
- “**Be anxious for nothing...**” - Wow! That's a tough one. It's so easy in this life, and particularly in our society, to stay anxious, fearful and worked up. Here the original Greek term, “*Merimate*”, which essentially means “*to worry*” can be defined as “*To be pulled in different directions*”. That sorta sums it up doesn't it?. When we're anxious and worried our mind is pulled away from reality. As a believer we know our Lord will not forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6). In fact the same verse assures us, “**...for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you...**”. And yet, we tend to set that promise aside and worry about the outcome of so many things in life. We all do that from time to time, which is why I find it interesting in the Bible how many times the Lord tells us to “**...fear not...**”. He only said “**...let there be light...**” once, (Genesis 1:3) but He said “**...fear not...**” hundreds of times. And yet, we find every reason under the sun to fear and be anxious. That's simply our flesh and the Lord knows that, which is why He reminds us so many times to fight the urge to fear. So here He reminds us again to “**...Be anxious for nothing...**”. Fighting anxiety is hard enough for

us to do, but then He adds the qualifier “...**for nothing...**” which makes it nigh impossible. But we have to try because “...**The Lord is at hand...**” and understands every anxious moment we will ever have.

- Let's think about it this way — In Psalm 23:4 we hear a very familiar prayer of David, **"4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."** David was a mighty man of God - A great warrior and king and yet, his life was punctuated by many trials, challenges, and valleys. So why does God allow us to walk through valleys and anxieties of life? Why doesn't God simply remove the valleys and let us walk through life on the mountain top? Because God wants us to trust what else He says in this verse: **"...For You are with me;..."** and **"...Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me..."**. This reminds us it is often when we walk through the valleys with the Lord we learn more than if He simply pulled us up to higher ground. That's what Paul means when he says, **"...The Lord is at hand..."**. He is always walking with us, and He wants us to do so while being, **"...anxious for nothing..."**.
- We see the same thing in Isaiah 43:2 where the Lord gives us a similar encouraging promise, **"2. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you."** Isn't that interesting? God could easily dry up the waters, divert the rivers and extinguish the fires we face in life. All the things that cause anxiety. Instead, He said we will **"...pass through..."** them. But, as we pass through we must trust what else He says, **"...I will be with you..."**. He is always with us, so He asks us to **"...Be anxious for nothing..."**.
- **"...but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God..."** - When the apostles asked Jesus to teach them how to pray He said, **"...For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him..."** (Matthew 6:8b). Prayer is not telling God all you think He needs to know, because He already knows what we're going to pray for. In fact, He knows details about our prayers we cannot even fathom. The purpose of prayer is to talk to our loving Father. To communicate and share with Him in a way only believers can do. That's because, as His children we can speak face to face with the God of all creation, aided by the indwelling Holy Spirit, **"Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be**

uttered.” (Romans 8:26). But notice what else Paul says, we are to pray with **“...supplication, with thanksgiving...”**. God is not a fast food pick-up window where we drive by and spout off a list of wants and needs. In other words, prayer is not **“Have it your way.”** God is almighty and all holy and the privilege of bowing before His throne of grace is not only an amazing gift, but brings with it great responsibility (Hebrews 4:16). As the sons of Aaron learned the hard way, God is holy and expects to be treated as such by His children, **“...3. And Moses said to Aaron, ‘This is what the LORD spoke, saying: ‘By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.’ ”** (Leviticus 10:3). So when we go before God to **“...let your requests be made...”** let’s do so with the right attitude. A posture of humility that will help us **“...Be anxious for nothing...”** .

- **“...and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”** – After telling us to **“...Be anxious for nothing...”** and reminding us to, **“...with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...”**, Paul tells us what the results will be – **“...the peace of God...”**. A type of peace that can only come from our Lord. A type of peace only possible through our faith in Jesus Christ and the joy that comes from our salvation (Psalm 95:1). Paul describes this as a type of peace that, **“...surpasses all understanding...”**. But what does that really mean? Well, I’ve known many believers going through a very difficult season of life, and yet, in the midst of their suffering they would tell me, **“The Lord has given me complete peace.”** They can’t really explain the peace they feel but they know they have it and they know it came from the Lord. That’s because when we surrender ourselves to Jesus and trust Him through our challenges He will **“...guard your hearts and minds...”**. Here the word translated **“...guard...”** , comes from the Greek word **“phrouresel”** which means like a soldier keeping watch over something to protect what is valuable. It gives us the sense of someone watching over us to keep us safe because we are valuable. That reminds me of Psalm 18:1-3, **“1. I will love You, O LORD, my strength. 2. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. 3. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies.”** Just as someone who is under attack can retreat to the safety of their fort, so too, as believers we find refuge and strength in Jesus. But sometimes that’s hard for us to understand and we still tend to fear or worry or doubt. But here the Lord tells us He will give us a peace we cannot even comprehend, and as difficult as that may be to accept during a really bad season in life, it’s a fact we can depend on. That’s why Paul tells us in Romans 5:1-2, **“1. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God**

through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2. through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Here we’re assured we can “**...stand, and rejoice...**” when we focus as intently on trusting Jesus as we do focused on our problem. Then He will give us that peace we want so badly. A peace that brings with it the joy we need to move forward through our trial.

- But where does this type of joy come from? We see an example illustrated by the story of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13. They were sharing the gospel which was of course upsetting the self-righteous Jews, so they were expelled from the region of Antioch. And yet, they found joy even in this circumstance which gave them the strength to “**...press on...**”, — “**51. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. 52. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.**” (Acts 13:51-52) Our joy, real joy, comes from the Lord through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Of course the Holy Spirit knew Paul and Barnabas would be persecuted and expelled. In fact, He could have stopped it. Instead, He gave them joy to encourage and sustain them so they could “**...press on...**” and glorify the Lord. And He'll do exactly the same thing for us.

Verses 8-9

Then, through Paul, our Lord gives us one of the most encouraging passages in the Bible. A passage we can go to in times of great stress to help us achieve the “**...peace of God, which surpasses all understanding...**”. Here Paul is speaking to believers - “**...brethren...**” to describe elements of a believer’s life that are honestly unavailable to the lost. Those without Jesus often feel they are on top of the world. Their finances are strong, they have a big house, good family and everything seems to be going in the right direction. It may seem that way from a worldly perspective, but the eternal outcome of their lives is dismal and there is no hope unless they come to faith in Christ. We see this illustrated in the stories of *Lazarus and the Rich Man* (Luke 16:19-31) and the *Rich Young Ruler* (Matthew 19:16-22). From an earthly perspective their lives were going very well, but from the viewpoint of eternity they were both bound for hell, as the *Rich Man* soon found out. Given all that, we as believers may live a life that’s not as plush, or we may have health issues or any number of problems that make our days tough. But what we have through our salvation is priceless.

So here Paul reminds of is the things we can lean into during those difficult seasons:

- “**...whatever things are true...**”

- Jesus said, ***“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*** (John 14:6). As the ***“...Word...”*** (John 1:1-14), our King is the source of all truth, ***“...as the truth is in Jesus...”*** (Ephesians 4:21b), as opposed to our enemy who is the father of all lies who, ***“...does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him...”*** (John 8:44b). In other words, the world has no real source of truth because the world is under the influence of the devil (Ephesians 2:2). They seek “truth” through politics, social reform, ideology, wealth or any number of other worldly things but unfortunately, those avenues are often fraught with the underlying schemes of the enemy to pull people away from the truth of Jesus. That’s why Jesus said, ***“19. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20. but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*** (Matthew 6:19-21). So how do we ***“...lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...”***? By a life lived faithfully for Jesus. That’s what Paul is getting ready to talk about here in this passage. The things in our lives that exhibit Jesus to the world through our personal testimony. The things that set us apart through our attitude and the way we live our lives. This is important, because a time will come when we as believers will stand before Jesus to hear how well or how horribly we lived our lives as a Christian. It will not be a judgment of heaven or hell, because our sin has already been judged on the cross. Instead, it will be a “judgment” to understand how well or poorly we lived our lives as a testimony for our Lord, ***“10. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:10). Paul further describes this judgment in 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, ***“...13. each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. 14. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”*** Again, this is not a judgment of whether or not we go to heaven or hell. It is also not a judgment of ***“...one’s work...”*** to earn salvation. But as believers we will be “judged” by what we did with our salvation. Either way, we will still go to heaven but depending on how we live will determine whether we go to heaven with or without the rewards of faithfulness. But non-believers will stand before the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of time, which in reality is

not a judgment but a final sentencing (Revelation 20:11-15). That's because those who died without accepting the truth of Jesus will not be given a second chance. Their sin was not forgiven before they died and therefore they will be cast into hell for all eternity. That's why Paul warned Timothy (and us), ***"3. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4. and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."*** (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

- But we know the truth and from God's word we know ***"...sound doctrine..."*** and it is that truth that sets us free from the influence of the world, ***"...And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*** (John 8:32). It is that truth we as believers have that the lost world does not.

- ***"...whatever things are noble..."***

- The Greek word "*semna*" is translated into English as "*venerable*" or "*honest*" or in the case of the New King James Bible, ***"...noble..."***. In each case it's a word meaning "*honorable, serious, dignified and worthy of respect*". The question is, do these words describe the things we hold as important in our lives? Where we go, what we watch, what we read, what we say, how we act. Are our actions, which is our testimony, honorable in the sight of God? Are our actions glorifying the Lord in front of a lost world? We should be focused on whatever things are honoring to God and let the world see us doing just that.

- ***"...whatever things are just..."***

- In this case, ***"...just..."*** means "*right*", as in something being justified or made correct. This isn't talking about salvation (justification) but speaks to a believer's outlook which is focused on things that are in line with God's expectations for our lives.

- ***"...whatever things are pure..."***

- In the original Greek the word used here "*hagna*" has a religious connotation. It can mean "*a condition prepared for worship, ritually and ceremonially, or pure from every fault*". That's a serious requirement that's difficult to achieve in our current human state, but it's a position we should strive to achieve each day. It's the mindset we need to be in so we're focused on the attitudes and actions that make our daily lives a

constant form of worship of the Lord. It is literally a component of “*Walking in the Spirit*” as we seek moment by moment to be in the will of God.

- **“...whatever things are lovely...”**

- The Greek word used here, “*prospile*”, simply means “*pleasing and acceptable*”. As with the other terms used in this passage it defines and describes who we are as ambassadors for Jesus living in a lost world. It's the standard set for us by the Lord we need to strive to achieve every day.

- **“...whatever things are of good report...”**

- A “**...good report...**” is exactly what it says. Like a report card, it is a reflection or representation of our lives. It's in effect all of the terms listed above rolled into one. The Greek term used here, “*euphema*” can be translated as “*admirable*”, but it also means “*well reported of, spoken in a kindly spirit, laudable, reputable*”. So let's think about that in relation to “**...true, noble, just, pure and lovely...**”, or in relation to their root definitions, “*truth, honest, right, prepared for worship and pleasing*”. Are these the words that would be included on our lives' report card? Is this what the world hears and sees when they come in contact with us?
- But why is all of this so important? Very simply. As we've discussed many times before, other than our salvation there is no greater gift from God than our personal testimony. It's our testimony – our life lived before the world – that represents Jesus. It's our testimony that can draw people to Him or drive them away. We can witness to people, hand them tracts, or give them Bibles, and there's nothing wrong with that, but what really brings credibility to the gospel is for lost people to see the gospel lived out in us every day and in every situation. Even when our Lord allows us to go through difficult trials and seasons in life He expects our testimony to remain “**...true, noble, just, pure and lovely...**” no matter what situation we're in or what condition we must endure. In fact, it is often during these difficult times when the world can see the power of Jesus in our lives much more clearly. But it's more than simply thinking this way. Our testimony requires action. That's why Paul reminds us to exhibit “**...The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me...**”, and then go do them. Remember, this is being said by a man in a Roman prison who is there for doing the exact things he is asking us to do. To live our lives as a “**...living sacrifice...**” (Romans 12:1), so we have a testimony worthy of showing Jesus to the world. That's what we

are to “...**meditate on...**” so we can practice them each day. And when we do, the Lord promises, “...**the God of peace will be with you...**”.

And we can take that to the bank.

Lesson #15 - Philippians Chapter 4, verses 1-23

Quick Recap:

Paul will now complete his beautiful letter to the Philippian church. A letter full of encouragement and joy, made even more so when we realize it was written by someone in a Roman prison. In his letter Paul has addressed a number of issues like false teaching and disunity. These are intended to make us more alert to the dangers around us and the things that can so easily distract us from our focus on Jesus. Distractions that still exist today, and arguably, maybe more than they ever have before. But coupled with his warnings, our Lord the author, through Paul the scribe, encourages us to press forward and never give up in our efforts to share the gospel of Jesus. No matter how difficult our situation might be.

As important as the gospel focus was in Paul's day, it's arguably even more important today as we draw closer to the day when time will have run out for the lost to accept the grace of God for salvation. So we must be vigilant, as the angel reminds John during the future Tribulation, "...***You must prophesy [tell the message of God] again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.***" (Revelation 10:11b). And that's exactly what we must do. Go tell the world.

Philippians chapter 4 verses 10-14

Verses 10-14

Verse 10

Paul began his letter with a message of joy (Philippians 1:4), and now he carries that same joy all the way to the end. But his joy is not in himself or his circumstances, because neither of those gave him much to be joyful about. He had lost everything he owned or had earned, and saw his life ending in execution. But his joy was ***"...in the Lord..."*** and the opportunities his persecution and imprisonment gave him to share the gospel. I just wonder, what joy could we find if we viewed our trials and tribulations in life as a unique opportunity to show Jesus through our difficulties? I think that's exactly what Paul meant when he encouraged us to be ***"...a living sacrifice..."*** (Romans 12:1) by being ***"...poured out..."*** as an offering to God (Philippians 2:17).

As Paul reflects on his difficult situation he thanks the church at Philippi for supporting him. Years before, at the beginning of his ministry in Macedonia they had partnered with him. First with Lydia, who worshiped with Paul at the riverside and then

offered her support (Acts 16:11-15). They continued to care for him through the years, even sending one of their own to Rome, ***“...Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need;...”*** (Philippians 2:25). In later verses (15-16) we’ll get a sense that Philippi may have been the only church who consistently helped provide the provisions he needed. No wonder he looked at them with such joy. But Paul wasn’t asking for financial support. He knew the Philippian church was under persecution and often ***“...lacked opportunity...”*** to help, but they were obedient to God’s call on their hearts and did the very best they could.

Verses 11-14

Paul then says something singularly profound. A statement we could all benefit from memorizing and holding close to our heart, ***“...I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content...”***. How easy would it have been to say this had he been sitting on the beach enjoying the sunshine. But Paul said it in a dark and dank Roman prison which offered only cold surroundings, poor food and even worse company. And yet, he was ***“...content...”***. To explain his condition he uses the terms ***“...abased...”*** and ***“...abound...”***, which in Greek, *“tapeinousthai”* and *“perisseuein”*, simply contrasts the positions of being *“humble”* with the state of being *“abundantly furnished”*. Paul had lived in both worlds. He was a highly educated Pharisee and even a Roman citizen. Social positions that gave him prominence and prosperity. But as a minister of the gospel he had become poor and indigent. Having forfeit all he had for the glory of serving the Lord (Philippians 3:7). But I find it interesting how Paul describes this condition. He says ***“...I know how...”*** to be ***“...abased...”*** and ***“...abound...”***. It’s not just that he understands mentally what it means to be on each end of the prosperity spectrum, but he knows ***“...how...”*** to do it. The term ***“...how...”*** implies a deliberate action to do something as he lives his life as a reflection of Jesus, even though that life is now missing the things we often count dear. Think back to his conversation about his loss and his gain – literally his ***“...abased...”*** and ***“...abound...”*** situation in life, ***“...7. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”*** (Philippians 3:7-8). He emphasizes this ***“...loss...”*** and ***“...gain...”*** by saying, ***“...I have learned...”*** to do this ***“...Everywhere and in all things...”***, including hunger and suffering. To learn something implies being taught, and from that teaching you acquire new knowledge and skills. Here Paul says he ***“...learned...”*** to suffer wherever he was and whatever he was doing. Learning takes time and application and is more than simply writing about something he observed or heard about. Paul is writing about his real-life experiences of being persecuted and poor as he shares the gospel. He ***“...learned...”*** the hard way, and yet, he could still write a letter full of joy. Did he find joy in hunger and suffering?

Probably not. But he found joy in the fact his hunger and suffering gave him an opportunity to share the gospel in places he might not normally be, ***“...inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.”*** (Philippians 1:7b). That’s the ***“...gain...”*** Paul saw as a result of his ***“...loss...”***.

So how do we learn from this and apply it to our own lives and testimony? Well, it’s not easy, but I suspect it wasn’t easy for Paul either. Just the condition of being ***“...poured out...”*** could indicate the extent to which he gave of himself to the Lord. It wasn’t just a matter of being obedient and busy, but his life was fully consumed by giving all he had to serving Jesus. And it was through this all consuming effort he ***“...learned...”***, ***“...to be content...”*** in every situation. But let’s be honest, that’s a lot easier said than done. We all want our health to improve. We want financial stability. We want our relationships to flourish. We want the things in life that make our life easier. That’s human nature, but if we’re not careful, that can easily become our own brand of ***“Prosperity Gospel”*** as we covet the blessings of life over our focus on Jesus. So how do we change that mindset and learn ***“...to be content...”*** no matter what is happening to us or around us? I think the same way Paul did, and the way we’ve been talking about throughout this study. We need to begin to see our trials in life as an opportunity to bring clarity and credibility to our testimony. Think about it this way: had Paul been sitting on a sunny beach writing his letter from a position of luxury he could have easily told the Philippians to be encouraged. But in reality his testimony would have been flawed because his readers would be encouraged by his situation and surroundings but not by how he was dealing with them. They could simply say, ***“I’d be happy too if I were sitting on the beach.”*** But think about how encouraging it was for the Philippians to read about Paul’s joy and understand he wrote that to them while sitting in a Roman prison. His condition and his situation (his ***“...loss...”***) brought great credibility to his testimony (his ***“...gain...”***). His deplorable condition would encourage his readers because we can learn from Paul’s example ***“...to be content...”*** even when we are totally ***“...poured out...”***. That’s also why Paul could say, ***“...I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”*** (2 Corinthians 12:9b). Paul wasn’t bragging about the state of his situation. Instead, he was using his ***“...infirmities...”***, his trials and tribulations, to fortify and bolster his testimony. Why? Because through his difficulties he knew the world would see the power of Jesus in his life. When the lost world sees a believer going through a difficult time in life with complaints and grumbling they don’t see ***“...the power of Christ...”***. But when they see us dealing with our issues with dignity and joy, and with the ***“...peace of God, which surpasses all understanding...”*** (Philippians 4:7) they will see something they do not have because they will see ***“...the power of Christ...”*** in our suffering. I believe that’s a core message the Lord is giving us through Paul because the Lord already knows every trial we will ever endure. As Jesus said of Paul, ***“...16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”*** (Acts 9:16), and when Paul

went to Jerusalem he was given insights to what lay ahead, ***“...22. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, 23. except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. 24. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”*** (Acts 20:22-24) And yet he went. Knowing there were trials ahead but also knowing he wanted to accomplish ***“...the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus...”***. As a result, his suffering brought great credibility to his witness for Jesus.

So how do we do this ourselves? Let's say we already knew what was going to happen tomorrow and the trials we were going to face. Would we do everything in our power to avoid them, or would we look for ways to use that trial to glorify God? Generally we would look for a way to avoid something in our lives we'd rather not go through. And there's nothing wrong with that. Even Paul once escaped through a window rather than facing an angry crowd (2 Corinthians 11:32-33). But usually we don't have insight to what is coming and we suddenly find ourselves immersed in a situation or a place we really don't want to be. That's when we have to make a decision: – will we react to the situation with anger, fear and doubt, or will we face the situation with the understanding God knows all about it and will walk through it with us? Will we complain and get upset, or will we seek to find a way to use the situation to glorify the Lord? In other words, what would we need to do so we could write our friends an encouraging letter like Paul did even though we had very little to be encouraged about? I think the key to that is understanding how our actions and reactions represent Jesus through our testimony. I'm certain Paul didn't enjoy suffering, but he knew God's grace was sufficient to see him through the suffering, and when he did, God would be glorified and Paul's testimony would be clear evidence of Jesus in his life. Paul lays this out for us very succinctly when he says, ***“10. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*** (see 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 / verse 10 quoted). Here the word translated as ***“...take pleasure...”***, “*eudoko*” in Greek, means *“it is good”*. In other words, Paul is pleased and finds joy and strength in the fact his trials afford him an opportunity to strengthen his testimony because it is ***“...for Christ's sake...”***. In a sense, that's why his ***“...loss...”*** (***“...I am weak...”***) becomes his ***“...gain...”*** (***“...then I am strong...”***).

Then Paul explains this in an often quoted verse, ***“ 13. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*** I think the key to understanding this verse is the phrase ***“...all things...”***. We tend to quote this verse when dealing with adversity in life, but we may miss an important point. We all tend to fight through life in our own strength, our own will and our own resources. That's human nature, and for most of us we have a strong survival mode when things get tough. But...how do we struggle through our

trials with the **“...peace of God, which surpasses all understanding...”** (Philippians 4:7)? By looking at the core message of this verse, **“Jesus is the strength I need to get through all things.”** In Galatians 2:20b Paul tells us, **“...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...”**. As believers we are in Christ and the Lord indwells bodily in us. This gives us a strength we can draw on so we don't have on our own. No matter how physically strong or strong-willed we might be. As believers we know our Lord is with us, and even though our circumstances might not turn out the way we would ideally want them to, if we live in the will of God they will turn out the way He wants them to. Paul's reference to **“...all things...”** means just that. The word **“...all...”** includes both good and bad things, good days and bad days, good health reports and bad health reports. Things we probably can't deal with on our own, but we can deal with them **“...through Christ who strengthens me.”** That's how we learn **“...to be content...”** in every situation. Even when we wish those situations would turn out a different way.

This verse reminds me of Romans 8:28 where the Lord gives us similar encouragement, **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”** It's amazing how many times this verse goes through my mind. Even on the worst days I will think of this verse and try to recall two or three or maybe a hundred **“...good...”** things that come from God. Maybe all I can think of at the time is my heartbeat or the ability to breathe, but I will find something to thank God for before I take another step forward. But in doing so I remind myself that God says **“...all things work together for good...”**. He doesn't say all good things, but He says **“...all things...”**, which could be good or bad, **“...work together for good...”**. I think we often miss that point when we read this verse. We tend to think it means all things from God are good, but that's not what it says. It says, **“...all things work together for good...”**. So, how can **“...all things work together...”**, and how can their work be **“...good...”**? Well, let's say you get sick, which is not good, but God enabled the wisdom for someone to develop a medication that will heal you. In that case, your body working together with the medication that was enabled by God, healed you. And your healing resulted in praise and thanksgiving to God, which is good. Or maybe, a lost person watching you go through a "bad" thing with strength and dignity realizes you have something they need. And so they come to Christ as a result of watching your life in-Christ lived out in front of them. And when that happens, **“...all things work together for good...”**. Many times we've talked about the fact nothing in our life will ever take God by surprise because **“...your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him...”** (Matthew 6:8). That means whatever happens today is already known by God, and if we approach it in a prayerful and obedient mindset it can **“...work together for good...”**.

Maybe you're going through a trial, but you begin to realize the trial will strengthen you. Or maybe you're in a place you don't want to be, but you realize God put you there because someone there needs the gospel. If we will try to look at our trials this way and be alert to how God is moving in our hearts then we will understand why we **"...are the called according to His purpose."** And when that happens we begin to understand how **"...to be content..."** in **"...all things..."** because **"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."** Paul knew his Philippian readers would understand this. Like him, they too were persecuted and **"...shared in my distress..."**. They were a brotherhood of sorts. Not only in sharing the gospel, but in pouring out their lives as a testimony of Jesus.

Lesson #16 - Philippians Chapter 4, verses 1-23

Quick Recap:

I suspect it was difficult for Paul to reach the end of his letter. He probably had more to say but he had said everything the Holy Spirit had given him. He knew his life hung on a thread and could end at any moment on the whim of a Roman official. He also knew he'd probably never see his Philippian Brothers and Sisters again – at least on earth. But in the closing of his letter we don't sense any of that dread or fear. Instead, he seeks to edify and encourage the church by reminding them of their faithfulness to his ministry, and God's faithfulness to them.

It is a beautiful conclusion to a beautiful letter.

Philippians chapter 4 verses 15-23

Verses 15-23

Verse 15a "...the beginning of the gospel..."

Paul had visited Philippi about ten years before. He had intended to travel east into Asia Minor (Turkey), but in a vision he was directed by the Holy Spirit to go west into Macedonia (Greece) (Acts 16:6-10). Paul probably had no idea why he was being sent to Macedonia but once there he would preach in Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Philippi (see Acts 17). In Philippi he joined a group of women who were praying by the riverside. Among them was Lydia, a merchant in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira. She heard the gospel, accepted Christ and was baptized. Afterwards she offered to help Paul in his ministry (Acts 16:11-15). That event began a long association with the believers in Philippi.

As joyful as that occasion must have been, Paul's ministry victories were often punctuated by persecution. For example, in an odd series of events Paul and his traveling partner Silas were thrown in jail for casting a demon from a possessed slave girl. Her owners, who had been using her like a circus sideshow to make money, were angry at Paul for freeing her of the demon, so they drug Paul before the local magistrates because he had stopped their flow of illicit profit. There they were beaten and thrown into the Philippian jail. A far cry from the reception he had received from Lydia. But in reality, it was the gospel message they were upset about, ***"20. 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."*** (Acts 16:20.21). Paul

and Silas were seen as Jews, encroaching on the Roman world and preaching an unusual message that infuriated the pagan Gentiles. It was a message of redemption through the work of a Carpenter named Jesus. So Satan stepped in the way and attempted to stop their ministry. (Acts 16:16-24). But as the Lord so often does, He used the situation for the furtherance of the gospel. Once in jail Paul and Silas began to pray and sing hymns. Probably something most inmates in a Roman prison never thought of doing. But here, as he would do again years later in a prison in Rome, Paul found joy in his incarceration because he knew the Lord was aware of his situation and already at work. As they sang praises a great earthquake occurred which shook loose the prison doors and shackles. The jailer, fearing he would be executed for allowing this to happen, panicked and threatened to take his own life. But Paul interceded, showing him the love of Jesus, and the jailer asked a question that still rescues troubled souls today, **“...‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’** (Acts 16:30b). This is a question whose answer has delivered millions from sin and shame. A question with eternal implications we strive to explain today. Paul’s answer was the same answer we give when we share the gospel message of Jesus, **“...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved...”** (Acts 16:31b). There’s no magic in this statement. No ritual or ceremony in its formula. No works or effort required. This is the simple truth of the gospel, **“6. Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’** (John 14:6). To the jailer the simplicity of this truth must have been shocking. No idol worship was required. No sacrifice was needed. In fact, it took no effort at all. It simply took faith in the person of Jesus and what He did to cover our sin with His blood. But I think something else happened that night with far reaching implications. Paul found himself in prison, just as he would years later in Rome, and yet, instead of panicking and calling for help, he found joy in his situation and praised the Lord. And when he did, the Lord used Paul’s incarceration to lead him to the jailer and from there to add a new saint to the Body of Christ. I wonder if years later in another prison, in another city, if Paul thought back to that time in Philippi and remembered how the Lord used his dire situation to bring glory to God. Maybe that’s why Paul could find such joy in his Roman imprisonment? Maybe he knew the Lord would use his time in chains to further the gospel message in a place he might otherwise never visit on his own.

Verses 15b-23

At the end of his letter to the church in Rome Paul spends considerable time thanking individuals and groups who helped him in his ministry (see Romans chapter 16). So here in the closing statements of his letter to Philippi he does the same thing. Paul thanked the church for their support, but cited the fact **“...but you only...”** indicating they may have been the only church who supported him in this way. Apparently they even supported him when he was preaching at the church in

Thessalonica, which is much like supporting a missionary even when they are not directly teaching you. In that way we sense the desire of the Philippian church to further the gospel by supporting Paul as he ministered throughout the region. This would be a clear example of a gospel-sending church. Even to the point of sending Epaphroditus on the equivalent of a short-term mission trip to help and encourage Paul in the field. But isn't that exactly what Jesus told us to do when He said, **"...19. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..."** (Matthew 28:19a)? And isn't that what Paul reiterated when he told us, **" 14. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" 16. But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "LORD, who has believed our report?" 17. So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. 18. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: "Their sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world."** (Romans 10:14-18 // Isaiah 52:7). Simply stated, the gospel message must go out in order to be heard. The church at Philippi clearly understood that which is why they continued to support Paul's ministry. A task we must continue to do today.

But Paul was not seeking riches or rewards for himself. He knew the obedience of the Philippian church would be rewarded through the blessings of God. Even though the ancient believers of Philippi are gone and the physical church they used no longer exists, their encouraging story has been passed down to us for centuries. What a blessing it would be to know the Lord recognized the obedience of believers by including their story in His word for all to see. Not a story of suffering and persecution – which they undoubtedly endured – but a story of generosity and obedience as they sought to further the message of the gospel by supporting Paul and his ministry. This is the **"...fruit that abounds to your account..."**. The blessings God will bestow when we are faithful. Paul then reminds them that because of their support he is **"...full..."** and **"...have all and abound..."**. Clearly, this does not mean earthly riches because he wrote this from a Roman prison. It means they contributed to his ability to share the gospel of Jesus and to do so with joy even in his deplorable surroundings. Because of this he describes their gift as an offering to God. A **"...sweet-smelling aroma..."** that was **"...an acceptable sacrifice..."** and would be **"...well pleasing to God..."** (see Leviticus 1:9 // Ephesians 5:1-2). Their efforts clearly illustrate their position as **"...a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service..."** (Romans 12:1b).

In his final closing Paul reaches out to **"...every saint in Jesus..."**. This isn't simply thanking a portion of the body or a single group of believers. He is thanking **"...every**

saint...” individually. He would have known many of them by name and would recall earlier conversations and probably meals together. He would understand their trials and they would understand his. He is thanking each one for the privilege of knowing them and for the investment they have made in the ministry. Then he mentions those who are with him. This would have included Timothy and Epaphroditus but there were obviously others. He doesn't tell us who they are but earlier in his letter he mentions other “... **brethren in the Lord...**” (Philippians 1:14), and in his letter to the church at Colossae (another of his Prison Epistles) he mentioned several brothers by name (Colossians 4:7-11 / Philemon 1:2)). These may have been the “...**brethren...**” he was talking about. But what is most interesting is the fact he mentions “... **those who are of Caesar's household...**”. This could have included family members of Caesar, but more than likely would have included the large number of domestic servants in the employment of the royal household. This indicates Paul not only witnessed to the guards he saw every day but must have had access to others he might not normally have come in contact with. Presumably as Paul shared the gospel and the word spread amongst the household he was able to lead a number of them to the Lord. This would have been so encouraging to the church at Philippi to realize their support of his ministry had reached deep into the inner recesses of the most pagan empire on earth.

What a fitting end to his wonderful letter...

Conclusion

So what do we learn from all this? Throughout our study I have sought to bring out a deeper understanding of the scripture itself, but I have also tried to give us a real-life application of its core teaching. Paul's letter gives us clear warning about the dangers of false teaching, and as prevalent as it was in his day, it is probably more pervasive today than it has ever been before. Primarily because of the accessibility to social media and how it can be used to quickly spread false doctrine. Couple that with the fact many Christians today go through life without ever reading God's word and you have a recipe for disaster. Of course the Lord knows that, so the words of caution He gives us through Paul two thousand years ago are just as applicable today. So a clear message for us from Philippians is to be in God's word every day, seeking to understand what it says, and being able to use it as a defense against false teaching and to influence our own life and the lives of others.

But one of the most enduring lessons from Philippians can be summed up in one verse, “...“...**I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content...**”. (Philippians 4:11b). Life can be hard at times and it becomes so easy to just let it beat us down. Health issues, financial problems, difficult relationships, our jobs, school and just life in

general can be taxing. To the point it sometimes seems as if nothing is going the way it should. But the Lord's letter to us, through Paul, teaches us just the opposite. It tells us in those times of great turmoil we can find **"...peace of God, which surpasses all understanding..."** (Philippians 4:7) because **"...I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."** (Philippians 4:13). This is not possible in our own strength, but when we view our challenges as an opportunity to glorify the Lord we realize, **"...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me..."** (Galatians 2:20b) because we know, **"...all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."** (Romans 8:28b). This is the core message of Philippians. In fact, that's a core message of the entire Bible. The fact is our lives will experience difficulties, but none of those difficulties surprise the Lord, which means He can use every trial in our lives to bring credibility to our witness, and in doing so, bring glory to Him. But this is not easy. In fact, it sometimes seems almost impossible to do in our own strength, which is why we must learn to lean on the strength that comes from Jesus. That's why the Lord reminds us, **"9. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."** (2 Corinthians 12:9-10) This passage doesn't say **"When I am weak, I give up."** or **"When I am weak, I just can't move forward."** No. It says, **"...when I am weak, then I am strong..."**. We are strong because through the indwelling Holy Spirit we are filled with the Almighty God.

This is what we should strive to learn from Philippians. The ability to look at life as an opportunity to glorify the Lord. Particularly when the difficulties we face give us a chance to show the power of God in our lives by facing our challenges with strength and dignity. Then we will surely have the **"...peace of God, which surpasses all understanding..."** (Philippians 4:7).

And to each of you, may **"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."** (Philippians 4:23)