

The Book of Philippians

Introduction

Prayer:

Father, as we begin our study of the Book of Philippians, we find ourselves in much the same situation as the 1st Century Christians in the church at Philippi. We are living in a world that is morally on a downhill spiral, we are facing greater and greater opposition (it's inevitable that outright persecution is just around the corner), and we daily hear depressing and discouraging messages that make us sometimes struggle and wonder what's next.

But Father, we thank you for inspiring Paul to write this epistle to encourage not only the Philippian church, but the church of the 21st century to hold fast and to pursue Christlikeness - - and to also live with joy. Father, show us in our study over the next few weeks how to live with joy - - because we know that joy is the quality in our lives that draws others in. In Christ Name I pray. Amen.

Opening Comments

Today we begin a new study, and my hope is that you will find our study to be as interesting and inspirational as I have.

The Book of Philippians contains so much for each of us that is practical, insightful, and encouraging - - it gets right down to where the rubber meets the road in the Christian life. Each week you will find practical applications for what we are studying.

Today, we'll get a quick overview of the epistle and its writer, Paul the Apostle.

The Book of Philippians

The Book of Philippians, written by Paul in 62 AD (when he was about 61 years old), contains 4 chapters and 104 verses written to the Church at Philippi in East Macedonia. Next time we meet, we will talk more about how that church was established on Paul's 2nd missionary journey (49-52 AD).

The Book of Philippians was written acknowledging receipt of a monetary gift from the church while Paul was under house arrest in Rome. The gift was delivered from the church to Paul by Epaphroditus, a member of the church at Philippi (and some say he may have been one of the leaders of the church) who had traveled 600-800 miles from Philippi. Paul wanted to thank them for the gift, which he called (**in Philippians 4:18**) a "fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God."

The three main themes that we will encounter as we study Philippians are as follows:

1. **Proclaiming the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ** by teaching doctrine and edifying and encouraging believers.
2. **Pursuing Christlikeness.**
The name “Jesus Christ” appears over 40 times in this epistle. He is the center of it and the One who is the very source of the next theme, which is “joy.”
3. **Living with joy** plays prominently as a theme.
“Joy,” “rejoice,” or “gladness” are mentioned 19 times in the Book of Philippians.
One of the points that Paul makes in this book is the fact that life does not have to be easy to be joyful - - in fact, he points out that ease of living and joy of heart have little to do with one other.

When Paul came to faith in Christ, his life changed dramatically. God gave him a life of service and devotion to the cause of Christ and it was not an easy life. If you read **2 Corinthians 11:23-27**, you see that Paul oftentimes found himself in difficult circumstances, and yet he was joyful - - THAT is what draws us into this Book of Philippians - - How do we live consistently joyfully, day in and day out, above our circumstances as Paul did?

As we study this book, knowing the challenges Paul faced throughout his life, we begin to wonder if he was some kind of super-saint with a faith made of different stuff than the rest of us. But that’s not the case! He tells us that he had the ability to be joyful because of the **source** of his joy - - and that source is revealed three times in his letter to the Philippians - - his joy was “**in the Lord**” (**3:1, 4:4, & 4:10**). And, as we go through this letter that he wrote, let’s pray that we will truly place our confidence and hope in the character and nature of God, just as Paul did, and live increasingly with joy in all situations.

I think it’s important that we take a brief look at Paul’s life to give us, perhaps, a deeper perspective regarding Paul’s writings here in Philippians.

Some of the information I am going to give you this morning comes from:

***The Apostle – A Life of Paul* – by noted biographer John Pollock, who read dozens of accounts of Paul’s life, performed extensive research, and drove his Volkswagen along hundreds of miles of roads on which Paul traveled 2000 years ago.**

Paul was born in 1 AD in the city of Tarsus, the capital city of the Roman province of Cilicia.

He said in **Acts 21:39**, **“I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city.”** He was telling a Jerusalem mob that Tarsus was not an obscure town in the middle of “nowhere.” Indeed, it was famous for its culture, and even its coinage bore the words, “Metropolis-Autonomous,” or “Independent City.” And though he was a Jew, he was also a Roman citizen (**Acts 16:37-38, Acts 22:25-28**), something that would be very important in the years ahead for Paul. {I sent you information last week that explains how he gained his Roman citizenship.}

Paul’s parents were Pharisees—fervent Jewish nationalists who adhered strictly to the Law of Moses—who sought to protect their children from “contamination” from the Gentiles. Anything Greek would have been despised in Paul’s household, yet he could speak Greek and Latin. His household would have spoken Aramaic, a derivative of Hebrew, which was the official language of Judea.

Paul was likely educated in the Tarsus synagogue until he was 13 and was then sent off to Jerusalem to study for 5-6 years at the feet of the famous and well-respected Jewish teacher Gamaliel (**Acts 5:33-39 and Acts 22:3**). Here he learned to dissect a text and debate in the question-and-answer style known to the ancient world as the “**diatribe**,” and to expound on the meaning of the Torah.

This method of articulation helped rabbis debate the finer points of Jewish law to either defend or prosecute those who broke the law. Paul became well-educated on the law and would have been considered a lawyer in his day. All signs pointed to his becoming a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court of 71 men who ruled over Jewish life and religion. He was zealous for his faith - - this faith did not allow for compromise. It is this zeal that led him down the path of religious extremism. He had become an educated and well-respected Pharisee, following in his father’s footsteps. His family must have been very proud of him.

We find him in Jerusalem at **age 30**, standing by as Stephen was stoned (**Acts 7:58**) and persecuting the church in **Acts 8:1-3**, where Scriptures tells us that “Saul was entering house after house and dragging off men and women to prison.”

Paul’s testimony as what he referred to as “a Hebrew of Hebrews” can be found in the 3rd chapter of Philippians. His name was a household word. He was respected by the Sanhedrin and feared by followers of Christ. But something happened that changed all of that!

Pastor and author Alan Redpath (1907-1989) is quoted as saying: **“When God wants to do an impossible task, He takes an impossible individual and crushes him. Being crushed means being reshaped - - to be a vital, compassionate, useful instrument in His hands.”**

And that is exactly what we see in the life of Paul as we read **Acts 9**. His life dramatically and completely changed on the Road to Damascus when he met the Lord. Let's read how this happened:

Acts 9:1-5

¹Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, ² and asked for letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, {Presumably, the early followers of Christ referred to themselves as followers of "the Way" because of Jesus' statement in John 14:6 that He is "the way and the truth and the life."} whether men or women, he might bring them in shackles to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; ⁴ and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are You, Lord?"

And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,

{Note that in this moment Paul identified the Lord Yahweh of the OT, whom he had attempted so zealously to serve, with Jesus of Nazareth, whom he had so ferociously persecuted through His saints. This was the turning point in Paul's life; this was his moment of salvation in Christ.}

Acts 9:6-9

⁶ but get up and enter the city, and it will be told to you what you must do." ⁷ The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

In Damascus, the Lord had prepared a disciple named Ananias to seek out Paul. Paul, in the meantime, was praying and had seen Ananias in a vision, laying hands on him and restoring his sight. The Lord further revealed to Ananias here in **Acts 9:15-16** exactly what He had planned for Paul; "He is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel." Though he would begin preaching to the Jews, **his primary calling was to the Gentiles.**

Ananias departed and went to the house to which the Lord told him to go and laid his hands on Paul, whose sight was restored. He was also filled with the Holy Spirit and was baptized in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture tells us that he took food and

was strengthened and immediately began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues in Damascus (**Acts 9:17-25**).

SHOW SLIDE #13 – MAP OF PAUL’S EARLY TRAVELS

Led by the Spirit, Paul had success in preaching the Gospel to some of the Jews there in Damascus, but some of the Jews there rebuffed his teachings and sought to do away with him (**Acts 9:23**). Some of the disciples he had made there in Damascus helped him to escape by lowering him in a large basket through an opening in the city wall. (**Acts 9:25**)

The Lord then led him (**see the map**) to Nabatean Arabia (a wilderness desert that stretched east of Damascus down to the Sinai Peninsula) and spent **3 years** (**Galatians 1:16-17**) studying and meditating over God’s Word, communing with God, and seeking direction regarding his newfound faith in Christ. This was most certainly a time when God revealed Himself and His plan to Paul.

According to **Galatians Chapter 1**, he then returned to Damascus for some period of time, and then went to Jerusalem to seek out Christ’s disciples. Here, he initially found that the disciples there were afraid of him. However, Barnabas, “The Son of Encouragement,” took him aside, and after speaking with him, he knew that Christ had truly changed Paul’s life. Barnabas took him to the apostles (**Acts 9:27-28**) and explained to them that Paul had seen the Lord on the Road to Damascus, and they accepted him as their brother and began to work with him in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ.

There’s an important part of his story that I had previously overlooked and it’s found in **Galatians 1:18**.

Paul, who had persecuted Christians, and Peter, who had denied Christ - - both transformed by the Risen Christ - - spent 15 days together in Jerusalem. We can only imagine the discussions that ensued. Peter had lived and walked with our Lord for 3 years and witnessed His death and walked with Him for 40 days following His resurrection. He saw our risen Savior ascend into heaven.

How many questions Paul must have had for Peter during this 15-day period - - there was so much he wanted to know about the Savior who had changed his life on the Road to Damascus just over 3 years earlier. He must have wanted evidence that Jesus really had lived a sinless life. Surely, he wanted to hear how love and purity had been demonstrated. How could he not have wanted to know as many of Jesus’ parables and sayings as he could write down? What a great meeting this must have been!!

He was 34 years of age by this time and returned to Tarsus for about 5-7 years, perhaps seeking direction from the Lord. He most surely experienced conflict with his family and the leaders of the Tarsus synagogue. Writing at the age of 55, Paul said in **2 Corinthians 11:24**, “**Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.**” He was probably cast out of the family home and disappeared into the wild country of the Tarsus foothills for a few years.

In a way that only God could have orchestrated, Barnabas (being led by the Spirit) left Antioch, Syria for Tarsus to locate Paul and bring him back, knowing that he would be useful in the work there in Antioch. It's interesting to note that the Church at Antioch was begun (according to **Acts 11:19–26**) when Christians who were scattered from Jerusalem because of persecution fled to that city in Syria, 300 miles north.

Paul joined Barnabas in serving and building up the Church at Antioch and in making disciples. It was here in Antioch, we read in **Acts 11:26**, that Christ's disciples were first called Christians.

In **Acts 13:2-3** we find the church at Antioch ministering and fasting, when the Holy Spirit said to, **“Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”**

So, at the age of 45, Paul set out, along with Barnabas and his cousin, John Mark (the writer of the Gospel of Mark), on the 1st Missionary Journey (**Acts 13-14**, 46-48 AD), a 1400 mile journey that would take them to Antioch of Pisidia, where Paul preached his longest recorded sermon (**Acts 13:14-52**) and Lystra, where he met a young lad by the name of Timothy, along with his grandmother (Lois) and mother (Eunice).

Let me say a quick word about the roads Paul would have traveled on:

It is interesting to see how God had used the paganistic Roman Empire to develop an intricate system of highways and roads. The Romans were quite advanced in their road construction techniques.

Bert touched on this in our study of Daniel Chapter 11; this happened in the 200 years immediately prior to Christ's Great Commission and the disbursement of the Jews from Jerusalem as persecution began in the mid-1st Century. **Did God not have a plan?** He knew these roads would be needed for the effective spread of the Gospel. It's amazing how this “just worked out.” The Romans built the roads as an efficient means for the overland movement of armies, officials, civilians, and trade goods, but GOD USED THEM FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL.

I want you to see this **MAP OF MAJOR ROADS IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE**. An estimated 250,000 miles of roads were built by the Romans just prior to the time of Christ, and many of them were stone-paved, cambered for drainage, and flanked by footpaths, bridleways, and drainage ditches.

Much of Paul's travel was done in Asia Minor. The next two slides show more detail for the **ROADS OF ASIA MINOR EAST** and **ASIA MINOR WEST**. The roads Paul would have traveled on were 8 to 12 feet in width and many are still in existence today.

The next slide shows a **MAP OF PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY**, which we were discussing before I showed you the maps of the roads in the Roman Empire..

Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey (**Acts 15:36-18:22**, 49-52 AD) {SEE THE **MAP OF PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY**} took him and Silas 2800 miles through Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece. When they went through Lystra, they took Timothy with them and he became an integral part of the team. In Troas, Paul received the Macedonian Vision, a man appealing to him to come over to Macedonia, which they immediately did. We will talk more about this Missionary Journey next week when we discuss the establishment of the Church at Philippi.

Paul's 3rd Missionary Journey (**Acts 18:23-21:7**, 53-57 AD) {SEE THE **MAP OF PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY**} took him, Timothy, and Luke 2700 miles through Asia Minor and Greece. He spent 2 years of this time in Ephesus building-up the church there. He also encouraged believers in Macedonia and Greece. One interesting thing that happened in Troas on this Journey is found in **Acts 20:7-12**, where a young man {Eutychus} fell asleep while Paul was preaching and fell from a 3rd story window and died. Paul subsequently revived him.

Following his 3rd Missionary Journey, Paul went to Jerusalem where Jews from Asia had gathered for the Feast of Pentecost in 57 AD. Recognizing Paul, they instigated a riot and leveled false charges against him. **Acts 22-26** describe his defense of these charges - - he defended himself 5 times in Jerusalem and ultimately appealed to King Agrippa to send him to Rome to plead his case before Caesar (**Acts 26:32**). It's interesting how God works. He had promised Paul (**Acts 23:11**) that he would present the Gospel in Rome and now he was getting an all-expense paid trip to Rome. {**SEE THE MAP OF PAUL'S JOURNEY TO ROME**, described in **Acts 27-28**}

He was sent from Jerusalem to Rome in 60 AD and spent 2 years under house arrest. God did not waste His servant's suffering, but inspired Paul to write Ephesians, Philemon, Colossians, and Philippians, the books we call "The Prison Epistles," during this period of time.

He was released from house arrest in Rome in 62 AD because the Jews who had accused him of being "a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension" (**Acts 24:5**) did not press their case before the emperor.

There was a period of about 3-4 years between his release from house arrest in Rome and his final arrest and subsequent death; we don't know much about this period of time. Some scholars believe that Paul made additional missionary journeys during this time that are not documented.

His final arrest, which is not detailed in Acts, occurred around 66 AD. Once again, he was held under Roman guard, but this time he was confined to a jail cell, perhaps more like what we would call a dungeon. From there, in 67 AD, Paul penned his final epistle, his second letter to Timothy, encouraging Timothy to remain passionate for Christ and to remain firm in sound doctrine.

Traditionally, both Peter and Paul were condemned by resolution of the Roman Senate on the charge of treason against the divine emperor and were in prison together for as much as nine months. The date honored in the city of their martyrdom is June 29, 67 AD, Peter nailed to a cross as a public spectacle at Nero's Circus on the Vatican, head downward at his own request, and Paul, as a Roman citizen, beheaded in a less public place.

Paul's life after conversion is a picture of total devotion to the purposes and plans of God. His words in **Galatians 2:20** explain how Paul viewed his life: **"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."**

Lesson Applications:

1. We see from Paul's life that there is a direct correlation between our joy and our relationship with Christ. As we study this book in the weeks ahead, let's pray that God's Word will draw us into a deeper relationship with Him.
2. Paul is known as "the Apostle of Grace." His life was far from ordinary - - it was extraordinary, and it vividly demonstrates that God can change anyone and no one is beyond the saving grace of the Lord.

Despite his circumstances, Paul praised God and continually shared the Good News. Through his hardships and suffering, Paul knew the outcome of a life well lived for Christ.

His life causes us to reflect on our own lives - -

Are we fully surrendered to Christ?

Are there things we need to let go of; things we need to allow Him to control?

Next week we will discuss the establishment of the Church at Philippi and begin looking at the first few verses of Philippians.