



CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

A Letter to the Philippians

Study Guide

Table of Contents

Pg 4 - Guide Overview

Pg 6 - Introduction to Paul's Letter to the Philippians

**Pg 8 - Why Paul Writes This Letter From a Roman
Prison**

Pg 9 - History of Philippi

Pg 11 - Establishment of the Church in Philippi

Pg 13 - Week 1 Acts 16:8-40; 1 Thessalonians 2:2

Pg 22 - Week 2 Philippians 1:1-11

Pg 27 - Week 3 Philippians 1:12-30

Pg 32 - Week 4 Philippians 2:1-11

Pg 37 - Week 5 Philippians 2:12-30

Pg 42 - Week 6 Philippians 3:1-11

Pg 48 - Week 7 Philippians 3:12-21

Pg 54 - Week 8 Philippians 4:1-3

Pg 59 - Week 9 Philippians 4:4-9

Pg 64 - Week 10 Philippians 4:10-23

**For our citizenship
is in heaven, from
which also we
eagerly wait for a
Savior, the Lord
Jesus Christ."**

Philippians 3:20 NASB

Guide Overview:

Our mission at Community Church of Columbus is “To be and make disciples of Jesus Christ among all nations.” It is our hope that as you study and reflect on Paul’s letter to the Philippian church that you will grow in your devotion to Christ and that you will share with others what God is teaching you. Be thinking of ways that you can grow as a disciple, but also ways that you can help others around you grow in their faith.

This **Study Guide** is meant to be a tool to help you and your small group work your way through Philippians. It is our hope that the resources provided will encourage you in the joy of your salvation as citizens of heaven here and now.

We have elected to include sections on **Background & Context** and **Discussion Questions**. This study is planned to coincide with a sermon series of the same name, space has been provided for **Sermon Notes** along with the weekly **Reading Guide**.

The **Background & Context Section** is designed to help you to understand the historical, social, and theological context of the passage in focus.

The **Discussion Questions** have been developed for you as a small group to talk through. Our hope is for you to grow in your understanding of the Bible and process how the text impacts your own beliefs and how you live out your faith. We want to challenge you to be transformed by the study of God's Word as Paul's letter to the Philippian church is translated into your own context today.

Following the Sermon Note section you will find the **Reading Guide** for the upcoming week. It is composed of relevant Scriptures, including sections from the book of Acts, and comparative Scriptures throughout the New Testament where Paul is communicating the same ideas in other letters. There are also times when we see Paul pulling from Jesus's teachings as recorded in the Gospels. All of this brings a better context to what we are studying in Philippians. It even helps us get a glimpse of Paul's own theology and how he understood his Bible (the Old Testament).

Introduction to Paul's Letter to the Philippians:

There is little doubt as to the authorship of this letter. The Apostle Paul identifies himself as the author (1:1) and this is confirmed by numerous leaders of the Church in the first few hundred years. The language Paul uses in this letter matches many of his other letters and serves to affirm his authorship. As a matter of legitimacy, Philippians is found in the earliest lists of Christian writings that would later become known as the New Testament.

Written during his imprisonment in Rome sometime between 60-62 AD, the apostle Paul's letter to the Philippian church is one of gratitude for their continued support, as well as an update on his well-being. On his second missionary journey in the year 49 AD the apostle Paul and a handful of other believers planted a church in Philippi. Ever since then they continued to be a source of support to the apostle Paul and his on-going missionary efforts. As with many of his other letters, he addresses divisions and false teachers that are negatively affecting the church. This letter is written in a very personal way as one corresponding with family while away from them. At the same time, Paul knows their social and political context, and so includes language pertaining to more noble aspects of being a Roman

colony; such as citizenship, the Praetorian Guard, and Caesar's household. While these references are upwards of nine times, he also mentions "joy" sixteen times in this letter. Even though he was in prison while writing this letter, Paul lets the joy of his salvation shine and does not fail to remind others that they can possess the same. He is able to encourage this church that he planted years before and express his overwhelming gratitude for their continued love and support.

Paul's letter to the Philippian church is sincere and affectionate like it was written to family members back home. Considering that Paul was imprisoned in Rome at the time of its writing, the themes of citizenship and joy are even more poignant. His conditions frame his inspiring words of finding our citizenship in heaven, our joy in Christ, as well as keeping a peaceful and unified fellowship. Two thousand years later anyone can be challenged by Paul's counsel to the Philippian church and be touched by the church's generosity in supporting Paul even while in prison along with his humble and overwhelming gratitude towards them.

Why Paul writes this letter from a Roman prison:

The book of Philippians is a letter that the apostle Paul wrote while in prison in the city of Rome. The reason for how he got there can be read in the book of Acts in chapters 21-28. Paul travels back to Jerusalem following his third missionary journey and while worshipping God at the Temple, he is attacked by a mob of Jews from Asia Minor, one of many areas where he had been planting churches for the previous decade. Paul is rescued by Roman soldiers but taken into custody after identifying himself as a Roman citizen.

In Acts chapter 25 he goes before Festus, a Rome appointed governor for Judea, and when it looks like he was going to be taken back to Jerusalem for trial Paul appeals to Caesar. He knew that a trial in Jerusalem would not have ended well for him but now he would have to be taken to Rome as a prisoner to plead his case before Caesar himself. Paul ends up being in prison and on house arrest for about two years. During that time he wrote encouraging letters to the churches in Ephesus, Colossae, and Philippi as well as a personal letter to Philemon.

History of Philippi

The history of the city of Philippi is critical to better understanding some of the issues that Paul addresses in this letter. As noted above, Paul utilizes language that plays upon the population's loyalties to Rome. What makes this a proud Roman city? The name of the city goes back to 356 BC, when it was conquered by King Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. It quickly became a military outpost and a profitable city from local gold mines. Philippi became a Roman city in 168BC, following the defeat of the Persians. In 42BC, the city was the site of a battle where Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar.

In 31 BC, Octavian, who later became the first Emperor of Rome, rebuilt Philippi as a military outpost once again. There he settled retired soldiers who Octavian knew would stay loyal to Rome, and even gave the city the special status of "being on Italian soil." This meant that they were governed and protected by Roman law instead of local laws. It also ensured citizenship to the inhabitants born there for generations to come. This was the highest honor a city or province could obtain. Obviously, there was much pride and loyalty in a city whose people were Roman citizens by birth, and besides that were mostly veterans who had fought defending and expanding the Roman Empire.



Establishment of the Church in Philippi

In Acts 15 we catch up to Paul and Barnabas along with their entourage as they travel to Jerusalem following their first and very successful missionary journey through Syria and Cilicia. Their success led to the establishment of churches throughout that region. But as they traveled and shared the Gospel, a theological issue kept coming up about whether the Gentiles who accepted Christ needed to be circumcised to be saved.

Remember, according to first century Judaism you needed to be Jewish to be saved and you were either born to a Jewish family or were circumcised. A Council made up of the disciples, minus Judas but who is replaced by Matthias (Acts 2), convened to discuss this issue and a consensus is reached. The apostle James states that circumcision is not necessary for salvation. Paul and Barnabas are affirmed in what they were teaching the Gentile Christian churches they had planted.

Following the decision by the Jerusalem Council, Paul and Barnabas decided to retrace their route and encourage the churches they had planted. Unfortunately, there was disagreement as to whether John Mark could join them or not. Since he had abandoned them during their first journey, Paul

did not think he should be invited to join them again. It was finally decided that Barnabas, who was the leader of the first missionary journey, would take John Mark with him to Cyprus while Paul and Silas retraced the original route.

On their second missionary journey, which was Paul's first to lead, Paul and Silas finish visiting the churches and wander through southern Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) passing through such villages as Derbe and Lystra. Along the way they picked up Timothy, who is referred to as a disciple born to a Jewish Christian woman and to a Greek father. Timothy already had a good reputation as faithful in the churches in that region. After Paul circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3) they continued on in their journey together to share the Gospel throughout central and western Asia Minor.

It is significant that Luke records at key points in Acts how God was guiding their journey by either restricting their travel to a region or by leading them on. We do not have a lot of details as to how this was done but it is important for the reader to understand that they were being directed by God Himself.

Eventually, Paul and the other believers find themselves in Troas without clear direction for where to go next. They seek the Lord and He answers.

Week 1

A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

Acts 16:9 NASB

Week 1: Acts 16:8-40; 1 Thes. 2:2

Date: _____

Title: _____

Speaker: _____

Sermon Notes:

Reading Guide for Upcoming Week:

- Monday - Acts 15:22-41
- Tuesday - Acts 16:1-21
- Wednesday - Acts 16:22-40; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-4
- Thursday - Acts 22:1-30
- Friday - Acts 23:1-35
- Saturday - Acts 28:16-31

Background & Context

While in the coastal city of Troas, a potential site for the famous city of Troy, the apostle Paul received a vision of a man from Macedonia pleading for them to come to him and help them. Paul immediately understands the vision as their call to travel to the district of Macedonia, which is a Roman colony, to share the Gospel there. Interesting to note that in Acts 16:10 Luke starts using “we” in his recording. Scholars think that it is in Troas that Luke joins Paul, Silas and Timothy. So, from Troas they all set sail to the region of Macedonia landing on the island of Samothrace and then sailing onward to Neapolis. Paul in a very calculated move does not stay long in Neapolis but takes the Egnatian Way, which was like an ancient interstate highway, directly to the “leading city” of the region, Philippi. Scholars believe this to have taken place in the year 49AD.

Philippi is a turning point for Paul and his fellow missionaries. After having some small success already on their journey, they are now about to face persecution from the local authorities. In his careful recording, Luke will develop themes that will pop up throughout the rest of Acts and Paul’s letters. Some of those themes include

ministry to those found in the margins of society, how ministry affects economic interests (idol makers), and persecution for sharing the message of Christ throughout the Roman Empire. Each of these themes are critical to the establishment of the Philippian church.

After spending a few days in the city of Philippi Paul goes out of the city gates to a nearby river where it is said to be a “place of prayer.” When there are too few Jewish people in a city to meet as a synagogue their gatherings are referred to as a “place of prayer.” It is here that Paul finds a group of women who are willing to hear him speak. You may recall that Paul himself is a Pharisee and some scholars believe he continued to dress the part to gain entry into synagogues or “places of prayer” to share the Gospel.

It is among this group of women that Paul meets one from Thyatira named Lydia who immediately puts her faith in Jesus. As a Gentile “God-fearer” she would have been considered just short of a full convert to Judaism. Lydia would therefore have knowledge of the God of the Bible and knew the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, and would have been familiar with the rest of the Old Testament. Along with Lydia, there may have been two others who also came to faith during Paul’s sharing of the Gospel, Eudia and Syntyche, who are mentioned in Philippians 4:2. These are the first converts in what is considered Europe!

Just to be clear, the first convert to trust in Jesus for salvation, Lydia, is neither a man or a Macedonian. While this isn’t what the original vision portrayed, it still brought

them this far to share the Gospel. Interestingly enough, Lydia is from the same region of Asia Minor that Paul was ministering to before coming to Macedonia. Some scholars think that Lydia's conversion moves the theological narrative along by connecting the two regions.

Lydia was a common name during this period in the Roman Empire. Her name could be a nickname since she is from Thyatira, a city in the region of Lydia in Asia Minor. Regardless of the origins of her name, Lydia would have been considerably wealthy as a high-status, freedwoman and dealer in purple cloth. Thyatira's main industry was luxury textiles. Lydia was basically an international businesswoman representing the interest of her home city as she dealt in purple textiles in the Roman colony of Philippi. It is her faith and generosity that led to her becoming a benefactor and patroness of the missionary work Paul and his companions were doing in Philippi to establish a church there. Her newfound responsibility for them even extended to providing accommodations while they stayed in the region. Lydia's local clout and prestige will be put to the test by what happens next when Paul and Silas have a confrontation with the local authorities.

Those meeting at the "place of prayer" must have received Paul's message favorably as they were invited back. It was on one of these trips that Paul and his companions were followed by a young female slave that was possessed by a spirit of divination. Luke is careful to avoid use of the word for "prophecy" here so as not to confuse his Christian readers. The girl with such abilities brought in a great

amount of profit for her masters. Interestingly enough what she says is true and accurate but it is still unwanted attention that Paul did not solicit for obvious reasons. Paul gets annoyed and Luke states that he spoke to the spirit directly to rebuke it in the name of Jesus and to come out of her. The spirit immediately leaves her. This episode is significant as it illustrates the power of the Holy Spirit and the name of Jesus Christ in overcoming evil. Christians hearing this would immediately think of Jesus and His ability to rebuke demons.

The girl's masters are quite upset for instantly losing their business! They seize Paul and Silas to forcibly take them before the magistrates. The magistrates served as a type of judge but they took on many different roles. As Philippi was a leading city of a Roman colony that was inhabited primarily by retired military personnel then these magistrates were more than likely retired generals that served as a council of nine to oversee operations there. They would not tolerate any disruptions in their city!

Paul and Silas are immediately beaten with rods and thrown into prison. The place where Paul and Silas end up was not like a holding cell. They were thrown into the dungeon of the prison with their feet locked in stocks or chains along with an armed guard. This could have been their final residence before execution except God had different plans for them! At midnight there was an earthquake that opened the doors but that's not all; even their chains fell off. Oddly enough the jailer slept through the whole thing! He wakes up and panics thinking everyone has escaped. He knows what his fate would be

when the magistrates hear what happened so he is about to kill himself when Paul stops him. Paul assures him that no one has escaped.

The magistrates, possibly out of fear caused by the supernatural occurrence the night before, order Paul and Silas to be released from prison and sent away from the city. It is important to note here how the ancient world was governed by an “honor/shame” culture. Any shame brought upon a person or family could have devastating consequences for your standing in society which could affect business, marriage prospects, as well as political appointments. Even associating with people whose history bears marks of shame could tarnish your own reputation. Paul and Silas being publicly beaten would have been extremely shameful for Lydia, potentially devastating for her business, and for the church that was now meeting at her house. So, when Paul and Silas make their Romans citizenship known there is a bigger plan in place. The magistrates themselves came to the prison themselves to escort Paul and Silas out. This would have publicly restored their honor and possibly saved the lives of the magistrates as what they did was illegal to do to a Roman citizen. But Paul and Silas do not immediately leave the city as the magistrates had requested. Instead, they go directly to Lydia’s house where the church had gathered thus restoring the honor to Lydia and the fellowship that met there. This would have afforded some security for the church in Philippi for some time. After seeing the other believers at Lydia’s house Paul and the others continue on their way leaving Philippi behind.

Discussion Questions

- What did you learn from this past Sunday's message?
- In what ways were you challenged from the message to grow as a follower of Christ?
- How did God work to establish a church in the city of Philippi?
- What role did dreams/visions play in the planting of the church in Philippi?
- Does God continue to communicate to us with dreams/visions today?
- How was the dream/vision fulfilled or was it not?

Discussion Questions

- Why did Paul and his companions go to the “place of prayer” on the Sabbath?
- How was God glorified by the conflict and persecution Paul and Silas endured?
- What do we learn about church planting from this episode in Paul’s missionary career?
- What role did Paul’s citizenship play in the establishment of a church?
- How does wealth factor into this narrative?

Week 2

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6 NASB

Week 2: Philippians 1:1-11

Date: _____

Title: _____

Speaker: _____

Sermon Notes:

Reading Guide for Upcoming Week:

- Monday - Philippians 1:1-11
- Tuesday - Philemon (Slaves/Bond-Servants)
- Wednesday - Titus 1 (Overseers and Deacons)
- Thursday - 1 Timothy 3:1-16 (Overseers and Deacons)
- Friday - 1 Corinthians 3 (Spiritual Maturity)
- Saturday - Ephesians 4 (Spiritual Maturity)

Background & Context

The apostle Paul begins his letter to the Philippian church by introducing Timothy and himself as “bond-servants of Christ Jesus.” This reference is not so much a title of humility as it is an overt sign of allegiance to Jesus. Bond-servants of Caesar had more authority than most of the nobility. Here, Paul and Timothy’s authority comes in service to Jesus Christ. Their citizenship is in heaven.

The letter is addressed to all of the believers in Philippi but singles out the “overseers and deacons.” These are actually leadership roles within the church. The term “overseer” is used elsewhere in the ancient world of that time to mean a “leader” and even in synagogues as an “elder” or “leader.” The role of deacon was held by men and women and were primarily responsible for the serving and meeting the physical needs of the church. Paul writes more on overseers and deacons in 1 Timothy 3. As the early church met in homes, it took a lot of coordination by the overseers and deacons to ensure needs were being met, conflicts were settled, and solid biblical teaching was being espoused. Paul’s greeting here is significant as it takes a common greeting in both Greek and Jewish cultures of saying “Grace and Peace”

and attributing both as coming not only from God our Father but also coming from the Lord Jesus Christ. This is uniting Jesus's status with that of God the Father's.

In v. 3-11 Paul gushes over the Philippians with gratitude and thankfulness. Remember that he and Timothy have been acquainted with this church for over ten years. For that entire time they have supported him and he has regularly gone back to visit them. In v. 5 he mentions their "participation in the gospel." We may miss this in English but in Greek the term used for "participation" is a financial term. Paul will reiterate his gratitude to the Philippian church in Ch. 4 for their support while he is in prison. This is one of the main reasons why he is writing to them.

In the ancient world people would often call upon a deity as their witness to affirm whatever they were saying or vowing to undertake was under divine wrath if failed. Here, Paul is calling God as his witness in how much he loves and misses them. He goes on to admonish them in their continued growth and maturing in the faith.

Discussion Questions

- What did you learn from this past Sunday's message?
- In what ways were you challenged from the message to grow as a follower of Christ?

Discussion Questions

- Where does Paul's joy come from in v. 4? (First mention of joy in this letter)
- How is the Philippian church "partakers" with Paul? (see v. 7)
- What is Paul's prayer for them?
- What does "love abound," "real knowledge," "and all discernment" look like for us today?
- Is it any different than it was for the Philippian church in the first century?
- What is the "fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ?"

Week 3

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

Philippians 1:27 NASB

Week 3: Philippians 1:12-30

Date: _____

Title: _____

Speaker: _____

Sermon Notes:

Reading Guide for Upcoming Week:

- Monday - Philippians 1:12-30
- Tuesday - Acts 28:16-31 (Praetorian Guard)
- Wednesday - Galatians 5 (Envy and Rivalry)
- Thursday - 1 Timothy 6 (Envy and Rivalry)
- Friday - 1 Corinthians 15:20-58 (Death and Resurrection)
- Saturday - Colossians 4 (Christian Conduct and Imprisonment)

Background & Context

In this section Paul, referring to the Philippian church members as “brethren,” speaks more on his current condition which is typical of ancient letter writing. Here we see Paul using the same letter writing technique.

Immediately following a greeting will come an update on well-being and recent news. What sticks out the most is his continued positivity even though his circumstances are less than ideal. Actually, to read Paul’s words it sounds like everything is going according to plan... God’s plan.

Paul’s time in prison has enabled him to minister to members of the Praetorian guard. Rome had laws that forbade any army from having a presence in Italy. To maintain security and act as Caesar’s elite bodyguards, the Praetorian guard was formed and were very well taken care of to ensure their loyalty. They were even considered to be a part of Caesar’s household (4:22). In total they numbered anywhere from thirteen to fourteen thousand soldiers. These freemen and citizens of Rome were hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ from a fellow Roman citizen in custody!

Paul mentions how his imprisonment is affecting other believers. Whereas we may assume some were afraid, just the opposite happens as some are emboldened and are preaching without fear. We cannot understate how Paul's case would affect the believers in Philippi though. Paul as a Roman citizen is on trial for what he believes. If the trial goes badly for Paul, it sets a precedent for Christians everywhere else in the empire and their citizenship would not save them! This fact is not lost on Paul's friends in Philippi.

Regardless of how Paul's case ends up he affirms his commitment to Christ stating "to live is Christ and to die is gain." If he is allowed to live then he will continue ministering and sharing the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. If he dies or is executed then he will be with the Lord. To Paul it's a win-win scenario!

Discussion Questions

- What did you learn from this past Sunday's message?
- In what ways were you challenged from the message to grow as a follower of Christ?
- How is God using Paul's imprisonment to further His Kingdom?

Discussion Questions

- How can someone preach the Gospel “from envy and strife” as well as selfish ambition?”
- What is inhibiting you from adopting a mindset like Paul’s towards life and death?
- What priority is sharing the Gospel in your life?
- How does Paul continue in his role as disciple maker to the Philippian church?
- What does it mean to “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ?”
- How is suffering for Christ an opportunity as Paul presents it in v. 29?

Week 4

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

Philippians 2:1-2 NASB

Week 4: Philippians 2:1-11

Date: _____

Title: _____

Speaker: _____

Sermon Notes:

Reading Guide for Upcoming Week:

- Monday - Philippians 2:1-11
- Tuesday - Romans 8:9-27 (Fellowship of the Spirit)
- Wednesday - John 17 (Jesus's Prayer for Disciples)
- Thursday - 1 Corinthians 1 (Paul on Unity in the Church)
- Friday - Isaiah 53 (The Suffering Servant)
- Saturday - Isaiah 45:18-25 (Every Knee Will Bow)

Background & Context

The second chapter of Philippians is directly connected to where the first chapter left off. Paul continues to encourage spiritual unity in the church. He even creates a direct correlation between unity and “fellowship of the Spirit.” The church was to be unified in purpose, in belief, and in action. They were to be loving and selfless towards one another. Paul not only invokes the Spirit in this admonition but also Jesus as an example for us to follow.

Scholars believe that in v. 6-11 Paul is either quoting or creating a Christian hymn that is indirectly contrasting Adam and Jesus. By doing so Paul is pointing to Jesus as the model of humility and obedience, even to the point of suffering and death. He is addressing spiritual unity by illustrating that it is Jesus who is worthy of our unified allegiance as citizens of heaven with Him as our King.

Unfortunately, Paul feels the need to address unity in the church in many of his letters. The early church met in homes much like our small groups currently do. The small group leader equivalent back then served in the role of a teacher as well as a “overseer/leader” who met with other overseers to discuss matters of faith or major issues

affecting the fellowship of house churches in that city. As Paul writes about “selfishness or empty conceit” we can hear issues that are less theological but more about personality and pride/ambition. Social status could even play a big part in causing division within the fellowship as well. Still, Paul points directly to Jesus as our example to follow as we serve and worship God with other believers regardless of their social status, ethnicity, wealth, connections, etc.

Discussion Questions

- What did you learn from this past Sunday’s message?
- In what ways were you challenged from the message to grow as a follower of Christ?
- Why do you think unity is a common theme in Paul’s letters?
- What do v. 1-4 as Paul’s prescription for church unity look like practically today?

Discussion Questions

- How was church unity made complicated by being in house churches?
- How do we maintain unity today as a church Of small groups?
- What do v. 6-11, the early Christian hymn, communicate about beliefs about Jesus? (theologically/ Christology)
- Explain the differing roles of Jesus and God found in v. 5-11?
- How could this section of Philippians be used in disciple making?

Week 5

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Philippians 2:12-13 NASB

Week 5: Philippians 2:12-30

Date: _____

Title: _____

Speaker: _____

Sermon Notes:

Reading Guide for Upcoming Week:

- Monday - Philippians 2:12-30
- Tuesday - 1 Thessalonians 5 (Day of Christ)
- Wednesday - Galatians 2:11-20 (Justification)
- Thursday - 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 (Grumbling)
- Friday - 2 Corinthians 10 (Letter Writing)
- Saturday - Galatians 6 (Letter Writing)

Background & Context

As a way of reinforcing his statements on unity Paul encourages the Philippian church to put his words into action as if he were present with them. It would be difficult to hear of strife and division in a church so dearly loved by Paul and not be able to do anything about it. Communication was limited to letters and messengers for the time being.

Ancient letter writing was an extremely valuable and important means of communication. A letter carried the full weight of the sender as an extension of their presence and authority. Messengers too were received as personal representatives of the sender and given the same honor. Even though Paul could not be present with them, he was at this time limited to letter writing.

In this section, we see other attributes of ancient letter writing that includes recommendations for Timothy and Epaphroditus. Timothy, as a disciple of Paul, is even described in father-son terms. Since letters were not sent often since the journey was always dangerous, they included updates but also announced one's arrival. In this case it is Timothy who would be coming soon in the

full authority of Paul to settle matters in the Philippian church. Epaphroditus, having accepted the danger in being the messenger, is recognized for his work in completing his mission by delivering a letter and monetary gift from the Philippian church to Paul. Paul takes the opportunity to update Epaphroditus's friends and family back home on his well-being and commend him highly giving great honor to his reputation.

Theologically, Paul presents both our responsibility to persevere and at the same time acknowledges it is God working in and through us for "His good pleasure." Our perseverance is to avoid being blinded by current moral standards and yet, to stay focused on the mission before us to "be a light in the world" and "hold fast the word of life."

Discussion Questions

- What did you learn from this past Sunday's message?
- In what ways were you challenged from the message to grow as a follower of Christ?
- Discuss what it means to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

Discussion Questions

- In v. 14-16 how does “grumbling and disputing” disqualify a person from being “blameless and innocent,” “children of God,” and “lights in the world?”
- What is Paul’s “reason to glory” mentioned in v. 16?
- How does this impact your views of disciple making?
- In regards to disciple making, what do we learn from Paul’s words about Timothy?
- What do you think it takes to create a disciple making relationship such as what we see between Paul and Timothy?

Week 6

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

Philippians 3:7-8 NASB

Week 6: Philippians 3:1-11

Date: _____

Title: _____

Speaker: _____

Sermon Notes:

Reading Guide for Upcoming Week:

- Monday - Philippians 3:1-11
- Tuesday - Galatians 2 (Circumcision)
- Wednesday - Romans 2:25-3:20 (Circumcision/Law)
- Thursday - Galatians 5 (Circumcision)
- Friday - 2 Corinthians 11 (Paul's Resume)
- Saturday - 1 Corinthians 15:12-58 (The Resurrection)

Background & Context

After what seems like a tidy wrap up to his letter ("Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord"), Paul makes a stark digression by denouncing the group of Jewish Christians who were demanding the new Gentile (non-Jewish) believers in Christ be circumcised. They felt it was a matter of salvation.

Digressions like this in ancient letters were not uncommon and there is no reason to assume as some scholars believe that this section is a different letter inserted into this one. Paul has already referenced this group and the division they were causing. Still, Paul feels the need to address them here with very strong language. He refers to them as "dogs", a term that not only insinuates unclean but also sexually immoral. There is certainly a bit of sarcasm and irony here considering what these individuals were seeking to do to other men. Also, the word Paul uses for "circumcision" here is also used in Galatians 5 and it is not the typical word used for this religious act. The word Paul uses in Greek is closer to "emasculate" or "castrate." Paul is being very clear in what he thinks of this group! This "circumcision group" appears quite often in Paul's letters, even being referred to as

Judaizers.” Since Philippi did not have a substantial population of Jewish persons living there to host even a synagogue, this group of Jewish Christian believers are probably acting as missionaries promoting this false teaching about circumcision. This may be the same group that is moving from one city to another, possibly following in Paul’s footsteps, to corrupt these young churches and new believers in Christ among the Gentiles.

Paul goes on to remind the Philippian readers, as he does on a few other occasions with other churches, of his own resume and credentials knowing that no one else could compare. Imagine being a part of the “circumcision group” present at the reading of Paul’s letter in Philippi!

After shaming this group, he immediately disregards himself and centers back on Christ. Knowing Jesus has been worth giving up everything else, even referring to all of it as “rubbish.” The word Paul uses here is actually used for excrement or wasted food thrown out to dogs. All of those credentials mean nothing to him compared with knowing Christ. Knowing Christ overshadows absolutely every other aspect of life whether it be past, present or future. Paul knows that knowing Christ is the key to participating in the resurrection to come!

Discussion Questions

- What did you learn from this past Sunday’s message?

Discussion Questions

- In what ways were you challenged from the message to grow as a follower of Christ?
- Does Paul's language surprise you? Why or why not?
- Why would Paul's resume in v. 4-6 be important to his missionary work?
- In what ways would applying v. 7-8 to your life change your mindset towards family, work, etc.?
- How does knowing Christ affect your view of righteousness?
- How does Paul connect knowing Christ "and the power of His resurrection and fellowship of His sufferings" to being a part of the "resurrection of the dead" in v. 10 ?

Discussion Questions

- How can that be applied to your life?
- As we have seen Paul make disciples everywhere he goes and now see that a certain “circumcision group” is doing the same. How does that shape your view of the importance of making disciples with good theology then and now?

Week 7

**For our citizenship is in heaven,
from which also we eagerly wait
for a Savior, the Lord Jesus
Christ; who will transform the
body of our humble state into
conformity with the body of His
glory, by the exertion of the
power that He has even to
subject all things to Himself.**

Philippians 3:20-21 NASB

Week 7: Philippians 3:12-21

Date: _____

Title: _____

Speaker: _____

Sermon Notes:

Reading Guide for Upcoming Week:

- Monday - Philippians 3:12-21
- Tuesday - 2 Timothy 4 (Athletic Competition)
- Wednesday - Colossians 3 (Relationships)
- Thursday - Isaiah 65 (New Heavens/New Earth)
- Friday - Ezekiel 37 (Resurrection)
- Saturday - Revelation 20 (Resurrection)

Background & Context

Paul begins this section by affirming to his reader that he has not already been transformed to what we will see after Christ returns. He re-emphasizes this by using a similar word that means “perfect” that would be familiar with his Greek audience. The word for “perfect” was used in reference to morality by philosophers as the ultimate goal to attain in this life. Paul is a human just like anyone else except that he is living his life completely devoted to Jesus Christ. It is not his righteousness, moral actions, that save him, but Christ righteousness that brings salvation and allows us to experience the resurrection.

After clarifying his current status, Paul shifts to how the resurrection affects his outlook on life and ministry. He does not believe he is perfect in the present nor is he concerning himself with the past either. Paul is striving to “obtain,” a term used for the goal of athletic competition, the “prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Paul is fixated on the resurrection to come that it shapes his current attitude. Everything is seen through the lens of the resurrection after we pass away even to the point of “weeping” over the destruction of the enemies of Christ.

These enemies are the ones mentioned earlier preaching salvation through circumcision and bringing division to the churches in Philippi and elsewhere. Paul does not identify them as his enemies but as being against Christ Himself.

When our focus is continually on Christ and the resurrection to come, it changes our relationships with people, our goals for this life, and how we prioritize ministry/ making disciples. Paul is encouraging the reader to have the same attitude and “walk according to the pattern” set by Paul and those who minister with him. The church in Philippi saw how they lived their lives devoted to Christ and could now recall that while reading these words.

Having our citizenship in heaven means living with an attitude shaped by living for the Lord, focused on the resurrection, and following the pattern of the apostles in our everyday lives. We look forward to our transformation to come!

Discussion Questions

- What did you learn from this past Sunday’s message?

Discussion Questions

- In what ways were you challenged from the message to grow as a follower of Christ?
- In what ways is your attitude shaped by your belief in Jesus Christ?
- How does the resurrection to come affect how you live your life now?
- What is “the pattern” Paul is alluding to for the Philippians church to follow? What does that look like today?
- How should being a Christ follower and knowing about the resurrection to come affect how you perceive and relate to your “enemies?”

Discussion Questions

- How are the “enemies of the cross of Christ” described?
- How would that translate into today’s language?
- What does your “citizenship in heaven” mean to you?
- How does our “citizenship in heaven” relate to Jesus as Lord?

Week 8

**Therefore, my beloved brethren
whom I long to see, my joy and
crown, in this way stand firm in
the Lord, my beloved.**

Philippians 4:1 NASB

Week 8: Philippians 4:1-3

Date: _____

Title: _____

Speaker: _____

Sermon Notes:

Reading Guide for Upcoming Week:

- Monday - Philippians 4:1-3
- Tuesday - Matthew 18 (Settling Disputes)
- Wednesday - 1 Thessalonians 2 (Crown of Rejoicing)
- Thursday - 2 Timothy 4 (Crown of Righteousness)
- Friday - Revelation 21 (Book of Life)
- Saturday - Revelations 3:1-6 (Book of Life)

Background & Context

In this final chapter of Paul's letter is typical of other ancient letters of that time with the main emphasis of the letter comes into view. This section would usually be more sentimental (v. 1, 10-14), addressing personal issues (v. 2-3) as well as pinpointing the most notable reason for the correspondence (v. 15-19).

Paul sees the Philippian church along with others that he has planted as "crowns" to be presented to Christ upon His return. Paul's whole ministry philosophy is centered on this presentation and shepherding these churches until that time. He is discipling them both when he is present and away through his letters. He is always encouraging them and never failing to address areas where they are lacking.

As we read this close to two thousand year old letter, we are made aware of two women who are at odds with one another. By their Greek names it may be assumed that they are foreign merchants like Lydia. Both have helped Paul in his ministry there in Philippi and possibly served in roles of leadership as deaconesses. Paul's desire is for them to settle their dispute and be at peace with one

another. Paul, after hearing of their conflict while in Rome, has now brought it to the attention of the entire Christian community in Philippi. Imagine this letter and these very words being read by the overseers in every single house church. Paul is calling them out and now it will need to be addressed.

Before we judge Paul too harshly, we should also understand that he is addressing women who could very well be of a higher social status than many of the other believers. This would be a very difficult matter to navigate for a local overseer. Paul, who is risking the forfeit of future support from wealthy patronesses, is still willing to address the matter for the sake of peace and harmony in the fellowship.

Discussion Questions

- What did you learn from this past Sunday's message?
- In what ways were you challenged from the message to grow as a follower of Christ?
- What does Paul mean when he refers to his fellow believers in Philippi as his "joy and crown?"

Discussion Questions

- Was Paul right to solicit the help of the community for help in settling the matter between Euodia and Syntyche?
- What example does Paul's handling of Euodia and Syntyche's dispute give for the modern church today?
- By mentioning the "book of life" how is Paul framing the above mentioned conflict?
- What do we glean in the area of disciple making from these verses?
- What do we learn in the area of small groups from these verses?

Week 9

**Rejoice in the Lord always; again
I will say, rejoice!**

Philippians 4:4 NASB

Week 9: Philippians 4:4-9

Date: _____

Title: _____

Speaker: _____

Sermon Notes:

Reading Guide for Upcoming Week:

- Monday - Philippians 4:4-9
- Tuesday - 1 Thessalonians 4 (Coming of the Lord)
- Wednesday - Romans 15:1-13 (Rejoice!)
- Thursday - Matthew 6:25-34 (Anxiety/Worry)
- Friday - Ephesians 6:10-20 (Prayer)
- Saturday - 2 Thessalonians 3 (Prayer and Peace)

Background & Context

Rejoice! At the mention of the “book of life” in the previous verse, Paul seemingly becomes overwhelmed and ecstatic in his praise to the Lord. We have seen over the course of this letter the contagious joy he shares in God through Jesus Christ. He is always looking for the Lord’s return to usher in the final move into eternity following the judgment at the opening of the book of life. This is everything Paul hopes in and for. It has framed his life for close to thirty years by the time this letter is written and as far as we know would only have to wait a few short years to see it realized as he meets his own martyrdom.

Paul’s joy is in the Lord. Through that joy, he encourages and guides other believers in their walk with the Lord. His counsel is practical and sincere. Instead of anxiety over matters we cannot control, Paul promotes taking everything to the Lord in prayer. By doing so, peace from God will flood our hearts and minds. At the moment Paul had plenty to be anxious about considering his life hung in the balance but also his daily wellbeing. Ancient prisoners, even those on house arrest, would need to be supported by friends or family on the outside or through

public charity. We see Paul choosing joy and when the temptation to be anxious arises he goes to the Lord in prayer.

Ancient letters would generally include encouragement towards being virtuous and moral. Here we see Paul including it at the same point in the letter but the focus is still Christ-centered. As we are supposed to be a light in this world these virtues were and are relevant to believers; whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellence, and anything worthy of praise. We are instructed to “dwell” or meditate on these virtues with the intent of putting them into practice. Paul presents himself as a model for these virtues. The result is having the same peace from God that he has.

Discussion Questions

- What did you learn from this past Sunday’s message?
- In what ways were you challenged from the message to grow as a follower of Christ?
- Why is Jesus’s return a cause for rejoicing?

Discussion Questions

- Paul presents prayer as a remedy for anxiety. How have you experienced that in your life?
- Paul encourages prayer that includes not only requests (supplication) but also to give thanks. How does this fit your typical model of prayer?
- Have you ever experienced the “peace of God?” How would you describe it to someone who has not experienced it?
- Which of the virtues listed in v. 8-9 draws your attention as one to “dwell” on?
- In a disciple making relationship, how can these virtues be passed along to the next generation of believers?

Week 10

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:12-13 NASB

Week 10: Philippians 4:10-23

Date: _____

Title: _____

Speaker: _____

Sermon Notes:

Reading Guide for Upcoming Week:

- Monday - Philippians 4:10-23
- Tuesday - Luke 12:22-40 (God Provides)
- Wednesday - Philippians 1
- Thursday - Philippians 2
- Friday - Philippians 3
- Saturday - Philippians 4

Background & Context

Here we come to the final section of Paul's letter to the Philippian church. While it may appear out of place being at the end of the letter, in ancient writing this is where the reason for writing is unpacked more fully. Gratitude was a serious matter in the ancient world with honor and shame attached to doing it well or not showing enough. It could even become a legal matter! Even more precarious is the nature of the relationships with those giving the monetary gift. If Paul thanks them overtly or too much then he subjects himself to these supporters in a Patron/Client relationship. He would be indebted to them. The current relationship dynamic is one of a shepherd looking after a flock or even a parent bringing up children.

Throughout the rest of the letter we have seen Paul's authority manifesting without hesitation as he instructs them to aggressively settle divisive matters or by lovingly and gently encouraging change. Paul knows where his authority comes from and his responsibility to make disciples. Yet he continually refers to them as "brethren" or in some translations "brothers and sisters." Even though a generous gift has been brought to support Paul during

his imprisonment, he expresses his appreciation for their “opportunity” while maintaining his own “contentment.”

Paul’s contentment comes from his focus on the mission and what is to come. Regardless of his current physical condition, he has learned to be content. Whether he has nothing or everything Paul is not living for those things. They are merely a means towards an end that is Christ Jesus. That is why he says in v. 13 that he “can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” It is not about achieving certain goals in this life or sports or anything like that. Paul is talking about contentment. For Paul it is Christ who strengthens his resolve to be content and not give into the worldly temptation to always want more or to achieve a lifestyle of comfort and security.

In v. 15 Paul uses a word for Philippians that is poor Greek grammar but only proves his knowledge of the recipients of the letter. The word Paul uses is one only the residents of Philippi identify with. It is endearing and familiar for him to use it and they would have surely been honored to have used it.

Paul closes with a few short greetings to all the believers in Philippi and communicates greetings from those who are with Paul in Rome, now including those of “Caesar’s household.” As stated before, this could be another reference to the Praetorian Guard or to any one directly supported by Caesar from family, slaves, employees, etc.

He ends with a final Christ-centered blessing and benediction in v. 23: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

Discussion Questions

- What did you learn from this past Sunday's message?
- In what ways were you challenged from the message to grow as a follower of Christ?
- What is Paul's reason for rejoicing in v. 10?
- Why is contentment important for Paul?
- Should it be important to Christians today?
- What does contentment look like for Christians in the United States?

Discussion Questions

- What does Paul say about the Philippian church's gift?
- How does our giving correlate with what Paul says in v. 19 that "my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus?"
- How does this section move you towards giving as a part of disciple making?



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