

I. Lesson 1: The Philippian Church – Acts 16

September 6/7, 2006

Aim: To introduce the Philippian church and the Philippian letter. The theme of the letter is ‘Christian joy comes through having a Christ-centered mind.’

A. Paul’s Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36-18:22)

1. Destinations

a) Asia

Antioch (15:36), Syria/Cilicia (Acts 15:41), Derbe/Lystra (Acts 16:1), Phrygia/Galatia (Acts 16:6), Mysia/Troas (Acts 16:7).

b) Europe

Samothrace/Neapolis (Acts 16:11), **Philippi** (Acts 16:12), Amphipolis/Apollonia (Acts 17:1), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1), Berea (Acts 17:10), Athens (Acts 17:15), Corinth (Acts 18:1).

c) Back to Syria

Cenchrea (Acts 18:18), Ephesus (Acts 18:19), Caesarea/Antioch (Acts 18:22).

2. Companions

a) Silas (Acts 15:40)

Leader in the church, chosen by the Jerusalem council to go to Antioch (Acts 15:22); prophet (Acts 15:32).

b) Timothy (Acts 16:1-3)

Son of a believing Jewish mother and a Greek father in Lystra (Acts. 16:1); Paul’s ‘beloved and faithful son in the LORD’ (1 Cor. 4:17); ‘does the work of the LORD’ (1 Cor. 16:10); ‘our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ’ (1 Th. 3:2); ‘a true son in the faith’ (1 Tim. 1:2); ‘a beloved son’ (2 Tim. 1:2).

c) Dr. Luke (Acts 16:7-10)

Notice the change from ‘they’ to ‘we’ in Troas (Acts 16:7-10); author of the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts; the ‘beloved physician’ (Col. 4:4); companion of Paul (2 Tim. 4:11); fellow laborer of Paul (Philemon 1:24).

3. Going to Europe (Acts 16:6-10)

- *What was the original itinerary of Paul & company?*
- *How did God change their itinerary?*
- *Why do you think God directed them to Europe?*

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B. The City of Philippi

1. Location

Northeast part of Greece, an important gateway between Europe and Asia Minor.

2. History

- 360 BC Founded due to presence of gold mines in the area; named after Philip of Macedon (father of Alexander the Great)
- 167 BC Became part of Roman Empire
- 42 BC Became a Roman colony
- 31 BC After the battle of Actium, Philippi gained the ‘Italic right.’ The city was settled by Roman veterans who supported Mark Antony against Octavian at Actium.

3. Characteristics

- An important city and Roman colony in Macedonia (Acts 16:12), although Thessalonica was the capital of the region.
- Located on the *Via Egnatia*, which stretched from the Adriatic Sea to the Aegean Sea, linking Rome to Asia Minor.
- Ferguson calls Philippi a ‘miniature Rome,’ ruled by Roman law and reflecting the Roman lifestyle, politically, socially, and even architecturally.
- Benefits of being a Roman colony include the use of Roman law in local affairs, the right to appeal to the emperor, the right to own and sell property, the granting of property to retired Roman soldiers, and exemption from some tribute and taxation.
- Roman culture in Philippi included the use of Latin in speech and on coins and the adoption of Roman dress and customs.
- Roman privileges combined with Greek heritage led to civic pride; they were proud of their dual citizenship. Paul exhorts the Philippian church that they have a greater dual citizenship – a citizenship in heaven (3:20-21).
- There were few or no Jews in Philippi, since there was apparently no synagogue in the city. Instead of going to a synagogue as was their custom, Paul and his team went to the river where prayers were made (Acts 16:13).

C. Paul’s Ministry in Philippi (Acts 16:11-40)

1. Lydia (Acts 16:11-15)

Lydia was a seller of purple from Thyatira, a seeker of God whose heart was opened by the Lord. In return, she opened her house to Paul and the Philippian church was founded in her home.

2. Slave Girl (Acts 16:16-19)

This slave girl was possessed by an evil spirit that enabled her to tell fortunes and make a handsome living for her masters. Paul cast out her demon and her masters cast Paul and Silas in prison.

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3. Jailer (Acts 16:20-34)

The jailer, probably a Roman soldier, heard Paul and Silas singing praises to God at midnight. Fearing that the prisoners had escaped during an earthquake, he attempted to kill himself. Paul assured him that all were still there. The jailer believed in God and he and his household were baptized.

4. Departure (Acts 16:35-40)

Paul played the ‘Roman card’ against the officials of Philippi, who were afraid of trouble for illegally beating and imprisoning Roman citizens. The officials of Philippi asked Paul and his party to leave town.

‘It would be some time before the citizens of Philippi would forget the day the city fathers had eaten humble-pie and given a civic escort to traveling evangelists whom they had had beaten the day before!’ (Ferguson p. xv).

5. Other Members of the Philippian Church

- Epaphroditus (2:25-30); Paul’s ‘brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need’ (2:25).
- Euodia and Syntyche (4:2).
- Clement (4:3).

6. Paul’s Ongoing Relationship to the Philippian Church

- The Philippian church supported Paul’s ongoing ministry (4:15-16; 2 Cor. 11:7-10).
- Paul visited Philippi once more on the return leg of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:6).
- Paul obviously had a warm affection for and special relationship with the church at Philippi.

D. The Book of Philippians

One of the oddities of Philippians is that it is the only Pauline epistle not to have any quotation or reference to the Old Testament!

1. Date/Occasion

- Paul visited Philippi in approximately 51AD.
- The letter to the Philippian church was likely written approximately 62 AD while Paul was in prison in Rome. Paul reports that he is ‘in chains for Christ’ (1:13). Ephesians, Galatians, and Colossians are Paul’s other ‘prison epistles.’
- The Philippian church had sent a gift to Paul while in prison, carried by one of their members, Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus became seriously ill and almost died (2:26-27), but he had recovered.
- Epaphroditus also brought news of troubles within the church. Ferguson speculates that perhaps the Philippians hoped that Epaphroditus would bring Timothy back with him to address their problems.

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- However, Paul still had need of Timothy for the time being; so instead he sent Epaphroditus back to Philippi with this epistle of pastoral counsel and encouragement for the church.

2. Logistics

If we assume that Philippians was written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome, then we can describe nine journeys associated with this letter:

- Timothy travels to Paul's location in prison. Timothy is not mentioned in the story of Paul's journey to Rome (Acts 26-28), but he is present at the composition of the letter to the Philippians (1:1).
- A message comes to Philippi to say that Paul is a prisoner and in need (4:14).
- Epaphroditus brings a love gift from Philippi to Paul in prison (4:18).
- Epaphroditus falls sick and the news of his illness reaches Philippi (2:26).
- Paul learns that the Philippians have heard about the illness of Epaphroditus, causing Epaphroditus to be concerned about their concern (2:26).
- Epaphroditus' journey back to Philippi carrying this letter to the church (2:25, 28).
- Paul's plan to send Timothy back to Philippi (2:19).
- Timothy's expected return to Paul bringing him news of Philippi (2:19).
- Paul's plan to revisit Philippi if he is released from prison (2:24).

3. Purposes

- Paul expresses appreciation for their concern of him and their ongoing generosity and support of his work, including a gift they had sent to him via Epaphroditus (1:3, 5; 2:25, 30; 4:10, 14, 18).
- Paul addresses news that Epaphroditus brought about various troubles in the Philippian church, such as: disunity (2:2-4, 14; 4:2); perfectionism (3:12, 15); and faintheartedness in the midst of trial (1:27-30; 2:15; 4:1).

4. Key Words

a) Joy

Although the letter is not primarily about how to have joy, Paul's joy in the Lord bubbles up and throughout this letter. The words 'joy' and 'rejoice' appear 16 times in the letter.

b) In Christ

Christ was the source of Paul's joy. The name of Christ or a pronoun referring to Christ appears 61 times in this letter of 104 verses.

c) Mind

Paul emphasizes the mind, using words such as 'mind,' 'minds,' 'minded,' and 'think' a total of 11 times in the letter.

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d) Fellowship

The Greek word is *koinonia*. It means ‘participation in something with someone.’ It carries the connotation of partnership or commitment to one another. Christians share with each other in common possession ‘the gospel’ (1:15), ‘the Spirit’ (2:1), and ‘suffering’ (3:10). It is a much richer and fuller idea than the modern usage of the word ‘fellowship,’ which usually means gathering together for food and shallow conversation.

e) Gospel

The word ‘gospel’ is found seven times in the letter. It describes the apostolic ministry and work of evangelization – the good news of Jesus Christ.

5. Theme

‘Christian joy comes through having a Christ-centered mind.’ Paul did not seek happiness. He sought to live for the Lord, and happiness found him.

E. Application & Discussion Questions

- *What are some situations that modern Christians encounter which make it difficult to rejoice?*
- *Paul was occupied with the Lord while he was in prison. How can we occupy ourselves with God?*
- *The church of Philippi was composed of members from widely differing backgrounds. What does this say about the fellowship of believers in Christ?*
- *What can we as members of Covenant PCA in Houston, TX learn from the church of Philippi?*

For next time: Read Philippians 1:1-5 and Ferguson chapters 1-2.