

Main Reading: **Philippians** 1:1-11

Many of the churches that Paul wrote to were messed-up...that's usually why he sent them a **letter**.

The **Corinthians** and **Galatians** — churches that were *totally* off track...

But the **Thessalonians** and **Philippians** — were some *really* solid churches.

Paul is *particularly* pleased with the Philippians, as he writes, and this is *basically* his **happiest** letter.

So, as we study this book, you'll see that the overarching theme is **JOY**

But here's the crazy part: Paul was in **prison** when he wrote it! Yet, he talked a lot about joy.

**QUESTION**: What are some things that make *you* joyful?

In today's world, it's easy to think of **concerts**, **movies**, or *really* good **ice cream** as the types of things that bring us joy...but Paul managed to experience *true* joy in **jail**.

Think about *all* of the luxuries that we enjoy in America. (cars, internet, good shoes, soft beds, A/C)

Paul did not preach or live in such a **comfortable** setting...

And the world, that Jesus was born into, wasn't all that **glamorous** either.

- Houses were made of clay, stones, **mud**, and straw, with a dirt floor to top it off.
- The food consisted of fish, **beans**, bread, salt, and honey.
- The average family lived in **one** room next to their animals.

*This* was the world that our Savior came into...*This* was the world that the Church **started** out in...

*This* was the world in which Paul was **imprisoned**... but he was able to find joy anyways.

*This* letter should put things in perspective for us. We've got it *made* compared to 2000 years ago!

Listen to Paul's situation: He was in jail for preaching, and this wasn't the first time...

The first time he was in a cold, **dark** cell; surrounded by sick/dying people,  
& all of the **dirty** things that you can imagine would accompany that type of place.

But *this* time, Paul was under house arrest; **chained** to a Roman soldier.

He couldn't go *anywhere* or do *anything* without a government **official** being there.

Imagine not being able to do or say *anything* without the gov't being in your business!

While he was in this predicament, he wrote to the church in a city called **Philippi**.

It was nicknamed "*Little Rome*" and the **Empire** was *heavily* involved in the city.

Philippi was to Rome as the 13 colonies were to Great Britain.

So, not only was Paul locked-up, but he was surrounded by an *intensely* **Roman** culture.

A group of people that believed in Political leaders as gods.

And with an Emperor, like **Nero**, who used burning bodies as street lights.

But while *all* of that is going on, he wrote this very personal letter about joy, prayer, & the Gospel.

[verse-by-verse] v. 1

This letter is addressed from Paul—right at the beginning.

Today, we'll usually sign our name at the **bottom** of an email,

but Paul's own name is emphasized right from the *beginning* of this letter.

Now, many people might wonder: *Why* are we reading a letter from Paul?

What does it matter what *he* thinks?

Some will even go as far to say that "I **follow** Jesus and **tolerate** Paul." — But that is *terribly* wrong.

Paul was Jesus' **Apostle** (sent one),

God had given him the ability to perform **miracles** and to speak on behalf of God.

Plus, Jesus' best friend, Peter, verified that Paul's letters were from God. 2 **Peter** 3:15-16

And Paul himself claimed to speak for God. 1 **Thessalonians** 2:13, 1 **Corinthians** 14:37

If that's not enough, Paul claims to have spent 3 years in the wilderness learning from Jesus in

**Galatians** 1. [The Disciples trained with Jesus for 3 years, and so did Paul]

But Paul's letters aren't the only words of God...

- **Moses'** writings are referred to as the Voice of God. (Exodus 15:26)
- God says that sent the **Prophets** in the OT to preach and to write. (2 Ki 17:13)
- Jesus explained that the **Psalms** were written with the help of the Holy Spirit. (Mt. 22:43)

The Bible was written by people in different times, locations, and in different circumstances,

But God used *all* of them to send one message.

Right from the start of this letter, we Paul writing with his own personality and point of view.

And this is *radically* different than any other religion.

**Muhammad** (Islam) claimed that Allah dictated the Quran to him. [\[explain dictation\]](#)

**Joseph Smith** (Mormonism) said God gave him golden tablets, and he copied the words down.

But the *real* Holy Book—the Bible—was written in a totally different way. 2 **Peter** 1:19-21

So, now that we know that what Paul wrote is important, what did he write?

First, he introduces himself, and **Timothy** (a friend to the Philippians & Paul's apprentice).

But it's no ordinary introduction...he claims that they are **slaves**.

The Greek word is ***doulos***—it means something *even lower* than a servant.

Nowadays, a lot of people don't want to use the word slave because it has bad connotations...

But, let's be real, it had a *terrible* meaning back in Paul's day as well!

When has slave ever meant anything remotely positive?!

The Romans perfected slavery...some slaves were **gladiators** who were killed for entertainment.

So, Paul is using strong language here.

No one would ever want to be a slave because the fear of having a **bad** master.

If an evil man was in charge of your life, it'd be a nightmare...

But Christians have the joy of serving the best Master of all, who **died** for all of His slaves.

So, this letter is from a willing slave who serves a benevolent (good) Master.

And it's addressed to *all* of the **saints** in Philippi.

You might've heard from **Catholics** that *certain* Christians are higher than others.

Paul, Peter, and Mary, can *supposedly* be prayed to...

But in Christianity, every **believer** is a saint—a word that means “holy one”

Now, you are not a saint because you’re so good and special, but because

God has forgiven you through faith and given you Jesus’ good resume. 2 **Corinthians** 5:17

**QUESTION**: As a saint, you’ve been set apart from the world, how are **you** living in a set apart way?

This letter would be **received** and probably **read** to the saints by “**deacons & overseers**.”

Churches didn’t just make up **elders** and deacons, we’ve had that type of leadership for *centuries*.

v. 2

Here, Paul’s joy is made *even more* clear. He gives a *traditionally* kind greeting:

“Grace and peace to you!” — a very common phrase in the Bible.

**Paul** used it in *every single* one of his 13 letters, **Peter** used it in *both* of his letters, & the Apostle **John** uses it in 2 John and Revelation...so it’s *pretty* popular among early Christians.

This phrase was coined by Paul, and here’s how he came up with it:

“**Greetings**” was a phrased used by Gentiles (*non Jews*) in letters and when visiting someone’s home.

Paul must’ve adapted the word “greetings” into a more *Christian* term—**grace**.

Peace, on the other hand, was a common greeting among Jewish people.

To *this day*, you will hear Jews say “**shalom**” to each other—a word that means peace.

So, by saying grace and peace, Paul brought **together** Jews & Gentiles—a symbol for the Christian faith.

And he reminds that Philippians that *all* grace & peace comes from the **Lord** Jesus.

**QUESTION**: Grace and Peace come from Jesus. Where else are you tempted to look for peace?

v. 3-4

Here, Paul brings up an essential tenet of the Christian faith: **praying** for others.

Interestingly enough, Paul, in a sense, needed prayer the *most*—He was **incarcerated**...arrested!

But *he* prayed for the Philippians.

For one, he had started their church 10 years before writing this letter,  
and his fondness and favor towards them and their church was *still* strong.

So, we can learn a couple of things here:

#1 — Even when you are the one facing adversity, **you should be praying for others.**

Everyone needs **prayer**...even when you *think* you've got a hold on life, you don't.

You—and everyone else—*need* God's help *every* step of the way...

So, praying for others to receive that help is *always* appropriate.

And #2 — When this kind of joy is present, when your life has been totally uprooted,  
But you can pray for others out of true joy, **this is the fruit of the Holy Spirit working** in you.

See, being happy depends on your **circumstances**.

You got a new **car**, you got a good **grade**, your boss gave you a **raise**, or something like that...

But joy runs *much* deeper than that. Joy is the result of our **relationship** with God.

And if that bond is one that can't be broken, your joy will be way more consistent.

v. 5

This church in Philippi was in a strong **partnership** with Paul.

The Greek word is ***koinonia***—it means to **share** in something.

The same word was used, in Luke 5, to describe Jesus' Disciples: Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

They had a fishing business together...they were quite *literally* in the same **boat**.

They all did the same work *together*, and the same goes for Paul and the Philippians.

They *both* participated in the Lord's work.

Today, churches and missionaries may be **separated** by miles,  
but it is an amazing thing when they're carrying-out the same **mission**.

v. 6

Whatever God **starts**, He **finishes**...God does **not try**. He simply *does*.

And as Paul prays for the Philippians, he is confident in that.

He is *sure* of their **salvation**...*This* church was legit...It was *filled* with true **believers**.

This is more than what could be said about some other churches out there...

But *this* was a *true* church with people in it who had *actually* been **saved**.

There's a couple of things to learn here...

**1)** You can't take any credit **credit** for your salvation. **Ephesians** 2:8-9

There's a temptation to use the phrase: "I made a decision for Christ"

Or we sing a song like "I have decided to follow Jesus"

And if you break it down, *sure*...you made a decision...

But as one of my favorite preachers would say,

"A **beggar** never brags about finding bread. Instead, He tells the other beggars where they can eat."

So, if we get all **puffed**-up; thinking we're better than others, we've got it *all* wrong. **Titus** 3:3-6

The Spirit **washed** us. We can't clean ourselves.

We need God's word and God's Holy Spirit to change us. **Romans** 10:17, **Ephesians** 5:25.

So, don't focus on you. Focus on the God who *began* a *good* work in you.

Focus on the transforming encounter that you have had with the **Good News** about Jesus...

2) The second thing to learn from this verse is that we have **assurance**.

No other religion in the world offers assurance of salvation/going to heaven.

You have to **try** and try and try; hoping that your good deeds outweigh your mistakes.

But Christianity offers assurance. You can know—without a doubt—that God has saved you.

v. 7

Here, Paul thanks the Philippians for defending the Gospel.

Gospel—εὐαγγέλιον (euangelion) in Greek—means Good News.

And what's the Good News? Jesus came and died for sinners.

**Bad News:** You have **sinned** and **owe** a debt to God, just like a criminal owes **finest** to the court.

**Good News:** Jesus came here to pay your fines, and you can receive that payment by **faith**.

That's a *really* condensed version of the Good News that the Philippians defended.

But, we need to understand something...God—and His story about Good News—*never* needs our defense. We don't have to **protect** or make **excuses** for God. He is capable of defending Himself.

But, as Christians we should be prepared to defend *why* we believe *what* we believe. 1 **Peter** 3:15

I've heard it said: "The best way to explain a lion to someone, is to let it out of its cage.

And the best way to show God's word to others is to unleash it."

v. 8-11

The Philippians were known for their love...but Paul wanted them to love in an even *deeper* way...

He desired for their love to be founded on **knowledge** and **discernment**. True love is **not** blind.

[Greek word, αἰσθησις aisthesis, (for discernment) gives us the English word "**aesthetic**"]

Artists do lots of **scrutinizing** in order to determine whether a design is aesthetic.

In the same way, when we love someone, we do *lots* of studying.

We **learn** about the person, we figure out the things they like, and why?

So, we can show them love by doing things for them that they appreciate.

And you can't truly love someone, including God, without *really* knowing them.

The more you **know** God, the better you can love and worship Him.

This is a big deal. Paul expressed *this* concern in **Romans** 10:2...

Being **excited** about religion or the idea of God, without knowing the *true* one, is meaningless.

If you know **church**, Christian **music**, and potlucks, but you **don't** know **Christ**, you haven't known *enough*.

The more plugged-in you are at church, the better you can know and love your fellow **members**.

See, what good is it to say you love someone if you don't **know** who they are?

Sadly, many people do this with God...They say they love Jesus, but haven't got a **clue** who He is.

Therefore, true love *requires* knowledge and discernment in order to be pure and sincere.

[Sincere comes from two words; "sun" and "to judge" the word originally described a piece of pottery that had been examined in the sunlight. If the pottery had been repaired with wax, the light would reveal it, and if it sat out for too long, the wax would melt.]

In the same way, true love does not melt away—it can stand the heat and endure difficult times.