

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Epistle of Joy

Scripture: Philippians 1:1-2

Code: 50-1

This morning we embark upon a wonderful new experience spiritually as the Lord speaks to us through Paul's letter to the Philippians. I trust that you have your Bible with you, and that you will open it to the first chapter. And this morning it's my desire to introduce to you this marvelous, marvelous epistle. Let me read you verses 1 and 2, just as a starting point, as we endeavor to introduce Paul's letter. "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." As we approach this epistle, which I've entitled "The Epistle of Joy," I trust and I pray that God is going to shape our hearts and our lives and our attitudes through this experience. Four brief chapters. The theme of these chapters is joy; Paul mentions it at least 16 times in these four chapters. He also mentions Christ 50 times. And that is because his joy is found in Christ, and so is our joy.

We live in a somewhat sad world, a world that knows despair, depression, unfulfillment, dissatisfaction; longing for things that never come to pass. It's kind of a sad reality, with an even sadder future, because we have a world of sadness with no hope that anything should necessarily change. The long years of life inevitably become long years of sorrow punctuated by moments of happiness, which moments become less and less frequent as aging takes place. And that's probably why the highest percentage rate of suicide is among those who are over 65, as the length of years and the decreasing moments of happiness bring about a morbid sadness and lack of satisfaction with life.

Men talk about happiness, and perhaps we ought to define happiness, at least in a very simple way. Happiness is an attitude of satisfaction or delight based upon some present circumstance. Happiness is related to happenings. Happiness is related to happenstance. Happiness is related to hap, which is a word that basically conveys the idea of chance. Happiness is that which you really can't plan and program; it may happen, it may not happen, and it seems so elusive. But it is related to the delight or the satisfaction that is tied to an occasional happening, a chance circumstance. And that's the best that men can do. On the other hand, when we talk about joy, we're not talking about something that's related to chance at all. We're not talking about something that's related to circumstances at all. We're talking about a deep down confidence that all is well, no matter what the circumstance, no matter what the difficulty, no matter what the problem. And that's very different from happiness.

Joy, to be understood in a biblical sense, must be understood to be related to God. It must be understood to be that which becomes yours in Christ. It must be understood to be a permanent possession of every believer, not some whimsical delight that comes and goes as chance may offer it opportunity. We're talking about joy; much, much different than happiness. My favorite definition of joy is this: joy is the flag that flies on the castle of the heart when the King is in residence there. Joy is the flag that flies on the castle of the heart when the King is in residence there. I love that, and that's really it. And I believe that only Christians know true and lasting joy. The verb "to rejoice" appears 74 times in the New Testament. The noun "joy" appears 59 times in the New Testament. It's part and parcel of Christian experience.

If I may, in a few moments I would like to give you a theology of joy. I'm going to start with a sentence, and keep adding to that sentence until it becomes a composite theology of joy. First of all, joy comes from God. It is a gift of God. In Psalm 4, verses 7 and 8 it says, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, for Thou alone, O Lord, dost make me dwell in safety." And the psalmist is saying, "You give me gladness, You give me joy because of my relationship of security with You." And that we read in Psalm 16:11 should be added to that in Psalm 4, "In Thy presence is fullness of joy." God is the source of joy. So we begin our theology of joy by saying, "Joy is a gift from God." Now, let me add to that. Joy is a gift from God to those who believe the gospel. Joy is a gift from God to those who believe the gospel. On that marvelous day in the Galilean countryside, when the angel appeared to announce the arrival of the birth of a Savior, the angel said, "Do not be afraid, for behold I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people, for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." It is the gospel that brings that joy, or that conveys that joy to the human heart.

Joy is a gift from God to those who believe the gospel, who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. In John's wonderful gospel record, in chapter 15, he says in verse 11, "These things I have spoken to you that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full." Christ came to proclaim a gospel that would give men joy. So joy is a gift from God to those who believe the gospel. Let me add another part to that sentence. Joy is a gift from God to those who believe the gospel being produced in them by the Holy Spirit – being produced in them by the Holy Spirit. In Romans, chapter 14, there's a wonderful little phrase that I think perhaps you have read, but maybe not grasped. It says in verse 17 of Romans 14 that "the Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." And Galatians 5:22 says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy" – so joy is a gift from God to those who believe, being produced in them by the Holy Spirit. The resident Spirit brings to the heart righteousness, peace, and joy.

Let me add a further element to our sentence. True joy is a gift from God that comes to those who believe the gospel, being produced in them by the Holy Spirit as the believer receives and obeys the Word – as the believer receives and obeys the Word. Jeremiah 15:16: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and Thy word was in me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." And on the road to Emmaus,

the disciples with Jesus said to themselves, “Did not our hearts burn within us” – an expression of joy – “while He talked with us, giving us His word, teaching us of Himself out of the scriptures?” And 1 John 1:4 says, “These things I write unto you that your joy may be full.” When you receive this word and apply this word, you experience full joy.

So the true joy that the believer knows is a gift from God to those who believe, being produced in them by the Holy Spirit as they receive and obey the Word. Let me add another thought. True joy is a gift from God to those who believe the gospel, being produced in them by the Holy Spirit as they believe and receive the Word, or receive and apply it, and it is mixed with trials – being mixed with trials. A very important element, very important; you will never experience the reality of true joy unless it is made very clear by contrast to trials. It is, in a very real sense, known only by its contrast – sadness, sorrow, difficulty. First Thessalonians 1:6 says, “You also became imitators of us and of the Lord” – listen to this – “having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit.” That sums it all up: the Holy Spirit, the tribulation, the word, the joy. In 2 Corinthians, you remember chapter 6 and verse 10, “As sorrowful yet always rejoicing.” In other words, you’re going through sorrowful circumstances, but always rejoicing. Do you remember the words of James, in chapter 1, verse 2, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials?” And the words of Peter, 1 Peter, chapter 1, “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.”

True joy is a gift from God to those who believe the gospel, being produced in them by the Holy Spirit as they receive and obey the Scripture, being mixed with various trials. And one final thought in our little theology. True joy is a gift from God to those who believe the gospel, being produced in them by the Holy Spirit as they receive and obey the Word, mixed with trials, and set their hope on future glory – and set their hope on future glory. We are, according to Romans 12:12, to be “rejoicing in hope.” First Peter, chapter 4 and verse 13 says, “To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.” In other words, endure with joy now, because you know the joy that is to come. And Jude 24 says, “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless, with great joy.” That’s the believer’s joy. That’s the theology of joy. It is a gift from God to those who believe the gospel, being produced in them by the Holy Spirit as they receive and obey the Scripture, being mixed with trails, and set their hope and their heart on future glory. That’s the theology of joy in a sentence.

Peter sums it up rather magnificently, I think, in 1 Peter 1:8: “And though you have not seen Him – that is, Christ – you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.” And Peter is writing to persecuted Christians, as we shall see tonight. But you rejoice with joy inexpressible because your joy is a gift from God being produced by the Spirit as you respond to the Word, mixed with trials, and set your affection on future glory. This is the theme of this marvelous little letter – the believer’s joy. It is the epistle of joy. Paul is

writing it to the Philippians. He loves the Philippians and they love him. In fact, it's my personal conviction that the love bond between Paul and the Philippians exceeded the love bond between he and any other of the churches. There was something so deep and so special about their love relationship that in the situation he is in as a prisoner, and he mentions his imprisonment four times in chapter 1, he is basically writing to the Philippians because he's concerned about their sorrow.

There are other things he's concerned about. He's concerned about their unity. He's concerned about their faithfulness. He's concerned about a lot of things that come through the letter. But from the relational viewpoint, his deep concern is that these people who love him so much will be sad because he's a prisoner. They will be sad because of his circumstances. They will be sad because of his deprivation. They will be sad because of the portent of the loss of his life. And he writes to say to them, in effect, "Look, I rejoice, so don't you do any less." And thus the epistle is intended to convey the joy of its author. Let's begin by just looking at that introduction, and we're not going to dig deeply and profoundly into the text itself, it's such a simple text. But I would like to give you some background that I think will make this beautiful epistle so real to you. Three things to notice in the first two verses: the servants, the saints, and the salutation. The servants and the saints are in verse 1, the salutation in verse 2. Let's start with the servants: "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ Jesus." We hardly need to say anything about that. We all know Paul. We all know Timothy. We all understand what it is to be a bond servant of Christ Jesus. But let me just touch lightly on the servants. Paul, the beloved apostle, Paul converted on the Damascus Road, Paul, the most noble servant of Christ the world has ever known, Paul, that remarkable man that God's Spirit has used to write 13 of the epistles of the New Testament, Paul, who becomes the model and the example for every Christian, he is the author.

Perhaps the most concise description of Paul anywhere is given right in this letter. If you look at chapter 3 for a moment, I draw your attention to verse 4. In verse 4, "Although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh," he says, relating himself to some whose confidence is strictly in the flesh and not in the Lord, he says, "if anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more." If you're going to compare fleshly credentials, if you're going to put your confidence in your humanness, in your human credentials, he says, here are mine, verse 5. "I was circumcised the eighth day" – that is the prescribed pattern for a Jewish boy – "of the nation of Israel" – the chosen people of God – "of the tribe of Benjamin" – one of the noble tribes – "a Hebrew of Hebrews." In other words, among my own peers I was esteemed as the epitome of what a Hebrew was and is. "As to the law, a Pharisee."

Now, those are some credentials. He had jumped through all of the hoops in Judaism – circumcised the eighth day, belonging to the nation of Israel, from the tribe of Benjamin, among the Hebrews esteemed to be a true Hebrew, a noble Hebrew, an exemplary Hebrew. As regards the law, he took that tack which was most zealous for the law and became a Pharisee. Verse 6: "As to zeal, so zealous was I that I became a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the law,

found blameless.” His own peers – not God – his own peers found him blameless. They found him a man who lived according to the law, a man of tremendous integrity religiously, in his own system. “But” – verse 7 – “whatever things were gained 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 but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.” In those verses you have Paul – that’s him – that’s him.

He was a Jew. He was a zealous Jew. He was a legalistic Jew. He was a Pharisee. He kept the law as any man could keep the law. He was blameless among his peers. And he trashed all of those human credentials, counting them rubbish, in order that he might gain Christ, because, in verse 9, he wanted “to be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.” And so he gave himself to Christ. That’s Paul. And then he spent the rest of his life proclaiming that. That’s Paul.

What about Timothy? Timothy was Paul’s son in the faith, introduced to him, as recorded in Acts, chapter 16, when Paul visited Derbe in Lystra, in the area around Galatia. He found this young man, took him as his protégé, trained him, taught him. He became a real son to Paul. Timothy was his dear companion, the one to whom he would really give the legacy of future ministry when he left this world. We know Timothy. We have spent three years with him in 1 and 2 Timothy, so we won’t belabor the issue. By the way, those two letters we have just studied were written only a couple of years after Philippians. This was written during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment. First Timothy was written after his release, and 2 Timothy was written during his second and last imprisonment, just a few years after this. But again, if we want just a brief introduction of Timothy, we find a very wonderful one in this very epistle, chapter 2, verse 19.

Here Paul introduces us to Timothy in a concise way. We find out really all we need to know about him. “I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition.” Timothy’s going to come, and he’s going to find out what’s going on with you, and he’s going to encourage me when he tells me. Timothy’s my messenger. And the reason I’m sending him, and here we find a little about Timothy, verse 20, “I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.” He’s a clone. There’s no one like him. His heart beats with my heart. His blood flows with my blood. And I’m sending him because he’s of kindred spirit with me. Not only that, he’s genuinely concerned about you. He’s compassionately concerned about you. And that is because obviously he was there when the church in Philippi was begun. He was there. He was on that second missionary journey. And he had made a couple of other visits back. And there was a bond between himself and them as well. He said in verse 21, “They all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.” What a tragic thought that is. Here’s the Apostle Paul saying, “I don’t have anybody to send but Timothy, because all the other people around me seek their own interests. Timothy’s the only one who has my heart – what a treasure. I’m sending him.”

“And I hope,” he says in verse 23, “to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me. And I trust in the Lord that I myself also shall be coming shortly.” All you need to know about Timothy is that when Paul looked around and saw who was around him, he said, “He’s the only one who is of kindred spirit. He’s the only one whose heart beats with my heart. He’s the only one like me. He’s the only one I can send.” That will tell you about Timothy. Did Timothy co-author Philippians? No. The implication here is not Paul and Timothy as writers, but Paul and Timothy as bondservants in Christ Jesus, who are together while Paul is writing. You say, “How do you know that?” Because starting in verse 3 all the pronouns are first person singular. It’s never “we,” it’s always “I.” I, my, my, in verse 3, my, in verse 4, I, in verse 12 – it’s that way all the way through. Paul is the author, Timothy is the companion. Well, why does he add Timothy’s name? Is it important that he add the name of Timothy? Yes. It’s important because of several things.

One: Timothy was well known to the Philippians, and well beloved by the Philippians. As I said, he was there when the church was started in Acts 16; it is the same chapter of Timothy’s coming with Paul. Timothy comes with him in verses 1 to 3, and by the time you’re in verse 11, they’re at Philippi and the church is born. So the Philippian Christians knew Timothy from the very, very beginning. Furthermore, since Paul was going to send Timothy, and wanted Timothy to receive the best reception, he includes Timothy as a true co-worker by including him in the opening greeting. He is a true co-worker of the apostle. And later on, he expands it even more when he says, “He’s the only one who has a kindred spirit with me.”

And thirdly, it is very possible as well that Timothy is the secretary to whom Paul dictated Philippians. We know that Paul dictated his letters. Oh, there were occasions when he wrote, but many of the letters we know were dictated. For example, I don’t know if you remember reading in Romans, chapter 16, right at the very end of the chapter, verse 22, it says, “I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord.” That doesn’t mean Tertius was the author. Verse 1 of Romans, chapter 1, says Paul was the author. Tertius was the secretary, the amanuensis, who wrote it down. In 1 Corinthians 16:21, Paul closes out by saying, “This greeting is in my own hand – Paul.” In other words, somebody else wrote all this as I dictated it, but I’m signing my own name at the end. He does the same thing in Colossians 4:18, in Galatians 6:11, and in 2 Thessalonians 3:17. So it was customary for Paul to dictate; it may well have been that Timothy was the secretary.

He was his companion. He wanted them in Philippi to know he was esteemed as a co-worker so that when he came they would accept him as such – and surely they would, because of the love bond that already existed, but this just reinforces that. And perhaps he was the one who wrote down what Paul dictated. Timothy had become a vital part of Paul’s life, serving alongside of him for years. And now he is available to Paul. Paul is a prisoner. He is in prison. He mentions it four times in chapter 1. Timothy is not a prisoner, as far as we know. But Timothy is able to come and see Paul, work alongside and help Paul. The nature of his imprisonment allowed him that privilege. Notice the title

that Paul chooses for the two of them: “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ Jesus.” That title, by the way, is used by James, James 1:1; by Peter, 2 Peter 1:1; and by Jude, in verse 1. So the writers of Scripture love to call themselves bond slaves of Christ. The term *doulos* conveys the idea of ownership, possession, allegiance, dependence, subjection, loyalty; all that we think a bond slave would convey.

It emphasizes, however, something you might not grasp, and that is willing service. Can you grab that thought? Willing service. We think of slave in the English language, we think of forced behavior, unwilling duty, abusive subjection, but that’s not the idea. A bond slave was a slave bonded to the individual. And it was often the case that that bonding was out of affection and love and a sense of esteem, not some kind of abject fear. For example, do you remember in Exodus, chapter 21, verse 5 that the law of God provided for a slave who wanted to permanently bond himself to his master? Many of the slaves in the ancient nation of Israel loved their masters deeply and dearly, and as a result, they wanted to serve their master for life. If a slave so desired, he would go to his master and say, “I want to serve you for life.” And the master would then follow the law of God, which said, “Take your slave to the door, pull his ear lobe, and drive a spike or an awl through his ear. And the piercing of the ear, and the hole in the ear, will be the signal and symbol to all who see him that this man is a slave out of love.” This is a servant of love who has chosen a lifelong bonding to some he longs to serve.

So Paul and Timothy don’t see themselves as slaves in some abject way, having to do something they don’t want to do, but as willing bondservants of Jesus Christ, serving out of joy, out of willingness, out of affection, out of love. Notice, please, “bondservants of Christ Jesus” – that was always Paul’s focus. His service was always to Christ – always to Christ. He was not a bondservant of the church. He was not a bondservant of the leaders of the church. He was not a bondservant of Rome, even though he was a prisoner of Rome. He was a bondservant of Christ Jesus – always connecting his life to Christ. And that is a ministerial perception that is absolutely necessary for anyone who serves the Lord. If you attach yourself to people, they will disappoint you. If you attach yourself to the church, they will disappoint you in the church. If you attach yourself to the Lord, you will never be disappointed. If you decide to evaluate your ministry on the basis of the opinion of people, you will go astray. On the basis of the opinion or success of the church, you will go astray. But if you choose to evaluate your life and ministry between you and the Lord, you will never go astray, because you will always know where you stand.

Service to Christ is the perfect freedom. Service to Christ is the perfect freedom. Paul says in verse 7, “In my imprisonment,” he says in verse 13, “my imprisonment,” verse 14, “my imprisonment,” verse 17, “my imprisonment,” or my chains, or my bonds. But in spite of all of this, he was not the slave of Rome; he was the servant of Jesus Christ. It was Jesus Christ who would meet all his needs. It was Jesus Christ who would choose all his duties, like 2 Samuel 15:15, where it says so beautifully, “Thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall appoint.” It was Jesus Christ who would

provide all his needs, who said, “My grace is sufficient for you.” He served Jesus Christ.

Now, he was a prisoner at this time, and during this imprisonment he wrote four epistles. We know them as the “prison epistles.” They’re called that because obviously they were written from prison. They are Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon, that little letter. If you read Philippians he says he’s in prison. If you read Ephesians he says he’s in prison. If you read Colossians he says he’s in prison. If you read Philemon he says he’s in prison. We have no difficulty discerning where he is when he writes – four letters. Now, some have suggested that he may have been in prison in Ephesus; that really doesn’t stand up to scrutiny. Others say he may have been in prison in Caesarea. That doesn’t stand up to scrutiny, I don’t think, as well. It is best to see him as in prison in Rome when he writes all four of these. Why Rome? Chapter 1, verse 13, mentions “the whole praetorian guard,” which would best be suited to the situation in Rome rather than Ephesus or Caesarea. And then in chapter 4, verse 22, “All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household,” would also best be suited to Rome, and there would be Caesar’s household.

Furthermore, in chapter 1, verses 14 to 18, he talks about all the preachers who are either preaching Christ honestly or contentiously, either helping to assist Paul or adding affliction to his already difficult situation. And the fact that there were many preachers would be somewhat indicative of a large city like Rome, rather than a smaller place. Furthermore, in chapter 1, he seems to be waiting for a decisive verdict. He says, “I may live, I may die, I’m hard pressed, I’d like to go and be with Christ, I’d like to stay and be with you, which seems more necessary for your sake.” He seems to have been on the threshold of some decision about his destiny. Chapter 2, verse 17, he says, “If it’s now that I’m to be poured out as a drink offering, on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice.” In other words, “If this is the time for me to die, that’s fine. On the other hand,” verse 24, “I trust in the Lord. I myself shall be with you shortly” – seems to me that he was indicating either death or release very quickly. If that was true, it’s best to see him in Rome, because Rome is the place where such adjudication would take place, where such a verdict would take place. He would be then released from Rome by the Roman court.

So it’s best to assume that he is in Rome. He is chained in bondage somehow, with enough freedom to receive those who want to come and work alongside him, in this case namely, Timothy. He expects release imminently so that he can come be with them in the event that they don’t take his life. So we would assume, then, that this is somewhere around 64 A.D., and that this is the last of the four prison epistles, in which he is anticipating either death or release. So that’s Paul, that’s Timothy, that’s the situation, the servants.

What about the saints? Listen carefully now. What about the saints? Who are they? Verse 1 says, “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.” He includes the church leaders, the spiritual guiding force and serving group of the church. But he is writing, please note, to the saints – to the saints. That wonderful word has been so fogged up by our sort of

cultural understanding of it that we've really lost sight of what a saint is. Some people think a saint is a person who gets himself made into a statue, somebody who is canonized. Or as one little boy said, "They're dead people that you put up on the church wall to keep the light from coming through." Now, that may be truer than we would like to admit, that sometimes we who are called saints are little more than dead people who keep the light from coming through. But all of those things represent some sort of a cultural understanding of what a saint is. We talk about Saint This and Saint That, and down the street there's Saint Genevieve Church and what those folks don't know down there is there are thousands of saints living up here, and they probably don't recognize us for what we really are.

The fact of the matter is the word "saint" is a designation used in Scripture of any and all of those who have new life in Christ; all Christians are saints. Acts, chapter 9, verse 13, "Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man'" – talking about Saul or Paul – "how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem." It's synonymous with Christian, it's synonymous with believer. Verse 32, "Peter was traveling through those parts; he came down to the saints who lived at Lydda." Just another word for a Christian; we're all saints. My grandfather used to say, "There's only two kinds of people in the world, the saints and the aint's," and you're one or the other. Now, the word "saint" means separated, unique, different, set apart. Basically the word could be translated "holy." It's connected to the Hebrew word *qadosh*, which means the same thing: unique, different, set apart. Not dead martyrs, not canonized people, not super-pious people, all believers. The letter to the Corinthians, mind you, 1 Corinthians was written to the saints who are called, and if the Corinthians were saints, folks, there's a lot of latitude in that term – a lot. Ephesians 1:1 was written to the saints at Ephesus.

Now, how do you define a saint? The saints in Christ Jesus – we are holy, made holy by Christ's salvation. We have been made righteous. We have been given the life of God. We are made separate, unique, and different from the rest of the world. We are the saints. We have every right to be identified as saints. We are saints in Christ Jesus. That is a phrase that Paul absolutely adores. You never met a Buddhist who said, "I'm in Buddha." He may worship Buddha, but he's not in Buddha. You never met a Moslem who said, "I am in Mohammed." You never met a Christian Scientist who said, "I'm in Mary Baker Eddy." You never met a Mormon who said, "I'm in Joseph Smith – I'm in Brigham Young." They may follow the teachings of some leader, but we alone are in Christ, fused together, with the same common life. That's why we're set apart. We were buried with Him by His death, and we have risen in Him to walk in newness of life. Our life is His life. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me." And we're all tied together in one life, the life of Christ.

So he writes, then, to the believers who are in Christ, who are called – legitimately – saints, because they've been set apart, holy and separate from the rest of the world, through the saving work of God. And where do they live? In Philippi. Is that important? It is. The city had some distinctives; listen now. Since the time of the Phoenicians, it had tremendous gold and silver mines. When they first

discovered gold and silver, of course, it became a boom town. And people rushed into that area before there was even a city there and began to mine the area. And due to the tremendous discovery of gold and silver there, the place became a commercial center in the ancient world, a great trade center. Its location is exceedingly strategic. It is right at the top of the Aegean Sea, right at the very top. And you know that Asia Minor dips down into the Mediterranean, that Greece dips down into the Mediterranean, that Italy dips down into the Mediterranean, so any road going from east to west has to go across the top of the Aegean and Adriatic Seas, which jut up like this between Greece and Italy and Asia Minor. So all the major roads ran right across the top edge of the Aegean and Adriatic Sea, which would say they ran right dead through Philippi.

Furthermore, there was a range of mountains, and the pass from Asia to Europe went through the pass of those mountains. That was the only way to get through without climbing all the peaks, and the pass was Philippi. It strategically located itself right at the pass between Asia and Europe, the East and the West. Running right through that pass, for 500 miles from Greece to Italy, was the Ignatian Highway. When it hit Italy and turned toward Rome, it became known as the Appian Way, which all those who study Roman history are identified with. It was built in 146 B.C. The Ignatian Highway was the trade route east to west; Philippi was right on the trade route. It was a strategic site in Europe, a strategic site to build a city. The city itself was built by Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. And the reason he built it was to command the pass – to command the road. One of the most decisive battles in history was fought there much later; it was at Philippi that Antony defeated Brutus and Cassius, and thereby decided the whole future of the Roman Empire – very strategic city.

Thirdly, it was a Roman colony. Not only did it have gold and silver mines – which, by the way, by the time of the Apostle Paul had been exhausted, and they were no longer functioning, but nonetheless they had acted as the foundation to the commercial enterprise, and the commercial enterprise was still going on. And not only was it at a key strategic location, but thirdly, it was a Roman colony. And to be a Roman colony was really the very, very height of dignity for a town. Roman colonies had military significance. They were a part of the Roman settlement in order to create the Pax Romana, or the Roman Peace. The way Rome founded Philippi was the way they founded most of the cities. They would find a city that was strategic to them. It was already a Greek city, but they wanted it to be a Roman colony, so they would take about 300 soldiers, veteran soldiers near retirement, pack them up and their family, and have them go settle right in the middle of that city, and begin to govern that city and lead that city and turn it into a Roman colony. And that's what happened; some veteran Roman soldiers came with their families, perhaps some others as well, and settled there with Roman culture, Roman life style.

The people in a Roman colony enjoyed three things: they enjoyed what the Latin language called *libertas*, which means self-government. They were not governed by Rome. They were governed by themselves. The Roman government gave them that privilege, having sort of ordained their government by settling with soldiers. Secondly, they enjoyed what the Latin language calls *immunitas*

, or immunity. That meant they were never to be taxed by Rome. So they were free from taxation, and they were free from the government of Rome. Thirdly, they enjoyed *ius italicum*, the rights of Roman citizenry. They had all the rights of anyone who lived in Rome.

The city rulers were called *praetors*; we translate that word magistrates. And the police were called *lictors*, and they were the ones who took care of law breakers. They imitated the Roman style of life. They imitated the Roman culture in every sense. William Barclay says, "These colonies had one great characteristic: wherever they were, they were little fragments of Rome, and their pride in their Roman citizenship was their dominating characteristic. The Roman language was spoken. Roman dress was worn. Roman customs were observed. Their magistrates had Roman titles, and carried out the same ceremonies as were carried out in Rome itself. Wherever they were, these colonies were stubbornly and unalterably Roman. They would never have dreamt of becoming assimilated to the people amidst whom they were set. They were parts of Rome, miniature cities of Rome, and they never forgot it," end quote. They were proud to be Roman citizens.

Now, in spite of all of that about Philippi, that's not why it was famous. That didn't permanently put this city on the map of the world, and the map of history. Yes it was a prestigious place; its official Roman name was *Colonia Julia August Philippensis*; it's a pretty big name for a little place. Much honored, but isn't why it's well remembered. Some cities are well remembered because they were honored cities. Paul Rees wrote, "For continuity across the centuries, such is Rome's distinction. For architectural glory and lavish elegance, such was Babylon's bid for immortality. For cultural brilliance, such was Athens claim upon the world's remembrance. For a distinctive quality in its citizens, such is the persistent fame of Sparta. For an extraordinary tradition of religious faith and devotion, such is the deathless repute in which Jerusalem is held. But in ancient Macedonia, not far from the western shoreline of the Aegean Sea, once stood a city that lives on in human memory for none of those reasons," end quote.

But why does it live on? I'll tell you why: because the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote this little letter to that city and immortalized it – immortalized it. And that's why it's known – this little letter, this epistle of joy. How did it all begin? Let's go back to Acts 16, ever so briefly. And I had planned to have more time to show you the beginning of the church; we have a little time, we'll look at it very rapidly. Acts 16, Paul had just taken Timothy with him, verses 1 to 3. They moved out in their ministry, going from place to place. They finally came to Troas, which was the last point of land. And they stood there facing the Aegean Sea, looking across and wondering, "Where do we go?" And then came that wonderful vision, verse 9, "A certain man of Macedonia standing and appealing to him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'" And God was calling Christianity from Asia to Europe. God was calling Christianity to Europe. And so that Macedonian call came at Troas, also known as Alexandria Troas, founded in the fourth century B.C., a free Greek city until Augustus had made it a Roman colony. It was about ten miles from the famous city of Troy that we know about.

So there they are at Troas, the call to step into Europe, and so they take off on a ship. Verse 11: “They put out to sea from Troas” and a straight course northwest takes you to Samothrace, which is an island – an island that rises up to 5,000 feet above sea level. It’s a mountainous island. They went there the first day. The second day they went from Samothrace on to Neapolis. Neapolis is the port city of Philippi, Philippi is ten miles inland. So they, verse 12, went from Neapolis those ten miles “to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia” – here it is – “a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days” – Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke.

On Sabbath day, of course, Paul’s custom in going into a city was to go to what place? Synagogue – there wasn’t a synagogue. It takes ten Jewish men to have a synagogue. No city could have a synagogue unless they had ten men. As far as we know, this city didn’t have any Jewish men that are mentioned – maybe a few. Ten make a minyan. You get a minyan, you can have a synagogue. They didn’t have that. So “on the Sabbath day, we went outside the gate to a riverside.” Why would they go to a riverside? Because if there were any Jews, they knew the Jews would go on the Sabbath to the river. Why? Because Psalm 137 says that the people, when they were in captivity in Babylon, went to the riverside and wept. And it became a custom for the Jews in captivity, in exile, to go to the river and weep because they were away from their homeland. And the tradition grew that where there was no temple, and there was no synagogue, Jews would find a riverside, like they did in captivity, and weep over their plight; that there was no temple, they weren’t in Jerusalem, and there was not even a synagogue for them to be a part of. So Paul knew that as he wanted to find the Jews, he would find them, if there were any, at a riverside on the Sabbath, and that’s what he found.

There was a place of prayer, which was what they would do by the riverside. They sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled – apparently no men. Some Jewish women lived in that city; one of them, named Lydia, was from Thyatira. She had a business of selling purple fabric. She was a true worshiper of God, and “the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. She and her household had been baptized.” So there’s where the church began. It began with some women by a riverside. Listen, the first person the Lord ever revealed His Messiahship to was a Samaritan woman, and the first European convert was a woman. The gospel went into Europe through this woman Lydia, the first European convert. And she urged us, verse 15, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.” If you think my conversion is real – apparently that was a matter for discussion even in those days. “And she prevailed on us.” She must have been a persuasive woman; maybe she had a successful selling business because she was persuasive. And they stayed with her, and the church was born with a Jewish woman, dispossessed, by a riverside, and her household.

Right after that, they were going to the place of prayer, verse 16 says, probably on a following Sabbath. We don’t know how long. They were going back to the riverside, and a slave girl came with a spirit of divination, a demon-possessed medium mystic slave girl. She was demon-possessed. And

I could take time to go into all the details of her demon possession. It's fascinating. You can get the tape on Acts 16 and you can read it and listen to it for yourself. But it's a tremendously insightful thing. That world was full of the occult. And this girl, it says at the end of the chapter, was making – the end of the verse, verse 16, was making much money for her masters by fortunetelling. The actual word is by frenzy. She would go into a frenzy when the demons would take control of her, and she was making money for her masters. She followed after Paul. She kept crying, "These men are bond servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation."

Was that true? Absolutely true – absolutely true. Everything she said was true. I want you to know, folks, the greatest hour of danger in the life of the church is the hour when Satan tells the truth. Great danger; and that is what makes false teachers so devastating and so dangerous. They are only dangerous when they tell the truth, is that not right? They are not dangerous when they lie, because we know they're lying. But they are dangerous when they tell the truth. And so the key to being a successful false teacher is to tell as much truth as you possibly can. Paul doesn't need that – neither does Jesus – so he turns around and casts the demons out of her.

Well, that infuriated her masters because they lost their profit, verse 19. They saw the hope of profit was gone; they seized Paul and Silas, dragged them to the marketplace before the authorities. Apparently they didn't grab Timothy and Luke, for some reason. They took these two who were the spokesmen. "And they said, 'These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews,'" anti-Semitism – anti-Semitism. "They're proclaiming customs not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans." And here's this proud Roman colony mentality, "They're violating our Roman customs." And then mob rule takes over, and you have a lynch mob, and the whole crowd rose up, and "the chief magistrates" – that's the *praetors* – "tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods" – give them over to the *lictors*. "They inflicted many blows on them, threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely." Of course, he would pay with his life if he lost them. "He received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, fastened their feet in the stocks."

Now, you've got to understand the issue here. They had just been flayed open by a bundle of rods in the hands of experts that left their back a pulp, that often caused intense hemorrhaging, often caused injuries to organs, often smashed vertebra, crushed ribs, and could cause death. So these aching, bleeding, limping men are then taken in, thrown into a deep, dark cell in the inner dungeon, and then they're put in stocks. Not the kind of stocks that we think of – we think of the English, that you drip your hands through, and sort of stick your feet through, and stick your head in, and sit like this. The stocks that the Romans used had a series of holes extending further out. Depending on the size of the individual, they stretched the legs to the farthest possible extremity, and then locked them in those holes. And then they stretched the arms to the same extremity, and locked them there. And in that condition, they were placed in that inner dungeon, aching, bleeding, sitting in a dark cell, cramping up in ways that we couldn't even imagine, along with the filth of the cell, the rats, in their

own excrement – whatever it was, that was the condition. And why? Because these men lost their money when they lost their demon-possessed girl.

By the way, something in me wants to believe that that demon-possessed girl wasn't just half delivered, but that she not only was freed from a demon, but she was introduced to Christ. I hope to meet her in heaven. There they are in jail. And what is their attitude in jail? Verse 25: "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and" – what – "singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." So you think you've got troubles? The church in Philippi was born out of joy – was born out of joy. And I'll tell you something, it's a joy unrelated to circumstances. They were alone. They were in pain. They faced the loss of their life. And they rejoiced. That's joy, that's not happiness, that's joy – that's joy – so deep, and so profound, that nothing touches it. They knew the joy which is a gift from God to those who believe, being produced in them by the Holy Spirit because they were willing to obey God, being mixed with trials, and they set their hope on future glory. That's why they knew that joy.

In the midst of the night, as they sang praises and all the prisoners listened, the Lord decided to shake the place. Shook the whole place, all the doors opened, all the chains broke, all the stocks split; everybody was loose. The jailer realized it, in verse 27, decided to kill himself rather than be humiliated publicly by an execution for having lost his prisoners. Starting to commit suicide, Paul cries out with a loud voice, 28, says, "Do yourself no harm, we're all here." What a leader – what a leader – secured the whole place. "He called for lights, rushed in; trembling with fear, fell down before Paul and Silas. And after he brought them out he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" You say, "How did he know even to ask the question?" Well, maybe he heard Paul preach, and maybe he heard, surely he heard Paul sing, and surely they sang the gospel. You know what those early hymns were? They were like singing the Apostles' Creed. They weren't those spiritual goose-bump songs. They were like, "A mighty fortress is our God," which we sang this morning. They were probably singing the gospel.

He heard it. He knew enough. "He said, 'Sir, what must I do to be saved?' They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you'll be saved, you and your household.'" And some people say, "See, it's so simple, just believe." But there's a lot in that belief. What kind of faith? And who is the Lord Jesus? And verse 32 says, "And that's why they spoke the Word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house." They had to explain what it all meant. "And he took them the very hour of the night, washed their wounds," and they had a baptismal. He baptized the jailer and his whole house. "He brought him into his house, set food before them, rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household." That's the birth of the church of Philippi. Special, isn't it? It started with a lady in her household down by a river, and the jailer and his household in a cell, and they came together.

Verse 40: "They let them go." You know why they let them go? They found out Paul was a Roman; scared the living daylights out of them. He was a Roman. They could really be in trouble for doing that

to a Roman citizen. They said, “Just get out of town – please, get out of town,” verse 39, “Get out of this city, we don’t want this coming back to Rome.” “They went out of the prison and they entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed. The church is now meeting in Lydia’s house; that’s the birth of the church. They had a bond with Paul that was marvelous. They saw him in a terrible extremity. They loved Paul. Lydia and her household loved him, the jailer and his household loved Paul. There was a bond there. There weren’t very many Jews there so they didn’t have to deal with the Judaizing element; that’s probably why there’s no major problems in the Philippiian letter to deal with, because that church wasn’t under the onslaught of the Judaizers. They were just some believers in the midst of paganism. The lines were drawn very clearly. And all through this letter, there’s some warnings, and some exhortations and encouragement, but no problems in the church are ever discussed. That must be partly due to the fact that there was no Jewish synagogue there to threaten the church.

That’s how it was born. It was born in joy. Is it any wonder that Paul wants to write back to them and say, “Now, look, we started in joy, and I just want you to know we still have to maintain that joy, so I want the saints and” – please notice – “the overseers and deacons” – the two roles that the church has in its leadership and service that are defined in the New Testament, overseers, elders, pastors, same idea, deacons, those who serve in any capacity. I won’t go into that, we’ve covered it in deep detail in our study of 1 and 2 Timothy – but he writes to these precious saints. The church has already grown to the place where it has elders and deacons. Several years have passed, the church is flourishing. It’s got its structure; it’s got its leadership. There are those in leadership, the overseers. There are those in service, the deacons. So he’s simply saying, “I thank God for you, and I’m writing to you because I want you to know about my heart, my joy.”

It was about two years after this that Paul wrote 1 and 2 Timothy, and in 1 and 2 Timothy he in detail defines the standards for overseers and deacons. Here he just greets them – just greets them. So this is the saints at Philippi. They are beloved people. Let me just talk very briefly about the bond they had, and I’ll wrap this up. Would you look at chapter 4 for a moment, and I’ll just touch this? In verse 10, he says, “I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me.” They sent him a gift – they sent him a gift. But they were always doing that; look at verse 16. “Even in Thessalonica you sent a gift; not that I seek the gift. I seek that profit increases to your account.” This church was always sending him gifts. It was the Philippians alone who sent him a gift when he moved on and had arrived in Corinth by way of Athens, 2 Corinthians 11:9. It was the Philippians who had sent him a gift in Thessalonica. It was the Philippians who sent him a gift now, along with probably Epaphroditus’ arrival. They loved him, and they expressed their love by giving gifts to him.

Years have passed since the last gift – some estimate even six years – and he receives another gift. And he writes this letter to thank them for the gift, and to tell them, “Don’t worry about me, I’m rejoicing – I’m rejoicing.” They were a generous church. They may be among the poor of Macedonia who gave out of their deep poverty, referred to in 2 Corinthians 8:1 to 5; surely they were. And he

loved this people so much. Chapter 2, verse 24, he says, “When I get out of prison I’m coming to see you,” and I think he did. It’s clear he did. When he left this prison, this imprisonment, he went to Ephesus, set Timothy to get the church at Ephesus right, took off, and went to Philippi, and I believe it was in Philippi that he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. And then he wrote 2 Timothy when they captured him, took him prisoner. Epaphroditus had come with the gift. Unfortunately, Epaphroditus was sent to encourage Paul, but Paul was so worried about Epaphroditus and the Philippians that he sends him back, probably with this letter. He just wants them to know he’s okay – he’s okay.

That brings us to the salutation and we don’t need to say much about it. Do you see it? “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” that’s just a greeting. Grace, *charis*, peace, *eirn*, the Hebrew *shalom* – “I wish you grace, I wish you peace.” Grace is the gift of God, peace is the result. Because of grace, we have peace. I wish you grace, I wish you peace. The source is God the Father, the source is the Lord Jesus Christ. I wish the best for you. It’s a common greeting. He gave it in Romans 1:7, he gave it in 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Colossians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:1, Philemon 1:2 and 3. It’s a familiar greeting. But it says, in summary, I want the best for you – I want the best for you, God’s best. You see, here’s a man who is concerned about others, who is lost in his concern for others. And he writes them to say, “Thank you for your gift. I don’t need it, but I’m so glad you love me that much. Thank you for Epaphroditus, but I’m sending him back ’cause you need him more. Don’t worry about me, I’m rejoicing.”

Listen to this. In chapter 1, he says, “People have disappointed me, but I’m rejoicing.” In chapter 2, he says, “The plans have sort of disappointed me. I’m sending Epaphroditus, I’m going to send Timothy, I’m going to be all alone, I’m still rejoicing.” Chapter 3: “I’ve lost all of my possessions, I’m still rejoicing.” Chapter 4: “I’m in very, very trying circumstances, I’m still rejoicing.” That’s his message. And we’re going to learn in these four chapters that people are going to fail you, plans are going to fail you, possessions are going to fail you, and circumstances are going to fail you, but it doesn’t ever need to touch your joy. And before we’re done, you’ll understand why. Let’s bow together in prayer.

Father, we believe in our heart that this is the tenderest of all the epistles. It’s a letter to inspire joy. I pray, O God, that it will do that in our church. Please grant us that; that we may have joy unspeakable, inexpressible, and full of glory in Christ’s name. Amen.

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