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

The Epistle of Joy
Scripture: Philippians 1:1-2
Code: 50-1

INTRODUCTION

Philippians 1:1-2 says, "Paul and Timothy, bond servants 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."

We live in a sad world--a world of despair, depression, lack of fulfillment, and dissatisfaction. Man defines happiness as an attitude of satisfaction and delight based upon present circumstances. He relates happiness to happenings and happenstance. It is something that can't be planned or programed.

Biblical joy consists of the deep and abiding confidence that all is well regardless of circumstance and difficulty. It is something very different from worldly happiness. Biblical joy is always related to God and belongs only to those in Christ. It is the permanent possession of every believer--not a whimsical delight that comes and goes as chance offers it opportunity.

A good definition of joy is this: it's the flag that flies on the castle of the heart when the King is in residence. Only Christians can know true and lasting joy.

A Christian's 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, being mixed with trials with a hope set on future glory.

A. The Source of Joy

1. Psalm 4:7-8--"Thou hast put gladness in my heart . . . for Thou alone, O Lord, dost make me to dwell in safety." Joy comes from God.

2. Psalm 16:11--"In Thy presence is fulness of joy."

B. The Reception of Joy

1. Luke 2:10-11--When an angel appeared to shepherds in the Galilean countryside to announce the birth of a Savior, he 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."

2. John 15:11--"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 joy.

C. The Product of Joy

1. Romans 14:17--"The kingdom of God . . . is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

2. Galatians 5:22--"The fruit of the Spirit is . . . joy."

D. Obedience and Joy

1. Jeremiah 15:16--"Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart."

2. Luke 24:32--After Christ's appearance on the road to Emmaus, the disciples who had spoken with Him said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us [an expression of joy] while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"

3. 1 John 1:4--"These things we write unto you, that your joy may be full" (KJV). John expected that when his readers received and applied God's Word, they would experience fullness of joy.

E. Trials and Joy

Joy is a gift from God that is mixed with trials. In facts, joy is most clearly evident in the midst of trials. A believer's joy remains in spite of sadness, sorrow, or difficulty.

1. 1 Thessalonians 1:6--Paul said to the Thessalonian church, "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the Word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit."

2. 2 Corinthians 6:10--Paul said that in doing the Lord's work he was "sorrowful yet always rejoicing."

3. James 1:2--"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials."

4. 1 Peter 1:6--"In this [your salvation] you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials."

F. Hope and Joy

1. Romans 12:12--We are to be "rejoicing in hope."

2. 1 Peter 4:13--"To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exaltation." We are to endure the present with joy because we know that exaltation is to come.

3. Jude 24--Jude pointed to "Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy."

4. 1 Peter 1:8--Peter, addressing persecuted Christians, wrote, "Though you have not seen Him [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."

The theme of Philippians is the believer's joy. Paul wrote to a church He loved and who loved him. The deep and special love of Paul for the Philippians can be seen in that while Paul was a prisoner in Rome, he wrote a letter out of concern for their sorrow for him. They were anxious about his circumstances, sad because of his deprivations, and distressed by the possibility that he might be executed. So he wrote with the message, "I am rejoicing in spite of my circumstances, so don't you do any less!"

LESSON

I. THE SERVANTS (v. 1a)

"Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus."

A. The Men

1. Paul

Perhaps the most concise description of Paul given in Scripture is Philippians 3:4-7. His worldly credentials were such that he could say to those who put confidence in such things, "If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more" (v. 4). He was "circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews" (v. 5). That means Paul was the epitome of what it meant to be a Hebrew. Further than that he was "as to the law, a Pharisee" (v. 5). Paul was part of the religious group most zealous for the law of Israel--the Pharisees.

Paul's zeal was so great that he became "a persecutor of the church; [and] as to the righteousness which is in the Law, [he was] found blameless" (v. 6). His own peers (not God) had found Paul to be a

man of tremendous integrity according to the law. Yet Paul said, "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 but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ" (vv. 7-8).

Paul trashed all his human credentials that he might gain Christ. He wanted to "be found in Him, not having a righteousness of [his] own which is derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (v. 9). Paul was a man wholly given over to Christ and the proclamation of the gospel.

2. Timothy

Timothy did not co-author Philippians. Paul included him in his greeting not as a fellow writer, but as a fellow bondservant in Christ Jesus, present with Paul as he wrote. Starting in verse 3 all the pronouns are first person singular. It's never "we" (Paul and Timothy) that write, but "I" (Paul).

There are a number of reasons Paul would have wanted Timothy's name with his at the beginning of his letter to the Philippians.

a) He knew the Philippians

Timothy was well known to the Philippians and loved by them. Acts 16 tells us he was present when the church was founded.

b) He was an excellent worker

Paul was planning to send Timothy to the Philippian church (2:19) , and wanted him to have the best possible reception. So he included Timothy in his greeting as a true co-worker. Later in Philippians Paul expanded his commendation of Timothy by saying, "I have no one else of kindred spirit" (2:20).

c) He may have served as Paul's secretary

Timothy may have been the secretary to whom Paul dictated Philippians. Many of Paul's letters indicate that he dictated his letters. For example, Romans 16:22 says, "I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord." That doesn't mean Tertius was the author of Romans. Romans 1:1 says Paul was the author. Tertius was the secretary or amanuensis who wrote it down. Paul closed 1 Corinthians by saying, "The greeting is in my own hand--Paul" (16:21). Paul meant that though someone else had written down the letter, he was signing it himself. The same thing is true of Colossians (4:18) , Galatians (6:11) , and 2 Thessalonians (3:17).

Timothy was a vital part of Paul's life. He had served at his side for many years. Though Paul was in prison at the time Philippians was written, Timothy was not a prisoner as far as we know and was surely of great service to him.

B. Their Title

1. Its meaning

Paul chose to refer to himself and Timothy as "bond-servants" (Phil. 1:1. That was a common title chosen by the writers of Scripture. James (James 1:1) , Peter (2 Pet. 1:1) , and Jude (Jude 1) so described themselves. The Greek term (doulos) has connotations of ownership, possession, allegiance, dependence, subjection, and loyalty. It was often associated with willing service. The English word "slave" tends to be taken negatively, meaning forced servitude, unwilling duty, and abusive subjection. But that was not what Paul meant by doulos.

A bondservant was a slave bonded to an individual. Often the relationship was the result of affection, love, and esteem--not fear or compulsion. In Exodus 21:5 God provided in the law of Israel for a slave who wanted to permanently bond himself to his master. Many of the slaves in ancient Israel loved their masters dearly and wanted to serve them for life. In such a case the master was instructed to "bring him [the willing slave] to the door or the doorpost . . . and pierce his ear with an awl" (v. 6). The hole in the ear of the slave was a symbol to all who saw him that the man was a slave for life out of love for his master. Paul and Timothy didn't see themselves as unwilling slaves forced into service, but as willing bondservants of Jesus Christ who were serving out of joy and love.

2. Its emphasis

Paul's focus as a bondservant was always on his master. That is to be true of anyone who serves the Lord. An evaluation of service based worldly success can easily lead to wrong conclusions. But when you evaluate your life and service in the light of God's Word, you will always know where you stand.

Service for Christ is the perfect freedom. Though Paul mentioned his imprisonment four times in Philippians 1 (vv. 7, 13, 14, and 17) , he did not consider himself a slave of Rome but the servant of Christ. He knew that Jesus Christ would meet all his needs and assign all his duties. His attitude was like that of David's servants: "Your servants are ready to do whatsoever my Lord the king chooses" (2 Sam. 15:15). Paul served the Lord Jesus Christ, who had assured him, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9).

II. THE SAINTS (v. 1b)

"To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons."

The "saints" Paul wrote to included the spiritual servants who lead the church at Philippi, but they were only part of a larger group. The Greek word translated saint means "separated," "unique," "different," or "set apart," and could be translated "holy." Its meaning is similar to the Hebrew word qadesh, which refers to that which is unique, different, or set apart. Paul was not writing to dead martyrs, canonized people, or a group recognized as the super pious. He wrote to all believers in Philippi. Similarly, the letter to the Corinthians was written to those who were "saints by calling" (1 Cor. 1:2). With all the problems Paul had to deal with in the Corinthian church, if the Corinthians were saints there's a lot of latitude in that term! Ephesians 1:1 says it was written, "to the saints who are at Ephesus."

A saint in Christ Jesus is a person who has been made holy, righteous, separate, and unique from the rest of the world. All believers are saints and have the right to be identified as such."Saints in Christ Jesus" was a favorite phrase of Paul's. He meant that believers are buried with Christ in His death and are risen in Him to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). Paul expressed what it means to be a saint when he said, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

A. Their Identity

The saints to whom Paul wrote lived in Philippi. Paul S. 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" (The Adequate Man: Paul in Philippians [Westwood, N. J. : Revell, 1959], p. 11). The apostle Paul's letter is the reason the name of Philippi lives on.

B. Their Origin

1. Paul's vision

We see the beginning of the Philippian church in Acts 16. Paul took Timothy into service (vv. 1-3) and together they moved from church to church, finally arriving at Troas on the west coast of Asia Minor. Troas was also known as Alexandria Troas, and was a Roman colony (v. 12). It was ten miles from the famous city of Troy. There Paul had a vision in the night: "A certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us'" (v. 9). God was

calling for the message of Christ to spread from Asia to Europe.

In accordance with the vision, Paul and those with him sailed from Troas northwest to the island of Samothrace, and then on to Neapolis, the port city of Philippi (v. 11). Because Philippi is ten miles inland from Neapolis, they traveled overland to Philippi, "a leading city of the district of Macedonia" (v. 12). There Paul and those with him--Silas, Timothy, and Luke--stayed for many days.

2. Paul's arrival

On first arriving in a city, Paul's custom was to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath. To establish a synagogue requires ten Jewish men. Apparently Philippi did not have the required number of men, because there was no synagogue in Philippi.

When there was no synagogue in a city, the Jewish people there to a riverside on the Sabbath. Psalm 137 says, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion" (v. 1). It became a custom for Jews in exile to go to a river and weep because they were away from their homeland. Paul knew that if he wanted to find Jewish people he would find them at a riverside on the Sabbath.

3. Lydia's interest

At a place of prayer by the riverside, Paul had the opportunity to speak to a number of women, including Lydia, who had a business dealing in purple fabric. She was a worshiper of God, and the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message (v. 14).

The first recorded person the Lord ever revealed His messianic identity to was a Samaritan woman (John 4:25-26). The first European convert was a Gentile woman. Luke records that she said to Paul and his companions, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay" (v. 15). Faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ was considered the test of saving faith in those days. She persuaded them to stay, and the Philippian church was born.

4. The slave girl's proclamation

Soon after the conversion of Lydia (while on their way to the place of prayer) they were confronted by a demon-possessed slave girl. That girl made a lot of money for her masters by fortunetelling. She would go into a frenzy when the demons took control of her (the Greek word manteuomai, translated "fortunetelling," is related to the words mainomai and mania, which describe the ravings of a possessed person). She followed Paul and his companions, crying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation" (v. 17).

How to Be a Successful False Teacher

The demon-possessed slave girl in Acts 16:16-18 spoke the absolute truth. The greatest hour of danger in the church is when Satan tells the truth. Similarly, the reason false teachers are so devastating and dangerous is that they sometimes tell the truth. They are not dangerous when they lie because then we know they're liars. But they are dangerous when they tell the truth because often they cannot be distinguished from true teachers. The key to being a successful false teacher is to tell as much truth as possible.

5. Paul's response

Paul didn't need that kind of testimony, and neither did Christ. So Paul cast the evil spirit out of her. That infuriated her masters. When they "saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them to the marketplace before the authorities" (v. 19). Apparently Timothy and Luke were not seized, but only the two spokesmen."And when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, 'These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans" (vv. 20-21). Those proud Romans were anti-Semites.

The crowd rose up against Paul and Silas, so the chief magistrates had the robes torn off Paul and Silas and they were beaten with rods. They then threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely. The jailor would pay with his life if they escaped, so he threw them into the inner prison and fastened them in stocks.

6. Paul and Silas' imprisonment

We must understand the condition of Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail if we're to fully appreciate their response. Their backs had been flayed open by rods wielded by experts. The victims of such beatings often experienced intense hemorrhaging, internal injuries, smashed vertebra, and crushed ribs--any of which might cause death. Those aching, bleeding, limping men had then been thrown into a dark cell and put in stocks. Unlike English stocks (that held the head, hands, and feet) , the stocks the Romans used had a series of holes that allowed a person's legs to be extended to the farthest possible extremity, and then locked in that position. The arms were similarly stretched. When Paul and Silas sang hymns at midnight (Acts 16:25) , it was while they sat alone in the filth of a dark cell, aching, bleeding, and cramping in pain. All because some men lost their income when their demon-possessed girl was freed from her torment.

As they sang their praises and all the prisoners listened, "there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened" (v. 26). The jailer assumed all had escaped, and because he would answer with his life for any who escaped, he was about to kill himself when Paul cried out, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!" (v. 28).

The jailer "called for lights and rushed in and, 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?'" (vv. 29-30). Why did he ask that question? Perhaps he had heard Paul preach. It is likely he had heard the singing, and the content of those songs would have been the gospel message. The early hymns were like singing the Apostles' Creed or "A Mighty Fortress is Our God"--solid theology set to music. The Philippian jailor had heard enough to know what he should ask.

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you'll be saved, you and your household" (v. 31). Some read this and say, "See it's so simple, just believe." But what Paul and Silas meant by "believe" was something with content. Note that they took time to speak "the Word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house" (v. 32). They had to explain the contents of the gospel.

The jailor took Paul and Silas at the hour of his conversion and washed their wounds. He and his believing household were also baptized. He brought them into his house, fed them, "and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household" (v. 34). The birth of the church in Philippi started with a lady down by a river and a jailer in a prison cell.

The next morning Paul and Silas were let go. In the process the Roman authorities found out that Paul was a Roman, which greatly alarmed them. They could have been in serious trouble for treating Roman citizens the way they had treated Paul and Silas. Therefore they asked Paul and Silas to leave Philippi quietly (v. 39).

7. The church's bond

The bond Paul had with the Philippian church was very strong. They had seen him handle himself in a terrible situation and they loved him. That bond was not complicated by a Judaizing element (there were hardly any Jewish people in Philippi) , and that's probably why there are no major problems dealt with in the letter to the Philippians.

The Philippian church was a group of believers in the midst of a pagan environment. The lines of spiritual battle were very clearly drawn. Several years had passed, the church was flourishing, and it had a definite structure and leadership (elders and deacons). Paul's simple message for the Philippians was, "I thank God for you and I'm writing because I want you to know my joy."

In Philippians 4:10 Paul says, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me." They had sent him a gift. That was typical behavior for the Philippians. Verse 16 says, "Even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs." This church was always sending Paul gifts. One arrived in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:9) , another arrived in Thessalonica, and another arrived in Rome (along with Epaphroditus; Phil. 4:18). The church expressed their love for Paul by sending him gifts. They were generous even though they were poor (2 Cor. 8:1-5). Paul loved the Philippians in return and promised he would visit them as soon as possible (Phil. 2:24).

III. THE SALUTATION (v. 2)

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Because of grace we have peace with God, and Paul wished both for the Philippians. The source of each is the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul commonly used this greeting to express his best for his readers (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philem. 1:3).

CONCLUSION

Paul wanted God's best for the Philippians. He had a deep concern for others. People had disappointed him, yet he rejoiced (1:15-18). His plans had not worked well and had to be changed, but he rejoiced (2:19-28). He had lost all his possessions but he still rejoiced (3:1, 7-16). He was in very trying circumstances but that did not reduce his joy (4:10-13). Paul's message is that even though people, plans, possessions, and circumstances may be a source of discouragement, all those things need never touch a Christian's joy.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Perhaps the most concise description of Paul given in Scripture is found where?

2. Paul trashed all his human credentials that he might _____ .

3. What grammatical marker starting in Philippians 1:3 indicates that Timothy was not the co-author of Philippians?

4. What are reasons Paul might have wanted Timothy's name with his at the beginning of Philippians.

5. Paul and Timothy didn't see themselves as unwilling slaves forced into service, but as willing _____ of Jesus Christ who were serving out of joy and love.

6. What will an evaluation of service based on worldly success lead to? What is a proper evaluation based on?

7. What are the various meanings of the Greek word translated saint? How could the word be otherwise translated "holy"?

8. All believers are _____ and have the right to be identified as such.

9. Where is the beginning of the Philippian church recorded in Scripture?

10. Paul's custom on newly arriving in a city was to go to the _____ on the Sabbath.

11. The reason false teachers are so devastating and dangerous is that sometimes they tell _____ _____ _____ .

12. What is a likely explanation for the Philippian jailor's question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30)?

13. Why did Paul and Silas take the time to speak "the word of the Lord to [the Philippian jailor] together with all who were in his house" (Acts 16:32)?

14. What is the simple message contained in Paul's letter to the Philippians?

15. How did the Philippian church express their love for Paul?

16. Because of God's grace we have _____ _____ _____ .

Pondering the Principles

1. In the seventeenth century the English pastor Jeremiah Burroughs wrote, "The afflictions of God's people come from the same eternal love that Jesus Christ came from. Jerome said, 'He is a happy man who is beaten when the stroke is a stroke of love. ' All God's strokes are strokes of love and mercy, all God's ways are mercy and truth, to those that fear him and love him." (The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964], p. 60). If any man had reason to be bitter because of affliction, Paul did (consider the list of his afflictions in 2 Cor. 11:23-33). Yet from a place of confinement in Rome Paul wrote Philippians--the epistle of joy. How does Paul's gracious

attitude in the midst of trials serve as an example for us?

2. James said, "consider it all joy . . . when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance" (James 1:2-4). The nineteenth century preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "Those old gnarlings on the root of the oak tree and those strange twistings of the branches all tell of the many storms that have swept over it, and they are also indicators of the depth to which the roots have forced their way. So the Christian is made strong, and firmly rooted by all the trials and storms of life" (Morning and Evening [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980], July 11, morning reading). Affliction is not only to be endured with grace, but also it strengthens and grounds us firmly in God's grace. Take time to reflect on how past trials have more firmly rooted and established you in your walk with Christ.

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