

Introduction

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice (Philippians 4:4)!" These familiar words of the Apostle Paul are indicative of the mood prevailing in the Epistle to the Philippians. This Epistle is one of the most positive writings of the entire Bible. It is one that can be of great encouragement to Christians living in the 21st Century. This Epistle was addressed to the first church Paul established in Europe.

Philippi is first mentioned in Acts chapter 16. In Acts 16:6-10 we find that Paul and his companions were traveling through Phrygia and Galatia (Roman provinces in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey) on Paul's second missionary journey. They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach in the Roman province of Asia and traveled to the province of Mysia intending to enter Bithynia, but once again were stopped by the Holy Spirit. Traveling west they came to the city of Troas on the western coast of Asia Minor.

During the night a vision appeared to Paul. The vision was of a Macedonian man pleading with the Apostle to cross over into Macedonia and help them. Paul and his companions immediately journeyed across the Aegean Sea from Asia to Europe, arriving in the Roman province of Macedonia (modern-day Greece). They eventually stopped in Philippi which was considered the chief city of Macedonia (Acts 16:11-12).

On the Sabbath the group went to a riverside where they encountered a woman by the name of Lydia. She was originally from the city of Thyatira in Asia Minor. In Philippi Lydia was a "seller of purple" and considered to be one "who worshipped God". Acts 16:14 states that, "The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by

Paul". As a result, Lydia and other members of her household were baptized, becoming the first Christian converts in Europe.

Following the conversion of Lydia and her family, the Apostle Paul and his companions were active in Philippi. Acts 16:16-24 records that there was a servant girl in that city who was possessed by a spirit that enabled her to be a fortune-teller. This girl followed Paul crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation". It is remarkable that God used the spirit within this girl to achieve His purposes.

After several days of this, the Apostle Paul commanded the spirit to come out of the girl which ruined her ability to be a fortune-teller. The girl's owners were enraged at the loss of their money making venture and had Paul and Silas beaten and thrown in jail. They were taken to the most inner part of the prison and their feet were fastened in stocks.

Acts 16:25-34 records another well-known conversion. In this passage we find that Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God while locked in jail. Then, there was an earthquake which shook the very foundations of the prison, opening all the doors and breaking all the shackles on the prisoners. The jailer woke up and thought all the prisoners had escaped. He drew his sword intending to take his own life, since he would be put to death if the prisoners escaped, but Paul spoke up and told him that everyone was still there.

The Philippian jailer fell down before Paul and Silas and asked one of the best-known questions of the Bible, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" In response to

this question, Paul stated, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you, and your household" (Acts 16:31). Paul then continued speaking the word of the Lord to him resulting in the baptism of the jailer and his family. Paul's mission to Europe has been a resounding success so far.

In Acts 16:35-40 we find that the next day the city officials sent word to release Paul and Silas. Paul insisted that these officials come personally and get them out of prison since they had treated them so shamefully in allowing them to be beaten and incarcerated. Since Paul was a Roman citizen he was not subject to the same punishments as most and he insisted that the officials own up to their mistake. Once Paul and Silas were released from jail they returned to the house of Lydia. By this time there were enough believers to constitute a church and Acts 16:40 says, "when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed". Since Luke states in Acts 17:1 that "they had passed" rather than "we has passed" it seems likely that he was left behind in Philippi to minister to the new congregation.

On Paul's third missionary journey he paid another visit to Philippi. This is recorded in Acts 20:1-6. The only other instance where Philippi is mentioned in the New Testament (besides the Epistle we are studying), is in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-2, where Paul refers to how he and his companions were "spitefully treated" there. Considering the beating and imprisonment he experienced there it is no wonder he considered it so.

The Epistle to the Philippians was written by the Apostle Paul. In Philippians 1:1 the letter begins, "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Jesus Christ". Paul began several other Epistles by joining his name with Timothy (2 Corinthians, Colossians, and

Philemon). He added the name of Silvanus also when he began the Epistles of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. While Timothy's name is included in the introduction, this does not mean that Timothy was the author of the Epistle, but, Timothy was well-known to the Philippians.

In Acts 16:1-5 it is recorded that Timothy's father was Greek, as were the Philippians. It is also recorded that Timothy accompanied Paul, Silas and Luke on the original journey to Macedonia. It is no surprise that Paul includes his name here.

The Epistle was written while Paul was imprisoned, and is therefore referred to as one of the "Prison Epistles". There is some disagreement among commentators whether Paul was imprisoned in Rome, or another city, such as Ephesus or Caesarea. There is also disagreement over the year the Epistle was written, but most commentators believe it was written from Rome around the year 60 A.D.

Philippians Chapter 1

Greeting (Philippians 1:1-2)

Paul and Timothy are referred to as "bond-servants of Christ", literally that they were slaves for Jesus. Paul does not refer to his position as an Apostle as he begins this letter, but rather to his position as a servant.

The letter is addressed to several groups of people: the saints in Christ Jesus; the bishops; and the deacons. All of these groups together constituted the church in Philippi. Notice that the members of the church are referred to as "saints". The term *saint* is not reserved only for a special group of people, but applies to all those who are "in Christ". The word *saint* comes from the Greek word, *hagios*, which denotes one who

is sacred, physically pure, morally blameless, ceremonially consecrated, or holy. This word appears numerous times in the New Testament, always translated from the same Greek word, and usually in the plural form. Philippians 4:21 is an exception to this rule.

The saints were joined in the Philippian church by the bishops and deacons. In other passages bishops were called elders, shepherds, or overseers. These men were the ones who had responsibility for the spiritual welfare of their respective congregations. Each time one of these terms appears with reference to a church, it always appears in plural form. There is no New Testament example of a church with only one bishop.

The deacons were concerned primarily with the physical affairs of their respective congregations. The word literally means "one who serves". Each congregation had a plurality of deacons as well as bishops. The Philippian church had matured to the point where they were scripturally organized. These three groups (saints, bishops, and deacons) constituted the church in Philippi and comprise the audience that Paul writes to.

In his opening sentence, Paul extends "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ". No greater blessing could be given to any congregation of God's people than this. It is God and Jesus who provide grace and peace.

Paul's thankfulness (Philippians 1:3-11)

These verses constitute a written prayer by Paul on behalf of the Philippian church. He begins by telling them he thanks God upon every remembrance of Philippi. In every prayer Paul makes requests to God on their behalf with joy (joy is a recurring

theme throughout the Epistle). What a wonderful way to pray! We can certainly benefit from Paul's example. When we pray we should pray in joy, we should pray on the behalf of others, and we should pray in a thankful fashion mindful of those most dear to us in the faith of Jesus Christ.

In verse 5 Paul specifies that he is thankful for the "fellowship in the gospel" extended to him by the Philippians. The idea of fellowship occurs in each chapter of this Epistle and the concept of the gospel is paramount throughout as well. The English word fellowship comes from the Greek word, *koinonia*, and has several meanings. In this particular context, Paul is referring to fellowship as financial assistance by the Philippian church which allowed Paul to preach the gospel in other places.

In 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, the Apostle Paul provides teachings about giving. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, Paul describes to the Corinthian church how the churches in Macedonia (including Philippi), had provided financial assistance to him even though they were enduring affliction and poverty. In 2 Corinthians 9:1-5, Paul uses the Macedonians as an example to those in Achaia (the Roman province neighboring Macedonia to the south, in the region of modern-day Athens, Greece). He challenges the Corinthians to be as faithful in the fellowship as those in Macedonia were.

In Philippians 4:15-16, Paul commends the Philippian church on their faithfulness with regard to giving, from the very beginning until the present time. These Christians had provided Paul with what he needed time after time, even when he was absent from them. They were faithful in *koinonia*, especially as it pertained to spreading the gospel.

In verse 6 Paul speaks of the confidence found in God. He is confident that He, that is, God, who had begun a good work with the Philippians, would see that through to the end. God is faithful. We must always keep this in mind when we encounter problems. In Paul's case, he is showing confidence that God would work through the Philippian church in such a way that they would continue to be able to assist him in reaching the lost. He also makes mention in verse 6 to "the day of Jesus Christ" which is one of several references in this Epistle to the Second Coming of Jesus. He argues that God will continue to work through the church until Jesus returns.

It was right for Paul to think this way of the Philippians. As he shows in verse 7 he always has them in his heart. This was a very special group of people to Paul, since they were the first Christians in Europe. This is evident from what Paul wrote in verse 8 ("how greatly I long for you"). It did not matter to Paul that he was in chains (prison). While he wrote to the church from prison, he wrote about the "defense and confirmation of the gospel", of which this church shared with him. Paul uses terms that denote both an offensive thrust and a defensive position when it comes to spreading the gospel. Sometimes the situation called for a defense and sometimes for a confirmation. Paul was able to use both effectively because the Philippians were willing to support him. They were all partakers of the grace God provides (see verse 7 and verse 2).

Verses 9-11 are easily seen as a prayer. First, Paul prays "that your love may abound more and more". As our Savior taught, love is what shows the world that we are His disciples (John 13:34-35). Along with this love Paul speaks about "knowledge and discernment". Love needs to be coupled with understanding.

Secondly, Paul prays "that you may approve the things that are excellent". This would only be possible through knowledge and discernment. This, in turn, would lead to the Philippians being "sincere and without offense", which are attributes each congregation should strive for. Once again, in verse 10, Paul refers to the Second Coming of Jesus.

Lastly, Paul prays in verse 11 that the Philippians would be filled "with the fruits of righteousness". This is something Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:6). Paul promised the Corinthians that God would increase the fruits of their righteousness (2 Corinthians 9:10). And, the Apostle James taught that the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace (James 3:18). We, like the Philippian church, need to be busy in bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, which Paul states are by Jesus Christ and result in the "glory and praise of God".

Christ is preached (Philippians 1:12-18)

In this section Paul writes of his trials and burdens. He wants the Philippians to know though that he is not complaining. In fact, the things that have happened to him (detailed in Acts chapters 17-28, and continuing to the very day he wrote these words) have actually been beneficial for the spreading of the gospel of Christ.

Paul was in prison, chained to Roman soldiers. Yet, even in this situation he continued to preach about Jesus. In fact, Paul states that the whole palace guard had become aware of his preaching. In Philippians 4:22 we learn that there were even saints in Caesar's household. Paul's chains were "in Christ" (verse 13), just as he and Timothy were "bondservants of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:1)".

Because of the example that Paul provided, other Christian preachers were being bold in presenting the gospel. But, there were also those who preached Christ from a completely different motive. In verse 15 Paul states that some preached "from envy and strife". In verse 16 he states that these men preached, "from selfish ambition, not sincerely", and that they were hoping to, "add affliction to my chains". It seems that some false preachers were using this as an opportunity to create trouble for Paul. Perhaps they felt that if they preached about Jesus it would cause the authorities to make life harder for Paul.

What is interesting is that Paul shows that no matter what the motive was, the message of Christ was being preached. This is an excellent example of how God uses situations in an advantageous way. While these men thought they were harming Paul they were actually enabling the message about Jesus to spread. Paul was not worried about this, "knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel".

"What then" (verse 18)? Or, as the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible translates it, "But what does it matter?" Whether in pretense or truth, the message was the same even if the motives were different. Christ was being preached. In this Paul said, "I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice" (verse 18) which is a common theme throughout the Epistle.

Magnifying Christ (Philippians 1:19-26)

As Paul states in verse 19, he knows that all these troubles and trials will turn out for his deliverance. He mentions that the Philippians were keeping him in prayer. As he

prayed for them, they prayed for him. He also speaks of the "supply of the Spirit" along with these prayers as being the means by which he would be delivered.

Paul had an expectation and hope that he would be released from prison and did not wish to bring shame upon Jesus (see Ephesians 6:18-20). Rather, he speaks of boldness that Christ may be magnified, whether Paul lives or dies. He wants to magnify Jesus in his body, that is through the life he lives. Paul does not wish to draw attention to himself. This is similar to the attitude of John the Baptist in John 3:30, "He must increase and I must decrease".

Magnifying Christ means that Paul (and us) need to have the attitude that whether we live or die, we are going to do so in the spirit of Christ. To live is Christ and to die is gain. This is a paradox to modern readers. How can dying be considered a gain? Jesus taught using such paradoxes as well (Matthew 16:24-26). Paul describes in this section of the Epistle the struggle he is enduring. Whether he should remain in the flesh and continue helping Christians like the Philippians, or whether he should die and be with Jesus, this is the choice he faces.

If Paul lives on in the flesh he will continue to work for the kingdom of God (see James 4:13-16). But, at the same time, he has a real desire to depart from this life in order to be with Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:1-8; 2 Timothy 4:6-8). He describes being with Jesus as "far better", yet is important to the Philippians that he remain. Paul speaks of being confident that he will remain (verse 25) and continue with the Philippians.

If he does remain it will be for the progress and joy of faith of the Philippian church. These Christians will rejoice that he has remained, and this rejoicing will be more abundant when he sees them again (Philippians 2:24).

Stand fast (Philippians 1:27-30)

In this section Paul teaches concerning faithfulness. He desires the Philippians to conduct themselves in such a way as to be "worthy of the gospel of Christ". This was a common theme for Paul. He also instructed the Ephesians in the same way (Ephesians 4:1-3). Whether Paul actually returns to Philippi or only hears reports from others, he is insistent that they be faithful and united.

Verse 27 includes the following commands from Paul: 1) that you stand fast in one spirit; 2) with one mind (see Philippians 2:5; 1 Peter 3:8); and 3) striving together for the faith of the gospel. These demands are repeated in Philippians 2:1-4, and are necessary for any congregation to have in order to be united and faithful.

In verse 28 he asks that the Philippians not be afraid of their adversaries. If they show fear this is a sign of perdition (1 Peter 3:13-17; 1 Peter 4:14). By not showing fear they will prove their salvation, and that this salvation is from God. The Philippians were in danger of persecution. Paul reminds them in verse 29 that they not only have an opportunity to believe in Jesus, but also to suffer for His sake (see Matthew 5:11-12; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12-13; Revelation 2:10-11).

Finally, in verse 30, Paul reminds the Philippians that they have the same conflict he is facing. He reminds them of the fact that when he first came to Philippi he suffered for Christ (Acts 16:19-40). This was something that the Philippians had seen first-hand.

Now, Paul speaks about the fact that they had heard about his imprisonment and the current suffering he was experiencing for Jesus, and that he was getting ready to send Timothy to them shortly with more news (Philippians 2:19-23).