**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 8-6-2023
Dear Brothers and Sisters of Philippi**

Last week we concluded our journey through the Minor Prophets, which are the very last books in our Old Testament. And I do truly hope that you were as blessed and encouraged as I was by this journey through an often-neglected, but important part of Scripture. But these Minor Prophets, and in fact the entire Old Testament, comes to a close without a proper ending.

Yes, each of the books do conclude, but they finish without the promised fulfillment of the Messiah’s arrival. Instead, they end with an expectation that His coming would be soon. God will be coming to His people and He would send a messenger to prepare the way for His coming. And what we have in the New Testament is truly the fulfillment and the conclusion that was long awaited for. Without the New Testament, the Old Testament seems incomplete. With the New Testament, everything fits together perfectly. Jesus did indeed come and He made a way for anyone to enter God’s Kingdom through His life, His death, and His resurrection.

Now with this Minor Prophets, we chose to spend one week in each of the twelve books. The focus was more on taking a birds-eye view over each of these books. Certainly, each one of these books is worthy of much further study.

But there are also times it is profitable to slow down and slowly digest a particular book. And I believe that today and for the next few months we are called to do just that. We will be looking at a very important book from our Bible called Philippians. This book is an epistle, which is basically an instructional letter. And this 4-chapter book is extremely rich in helping Christians to live godly lives in light of Jesus Christ and what He has done.

All of the epistles in the New Testament are important. But Philippians is one of my favorites, perhaps even my favorite. And one reason why is because it is so focused on joy. We spoke about the importance of joy last week as we were studying Malachi. Joy comes as people choose to be all-in for God, rather than just going through the spiritual motions, so to speak. Finding our joy in Jesus will motivate us to be all about His work in this world.

But before we begin our slow journey through Philippians, I think that it is very helpful to set the context a little bit.

This is one of the 13 New Testament letters that Paul the Apostle wrote. Some people think that Paul wrote the Book of Hebrews as well, but we do not really know today who the author of that book was. And Paul does not claim to be its author anywhere in it.

But regarding the letter to the Philippians, taking a look at the Book of Acts is a necessary place to begin in order to better understand the background to the letter.

So that’s what we are going to do mostly today.

About 10 years before Paul’s letter to Christians in Philippi, Paul arrived in Philippi presumably for the first time. It was part of his 2nd missionary journey, where Paul went from city to city sharing Jesus and planting new churches. And this was certainly the case in Philippi.

Please turn with me now to the Book of Acts in chapter 16:12-40. As we hear these words, we will pause a few times to process some of these events.

And again, all of this will help set the stage for Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi.

**Acts 16:12-40 New International Version (NIV)**

**12From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+16%3A12-40&version=NIV#fen-NIV-27496a)**] of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.**

Let’s pause there for a second. Now this was on Paul’s second missionary journey. And it was in the midst of this church-planting trip that Paul and his traveling companions find themselves in Philippi. And Philippi, we are told, was a Roman colony. Roman colonies were towns that were conquered from Roman Empire and populated with Romans. It has a very Roman feel to it, even though it was not in Rome.

The Philippians were people that were proud to be Romans. Many Roman soldiers found Philippi a great place to retire. Comfortable weather and a safe place.

We think about people traveling to Florida for a comfortable retirement. So Philippi was kind of like Florida in a way.

And this is the leading city in that part of Macedonia. What does that mean? It means that this city of Philippi had some influence.

And so it makes sense for Paul to go to Philippi, but it was the places of influence that would influence others. Paul always sought to travel to these places and he hoped to see the Philippians one day influencing others with the good news of Jesus Christ!

Let’s pick up the story again.

**13On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer.**

(let’s stop there for a moment – why was Paul doing this? ---- the Sabbath was when the Jews would gather together. Paul wanted to share the message of Jesus first to the Jewish people in the towns that he went to).

And apparently there was not enough Jews there to even build a Synagogue. And so Paul was looking for the place where the Jews would gather to pray and doesn’t even find this.

It does not appear that there were any men from Philippi there. There were some women who had gathered there, likely to pray.

Let’s pick us the story again:

**We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God.**

(a worshiper of God would be coming that wasn’t Jewish, but who worshiped the God of Israel)

**The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. 15When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.**

(This woman, Lydia, becomes the first Christian from Europe – the family of God is expanding in Philippi. Very cool! And Paul stayed in Philippi for some time, because we go on to read this.)

**16Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” 18She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her.**

(even though this evil spirit was speaking truth through this girl, it was still clearly not of God what was going on. And Paul commands the demon to leave her. And through the authority of Jesus, the demon leaves.)

Think about this scene for a bit. Remember, Philippi was about comfort and privilege and authority. And through the obedience of Paul, God demonstrates that true comfort and privilege and authority are found in Jesus Christ.

Let’s cut back to this story:

**19When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”**

**22The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. 23After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.**

**25About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. 27The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”**

**29The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” 31They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” 32Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. 34The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.**

**35When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: “Release those men.” 36The jailer told Paul, “The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.”**

**37But Paul said to the officers: “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.”**

**38The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. 39They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. 40After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.**

Again, even in being beaten and thrown in jail for serving God, Paul demonstrates that the people in real trouble are those that oppose and reject the good news of Jesus. And we see that the jailer and his household become true believers in Jesus through this.

Ten years after these events, while Paul had moved on to plant other churches and be doing ministry in many places, by the time of this letter to the church, Paul finds himself again incarcerated in prison for proclaiming the good news of Jesus. This time he is under house arrest in Rome.

And he writes to the young church that he helped to start in Philippi. You can keep all of this backstory in the back of your mind as we now turn to the opening verses of this epistle – Phil. 1:1-2

**1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: 2Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Here are a few quick observations about these couple of verses.

First, the church there had grown. There are now established leaders. Paul and Timothy mention the overseers and deacons. The little church that Paul had helped to plant was growing and God was raising up leaders to help shepherd and serve the people there. That is huge praise!

Second, Paul and Timothy refer to themselves as servants or slaves of Jesus Christ. The Greek word often translated as ‘servants’ can also be translated as slaves. In fact, it may be better translated as slaves, based on some of the other things that Paul writes about in his book. This is so profound.

In a town like Philippi, where Roman citizenship meant so much, here is Paul referring to himself as a slave or servant. A slave of Jesus Christ.

And third and finally, the Church in Philippi have been set apart for God and made holy through Jesus. And it is all by God’s grace through their faith in Him. So amazing! God’s grace and peace is theirs through God their Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This community that largely did not know God only 10 years earlier was now God’s saints, His holy people, right there in Philippi.

So as we fast forward to today, what is the main takeaway for us today, in light of our reading from Acts as well as the opening verses of Philippians?

And I believe that it is this. **We are to remember that true grace and peace is offered to us through knowing and serving Jesus Christ, rather than asserting our status or striving for earthly status**. Grace and peace do not come through striving for high worldly status and having worldly power, but instead by choosing to live as slaves to Jesus Christ. When we say “Jesus is Lord,” which is most likely the oldest creed of the Christian Church, we are proclaiming Jesus as our King and Master. In so doing, we are saying, we submit to You with our lives. We are Your slaves. We are Your servants. Our lives are not our own. Jesus is the perfect, benevolent King. And joy comes through willingly serving Him every day.

May we live every day to be slaves of Christ. We are His and He loves us. And our identity must be found in Him.

Resources:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+16%3A12-40&version=NIV>

<https://www.ancient.eu/Philippi/>

New Testament Cultural Settings – Lesson on Slavery – Spring 2023 – Dr. Douglas Buckwalter