

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 4/15/09 Wednesday evening

New Testament Survey—Philippians

If you were in prison incarcerated for a crime you hadn't committed, if you were waiting for a trial date in which you might possibly be given the death sentence, what kind of things would be going through your mind? If you wrote a letter, what would be the tone of it? Would you talk about how joyful you were?

The New Testament book of Philippians is an amazing book. It's a letter that fits the scenario I just described.

Discuss: What do you think of when you think of the book of Philippians?

To do: Two groups. To get a feel for the flow of the book...

1. Circle the word "gospel" (6 times in ch. 1; 2 elsewhere).
2. Circle the words "joy," or "rejoice" (14 times).

- **Who wrote the book?**

--Paul (and Timothy)

- **When was the book written?**

--A.D. 61

--Paul was in prison (probably under house arrest in Rome; see Acts 28:30-31)

Key: When Paul wrote this letter, he was not in the Mamertime dungeon as he was when he wrote 2 Timothy. He was in his own rented house, where for two years he was free to impart the gospel to all who came to him (NIVsb).

Recipients: Who were the Philippians?

(see NIVsb; and Gromacki)

--The city was named after King Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. It was a prosperous Roman colony, which meant the citizens of Philippi were also citizens of the city of Rome itself.

--Many of the Philippians were retired military men who had been given land.

--The people prided themselves in being Romans (Acts 16:21). They dressed like Romans and often spoke Latin.

Discuss: What potential problem would need to be addressed for such people after they became

Christians? Pride in earthly status. Notice how Paul addresses that subject throughout the letter...

3:20-21 Roman citizenship is fine, but what do we have?

2:5 What kind of attitude should we have as citizens of the heavenly kingdom? also 2:1ff.

--Philippians contains no OT quotations.

Discuss: What are possible reasons for this? Since Philippi was a Roman colony, few Jews lived there. There were not enough Jews to establish an official synagogue. It's quite possible the city was quite anti-Semitic, since there was no synagogue there (for large numbers of Jews were found in other Greek cities, like Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth).

Background: How did the church at Philippi get started?

The sequence goes like this: (see Acts)

--On the second missionary journey, Paul and Silas picked up Timothy (15:36-16:5).

--The Holy Spirit prohibited them to preach in Asia and Bithynia. The missionaries went to Troas, where Paul had a vision (16:9). A man of Macedonia appealed, "Come over into Macedonia and help us." Luke joined the team, and the gospel went to Europe.

--At Philippi on the Sabbath, they ministered to a group of women by the river (prob. Jewesses and Gentile proselytes). Lydia and her household believed and were baptized. Her home became the base of operations for the new "church."

--Paul cast a demon out of a slave girl. Her masters seized Paul and Silas and had them beaten and thrown in jail (16:20-21). God used this to bring the jailer and his household to faith.

--Paul and Silas left the next day for Thessalonica, and left Luke behind.

Note: This new church started with an unusual mixture--a converted business woman, a former demonic soothsayer, a jailer, and perhaps some prisoners.

Discuss: What does that say to us about God's design for the church?

- **Why was the book written?**

For the following reasons...

1. *It was a missionary "thank-you" letter.*

See 1:3-5; also 4:14-19

2. *Paul reported on his own circumstances in prison, and how this affected the spread of the gospel.*

See 1:12-14

3. *It was given to encourage the believers in face of persecution.*

See 1:27-30

4. *It was to deal with a problem of disunity.*

See 2:1-5 The book exhorts the believers to be humble and strive for unity.

Discuss: What does it take for a church to have unity?

- **What is the outline of the book?**

(adapted from *NIV Study Bible*)

I. Paul expresses his thanks and prayer for the Church (1:1-11).

II. Paul explains his personal circumstances (1:12-26).

III. Paul exhorts the Church (1:27-2:18).

A. To live a life worthy of the gospel

B. To have a servant's attitude like Christ

IV. Paul explains about his associates (2:19-30)

A. Timothy

B. Epaphroditus

V. Paul warns against Judaizers and Antinomians (3:1-4:1).

VI. Paul gives final exhortations and thanks (4:2-23).

- **What is the message of the book in one sentence?**

Philippians is a thank-you letter written from the missionary, Paul, to one of his most loyal, supporting churches.

- **What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?**

1. *Philippians gives us one of the most profound Christological passages in the Bible.*

See: 2:5-11

This is called the *kenosis* passage. Why? It's based on the Greek understanding of the phrase in 2:7 "But he made himself of no reputation." (*alla heauton ekenosen*), lit. translated "But himself he emptied."

The issue: Of what did Christ empty himself when he became a man? Did he empty himself of his divine attributes? Was he less than God when on the earth?

The classic answer (Gromacki, 260): "Christ surrendered the independent exercise of His divine attributes when He became incarnate. He had them, but He did not always use them. He learned,

hungered, and grew weary; these are characteristics of His human nature. However, He did use His attributes at times under the control of the Holy Spirit. He forgave sin, created food, gave life to the dead, and walked on the water."

Discuss: What other passages can help us understand the unique personhood of Jesus Christ? What cautions must we keep in mind as we think and talk about who He is?

2. *Philippians teaches us about how to be joyful regardless of circumstances.*

What verses address that subject? What counsel does this book give us?

3. *Philippians teaches us that the spread of the gospel involves a partnership.*

How so, according to Philippians? Who's involved?

Note: This letter is one of Paul's most personal. There are over 100 occurrences of such words as "I," "me," and "my." This doesn't mean Paul lacked humility, but rather shows the personal rapport he had with the Philippians.

Discuss: How can we as a church develop such closeness and affection?

Application Questions:

What does this letter teach us about contentment? see 4:10-13 About anxiety? see 4:4-7