

**The Rock: 02-07-2021**

**Philippians: The letter of Joy**

**First reading:** Acts 16: 6-10, 25-37

**Title:** Servants of Christ Jesus

**Scripture:** Philippians 1:1-2, Acts 16

**Theme:**

The call of every Christian life is one of service to others. The two assignments given by Jesus (Great commission and greatest commandment) are seen lived out in the most practical of ways in the missionary journeys of Paul and his companions.

**Introduction:**

I often wonder what things in the early church would have looked like if people such as Paul, Timothy, Silas, and Luke decided to go for comfort and convenience rather than following the call at all cost.

We look at the letter to the Philippian church and see right away that it is a letter of joy, and it sure is. But it is also a very practical letter written from a place of great inconvenience: prison.

These are not just names on a page, they are men who understood God's sovereign and guiding hand on their lives. They understood the call, not just of missionaries and pastors, but of the Christian in this world.

As we go through this letter, I want us to see that, along with many other things Paul writes about, all wrapped up in the joy that comes from knowing and obeying Jesus our king.

But let's get some of the back story on just how it was they got to Philippi, because that is quite the tale.

### **The Story:**

As we begin, I've often wondered if it wasn't just for Lydia, the slave girl and the jailer that God directed Paul's steps to this place.

Many reasons I'm sure as Paul was now stepping into the "ends of the earth" with the command of Jesus to go into all the world and preach the good news.

It's amazing if we are watchful of how God operates, we see things from a different perspective. On the surface, being beaten and put in prison tends to be a failure of sorts.

Yet, starting with Lydia, a powerful business woman in the city, these missionaries find a base of operations and go right to work.

This is where Acts 16 comes in. Paul and Barnabas have had an argument about Mark and whether he should join them again.

Barnabas, at this point, having more grace and forgiveness than Paul, wants him to go. Paul, not so much.

"And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."

**-Acts 15:39-41 ESV**

A sharp disagreement. Just in passing here this morning, we know in God's providence, he took care of both of these men as they separated.

But pride and unforgiveness for past mistakes caused Paul to not want anything to do with Mark at this point. Barnabas, an entirely different personality, was willing to risk another chance.

Scripture bears out that Barnabas was correct, as even at the end of his ministry, Paul has complete trust in Mark again. (2 Timothy 4:11)

In understanding God's providence, let's be careful this morning to recognize right at the outset, that holding grudges and unforgiveness causes us to miss out on a great many things.

For Paul, it ended up being his relationship with one of his best friends. For nowhere are we told that they ever talked again. Just another thought about these people we read about on the pages of Scripture.

They were people just like you and me, and we need to always remember that even the best of men are just men at best. Grace, mercy, forgiveness.

Anyway, as Paul and his new companions start out looking for a place to preach, the Holy Spirit continued to "redirect" them:

"And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them."

**-Acts 16:6-7 ESV**

Strange that the Spirit was the one not allowing them to do the very thing the Spirit has called them to. But Paul wasn't passive in finding where to be.

He didn't get discouraged and worked up and try and fight the authorities for his right to speak. Somehow, he recognized that it wasn't just unfortunate coincidences which kept happening.

He saw somehow in these doors that kept closing, God's providential care directing he and his team. Quoting Swindoll:

"It takes a sensitive spirit to the Lord's leading to maintain this kind of perspective. We naturally tend to wonder what we did wrong or if we know we did nothing wrong, play the victim."

**-Swindoll's living insights Pg. 318**

In practical terms, this is the day to day living out of the Christian faith. Prayer, Scripture reading and then the doing.

Paul knew he had an assignment, and it wasn't about him and his comfort. Nor was it about where he felt he ought to be. Rather, it was the direction and call of God.

Understanding that, Paul didn't sit around and mope or wait for a voice from heaven to direct traffic. He just kept doing the next right thing.

Ok, if it isn't working here, let's try the next place. Paul wasn't just a Christian in name, but in practice. In other words, it wasn't what he did on the Sabbath day and only then, if it was convenient and there wasn't something better to do.

It was who he was, not just what he did. What he did, and was doing here in Acts 16 is the result, or fruit of who he was "In Christ."

What he read in the Scriptures and learned in his prayer life were working themselves out in practical action each day.

This is a big thing for us to get in this day and age of church consumerism and belly-button gazing. What's in it for me? Will this church "meet my needs and do what I want?"

This type of thought process will not survive the trials of a church that is being pushed off to the side and is no longer even a neutral entity in our culture.

The church is seen in a very negative way, much like we will see it was at the outset in Philippi, and that is costly to the follower of Jesus.

Paul discovers this inconvenient truth pretty much in each town they go to, and more awaits in Philippi. But that is where God wants them to be.

"So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."

**-Acts 16:8-10 ESV**

The Christian life is never about comfort and convenience. Philippi was in "Europe", a place Paul had not thought to go. They were going to work their way east, not west.

God, as always had other plans. Philippi was a Roman colony, probably one of the biggest in Macedonia, and they didn't even have a Synagogue for Paul to begin ministry at.

Would we have chosen to start there? Probably not. Paul didn't even think to

start there. But when God directed them that way, the guys were all in.

They knew it wasn't about them, if it had been, let's think about this for a minute, Lydia would not have been saved, the slave girl would not have been freed, and the jailer would have died in his sin.

Instead, Christ was made known, people were saved from this broken world, because the church was on the move.

As much as this letter is about joy, and we need it. We will find that it is very practical letter in at least this way:

When the Church is being what she is supposed to be, both locally and globally, living for the glory of God and serving others, she will get noticed AND she will get in trouble.

But Joy is found when we are being and doing, because God is glorified, Jesus is made known, and people are saved, by the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

This is a far cry from culture club Christianity where it's all about making me happy and comfortable. Listen, selfishness is a joyless endeavor.

How do I know? I'm selfish, that's how. Inevitably we will not get what we want,

no matter how hard we cry. That sucks the joy right out of us.

Selflessness, on the other hand, asks: What can I give and do to help others? That, no matter the cost, brings joy:

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

**-Philippians 1:1a ESV**

Brings a whole different meaning to this opening which Paul writes doesn't it? They have been captured by Christ, and want nothing more of their lives than to serve Him in any capacity that will build God's people up.

Again, Paul is writing to a particular people, at a particular place and time. People who, because of Paul's first visit and sacrifice along with Silas, have established not only a church, but an ordered and growing community.

"To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons"

**-Philippians 1:1b ESV**

Ordered leadership, membership and responsibilities within the community to make sure everyone is served and taken care of.

Don't think for a minute that membership is unimportant. Don't think for a minute that good leadership is not necessary, and that we can all just go about doing whatever we want.

No, the only way the Church survives and grows is when she follows the Biblical pattern given to us. Everywhere Paul went, this is how churches were established, and grown.

Now, in the midst of trouble and persecution, Paul is encouraging them to stay the course, focus rightly, and help one another. That happens because they are functioning as a unified body of believers.

But getting to that point in Philippi didn't happen overnight, nor was it cost free. Paul confronted this slave girl who was possessed "had a spirit of divination".

She was freed from that oppression, and that got them a sound beating, not an award for being kind. Instead, they were accused of disturbing the city.

Beaten and thrown into prison:

"The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many

blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.”

**-Acts 16:22-24 ESV**

They are smack dab in the middle of God's will! If we want to talk about personal rights being violated, personal freedoms being taken away as the church, let's talk.

But let's do so for the right reasons, and with the proper perspective. Because the right perspective, as it relates to our circumstances is critical.

I am very concerned that when genuine persecution comes to the Church in America, how well she will stand in the face of it.

Paul and his team shared the gospel and freed a young lady from possession and oppression. Why? They loved God and they loved their neighbor.

Compelled by the Spirit to go there and preach the good news - set people free spiritually and physically. Simply fulfilling the ministry and mandate of Jesus:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

**-Luke 4: 18-19 ESV**

For that, they got no civic award, they didn't make the front page of the paper. Rather they got a sound beating and locked up in prison.

Let's be more careful when we (myself included) get stirred up by the politics and perspectives of our time, as if somehow the Churches right to exist and her mission is determined by any government.

I suspect that if someone can't get to Church on a Sunday in our time here in America (you fill in the reason why), I am prayerfully concerned and have little confidence that they will gather when the real pressure is on. Because we haven't formed the habit of making it THE priority.

No, my friends. We need each other now. We need to be in community and prayerful and working together. To not be open has

been very hard, and we made that decision for good reason.

But it was difficult because we know and knew that we need each other. I pray that we continue to grow as a community in such a way that Sunday gatherings are the most important thing for us.

Enough on that. Paul, Timothy (unmentioned are Silas and Luke) are writing to the saints in Philippi to encourage them in a time of genuine strife and trouble.

Paul, remember, is writing from prison himself to encourage in very practical ways - to re-frame or frame out their world view around Jesus and His example.

Again, I often wonder if it wasn't for Lydia, the slave girl and the jailer that Paul was initially sent to rescue. But the fruit of that labor and suffering is a church which is thriving.

The tender care of God for His own through and by those who do what they are called to wherever they are put. Active agents (very practical isn't it?)

What can I be doing Lord, for your glory and to help others? The Church is not to be a passive people fussing about the inconvenience of it all.

Servants of Christ...A powerful and important title. Perhaps the most important. They are joyful because they know they are in the center of God's will, even though they are chained in prison.

So, when they begin to sing, it doesn't prove that they are crazy, but rather they're settled in their confidence that they are there for Christ.

"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them..."

**-Acts 16:25 ESV**

By their wounds, people came to Christ, a church was born, human beings were re-valued. But before they leave town, Paul knows that in order to ensure the legality and validity of this tiny new body of believers, he has to challenge the authorities one last time:

"But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do

they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city."

**-Acts 16:35-39 ESV**

You beat us for no reason, Roman citizens. Now, Paul could have declared that at the outset and saved himself a beating.

But he didn't. He and Silas bore the marks of Christ for the benefit of the new believers, including the jailer. By waiting until they were freed, Paul was able to use the moment for a public apology.

This insured the validity of the Church and her right to exist. That in fact, they had done nothing wrong, but rather it was the magistrates who failed.

The church was no rogue group, but now they were recognized and a legitimate group who could exist and continue. Job done, because Paul picked the right battle and the right hill.

There are certain things worth dying "on that hill" for. But far too often we are

on the wrong hill, fighting for personal pride issues rather than the right hill of Kingdom purposes.

The Church in the world today, and especially here in our beautiful country has to, and is sorting this out. We are being shaken and sifted. How deeply divided we are over the wrong things and how quickly it steals our joy.

If our focus is right, and our actions (the fruit of our focus on Christ) work as they should, we will always have joy in Christ. Why? Because it is simply the day-to-day practical working out of our salvation, regardless of who is in charge, what is going on and how much we are pushed to the side.

In fact, if you really study the Bible, it's when the church is pushed to the side, that she grows and is most effective.