

This morning we begin a series working through the letter to the Philippians called “Joyful Unity in Christ.” Exposition. We’ll be here till around April or so. But first, why do we have this precious letter? This morning, let’s consider how the church at Philippi got its start. Acts 16:6-34 (870). Let’s consider the Macedonian call, the wealthy, the marginalized, and the blue collar.

**I. The Macedonian Call – 6-10** – This was around the early 50’s. Paul was on his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey. They were headed West but the Spirit said no. We are not told how, but he closed a door, he redirected a path. The Spirit is responsible for the plotline of the church’s mission. The Spirit of God guides and empowers the church on mission. What a comfort!

Luke says the Spirit *of Jesus*, because the Father, Son, and Spirit are one essence in three persons. When Jesus works, he works through the Spirit. **1:1.** / So the Spirit of Jesus closes a door. That’s helpful as we seek to discern God’s will. When we watch these early Christians trying to discern God’s will, we don’t see them sitting around, asking for signs. No, they are active. They are moving and the Lord opens and closes doors, direct and redirects paths.

Paul has a vision of a man in Macedonia asking for help and concluded that God had called them to go share the gospel with them (16:9-10), which leads them to Philippi, a large city and a Roman colony. The story of the gospel coming to Philippi shows that the message of the gospel knows no bounds. Here we have three very different types of people being confronted with the message of grace. The church of Jesus Christ transcends our standard social classifications and makes all one in Christ. What did we see last week: Col 3:11: “Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.”

**II. The Wealthy – 11-15** - The typical practice of the first missionaries was to go to the local Jewish synagogue but there was no such thing in Philippi. There only needed to be at least 10 Jewish men to form a synagogue, but apparently, they didn’t have that.<sup>1</sup> But there were some ladies were having a riverside Bible study. In every place where the Lord is named, you can count on some women praying, can’t you? Praise God for the prayers of faithful women.

One of those ladies was not Jewish, but had rejected paganism. Her name was Lydia and she was Asian. She was from Thyatira and probably owned a successful fashion company and her main clients would have been wealthy people since purple was the color the wealthy wore in Rome. Purple meant royalty. She rubbed shoulders with the elite. The Lord was drawing her in. One of the other ladies probably invited her to the prayer meeting. Paul and the team show up and tell them about the Jewish King, Jesus.

Look again at v. **14.** Grace. We sing “Grace Alone:” “I was an orphan lost at the fall, Running away when I'd hear your call, But Father, you worked your will, I was in darkness all of my life, I never knew the day from the night, But Spirit, you made me see. I swore I knew the way on my own, Head full of rocks, a heart made of

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<sup>1</sup> David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 460.

stone, But Spirit, you moved in me.” The Lord opened Lydia’s heart to hear the gospel message. This is what happens when we share the gospel. And the Spirit works.

We work and the Spirit works. God uses means. John Stott writes, “Although the message was Paul’s, the saving initiative was God’s. Paul’s preaching was not effective in itself; the Lord worked through it. And the Lord’s work was not in itself direct; he chose to work through Paul’s preaching.”<sup>2</sup> Paul told the story of Jesus and God opened her heart. My story

How many times did you hear the good news of Jesus before it finally hit home? God opened your heart just like He did Lydia’s. Sweet sovereign grace. Lydia’s conversion changed her life and immediately she was hospitable (Lk 24:29-31). She was adamant. She prevailed upon them, persuaded them to stay and let her serve them.

She was quick to serve other believers and use her resources for the propagation and advancement of the gospel. The church met in her big house!

Friends, some faithful woman befriended and invited Lydia to come to prayer. Let this motivate you to befriend and invite people. Because of the faithfulness of the disciples, the Spirit at work in Lydia, a church was birthed. Now we have the letter to the Philippians because of it. / So the gospel makes its first stop with a wealthy elite Asian business woman.

**III. Marginalized – 16-24** - Next, the message of grace grabs the fortune-telling slave girl. The ESV says she had a “spirit of divinization” but the word is literally a “pythian spirit” from the Greek myth Python, the dragon that guarded the Delphi oracle at Mount Parnassus and was killed by Apollo. She followed them around for many days, announcing that these men know the way of salvation. She was right. They were proclaiming the way of salvation.

Finally, Paul had enough of it and commanded the spirit to buzz off and it does. This is not a magical incantation but a confessional one. Jesus has triumphed over evil. He has subjected the principalities and powers through his resurrection. Now, the owners of this girl are ticked. They are going to have to get real jobs now. This slave girl was their means of incoming.

The owners drag them to the authorities and accuse them of preaching against Caesar, which is partly true since they were announcing a new King – **17:7**. They were stripped naked and beaten with rods!!!! Flogged and tossed in prison.

Now, we are not told that this slave girl was saved, but chances are she was. That was the pattern in the Gospels when Jesus delivered people. If so, now we have a wealthy businesswoman and a freshly recovered demon-possessed slave girl as the nucleus of the church in Philippi. Quite the D-Group! Today, it would be like

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<sup>2</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 263.

a corner office executive and a homeless woman. Not exactly church planting core group material by today's standards. But the Spirit's standards are not today's standards.

**IV. The Blue Collar (25-40)** - Next, the hound of heaven pursues the Philippian jailer. **25** Paul and Silas are naked and beaten, yet here they are locked up what are they doing? Sulking, groaning, complaining? No! They are having a church service. They are praying and singing. Come on, somebody! As the 2<sup>nd</sup> century theologian Tertullian put it, "The legs feel nothing in the stocks when the heart is in heaven."<sup>3</sup> Listen to how Michael Green describes the early church: "Tell them to keep quiet, and they disobey you. Throw them into prison, and they convert the jailer. Whip them, and they rejoice to be allowed to suffer for Christ. Stone them to within an inch of their lives in one city, and they carry on with just the same message in the next. Kill them, and others arise to take their place. Endurance like that simply has to win in the long run. But we do not see enough of it in our western church."

What an example of faith and hope. Church, let's cultivate a faith that sings when, when-not-if, the trials come. Don't be a whiner. Let's resolve not to be a bunch of complainers but singers. Let's ride the wave of providence with a smile not a scowl. **Acts 5:41**. They truly believed in the surpassing worth of Jesus. Do we?

**26-34** - Then God miraculously frees Paul and Silas through an earthquake. Quite the earthquake! Doors blown open and chains broken. Nothing can stop the mission of God. This jailer was desperate. Jailers who let prisoners escape were typically executed so he decides to stab himself before his authorities can get ahold of him. But Paul shouts at him and tells him not to do it. Paul was free, but risks his own life to save the life of the jailer. This theme of giving of self for the good of others will surface again and again in Philippians.

This jailer knows that the God whom these Christians were praying and singing to is the real deal. So he asks, "What must I do to be saved" (Acts 16:30)? The answer is that he must believe on the Lord Jesus and he will be saved. **G.** Friend, if you are not a Christian, this should be your question. Listen to Rom 10:9-10: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." You can do that right where you are.

This jailer believed, cleaned up the disciples, fed them, and rejoiced. Just as with Lydia, this man's faith immediately leads to service and hospitality for the people of God. We are saved to serve. Paul and Silas were released, returned to dear Lydia's house to encourage the new believers, and moved on to Thessalonica.

So here we have the beginnings of the church at Philippi. We have Lydia the successful business owner, a rough and tough jailer, their households, and a formerly enslaved slave girl. The church at Philippi was a diverse group of people. Christianity is for all. Unlike virtually every other religion it is not bound by any particular culture. This reality sets the Christian faith apart. It can take root anywhere and be transplanted anywhere. God so loved the world that he gave his Son that *whoever* believes.

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<sup>3</sup> Tertullian, *To the Martyrs*, 2 quoted in Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 317.

The Philippian church begins as a motley crew, to say the least. But a motley crew with a message that saves. And it does. The church grows. And this church, this new covenant motley crew grew and ultimately became the Apostle Paul's most supportive church. About a decade later, a thank you letter was sent by the Apostle, that began with: to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi . Turn there with me: Phil 1:1 (921). We are going to be in the trees of this letter for 6 months, so let's look at the forest as we close. 1 Tim 4:13 says devote yourselves to the public reading of Scripture, so let's read the whole letter together (12 min).