

Philippians 1:1-11, Acts 16:13-24

A Unique Beginning

Image Church // Philippians Week 1

MPS: How God brought together the church in Philippi and the implications it has on us and on the book of Philippians.

Introduction

Hey good morning Image family, I hope you're doing well!

I want to welcome back those of you that may have joined us for the **first-time last week** to celebrate Easter with us! We're glad that you're tuning in and I would love to encourage you to take a next step and get connected to one of our **Virtual Community Groups** you can do that at imageATL.com/community.

And if it's your first time turning in today thanks for joining us we want to connect with you and so, please make sure that you text **GUEST to the number on the screen** and someone will follow up with you soon!

Well I am excited about this morning because we're kicking off a **brand-new series** where we're going to be walking through the book of **Philippians** together.

The book of **Philippians** is a letter written by **Paul** while he's in prison to the church in Philippi.

The city of Philippi was an influential city because it was on a major trade route that connected Europe and Asia...

And it was a very well-known city because it was built by **Alexander the Great's** dad... And for those of you **Shakespeare** fans, it was the city where the battle went down between **Brutus and Cassius**, who assassinated Julius Caesar, and **Mark Antony** and **Octavian**...

In a lot of ways **Philippi** was like a smaller version of **Atlanta**. Atlanta's considered a *city of influence* in America, it's also a city with several major highways that run through it, *and we don't have the battle of Philip as our claim to fame but we have the Peach Bowl...*

- *I would say GA vs. GA Tech but we all know that really not a battle...*

Philippi was a **Roman Colony** with a **Roman** perspective on religion where you're free to worship any **god** that you want as long as you don't claim that your God is the only God, and as long as you worshiped the Emperor...

There were no Christians in Philippi... That is, not until **Paul planted a church** there on one of his missionary journey's...

Philippians is such a special story because it's the first church in the city of **Philippi**, and it's also most likely the first church in all of **Europe**...

And so, Paul writes this letter to encourage the church in their faith, and to show them what it looks like to continue to grow as Christians, to mature as Christians...

- Philippians is going to give us a picture of what Christian Maturity looks like, it's going to show us what it means to grow as Christ followers...

But here's what I want to do this morning, I want to take you back to the beginning of this church...

I want to make the book of Philippians **come alive for you**, I want to make it real for you by looking at how it all began **so that** you can see the incredible hand of God in **how** He brings this church together, and more specifically today, **who** He brings together to form this church...

And the implications that it has for us...

So, if you have your Bibles go ahead and turn to Acts 16, we're going to start in verse 13...

Paul and his companions had just entered the city of Philippi, let's look at what happens first...

Acts 16:13-34

13 On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate by the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and spoke to the women gathered there. **14** A God-fearing woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, was listening. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying.

15 After she and her household were baptized, she urged us, "If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Ok so here you have: **Lydia** let's talk about Lydia for just a minuet...

Lydia was from **Thyatira**, so racially she was **Asian**... And she was a merchant who sold purple cloth.

- *Purple cloth*—is something that would have been marketed to wealthy people.

So, she's a wealthy *fashionista*, she's well known around the city, she's respected, she's an independent woman that has her own company, and is pioneering the fashion industry... *She's like, Kate Spade* making it happen here in Philippi!

The text also says she's a *God-fearing woman*...

- What that means based on the original language here is that *she showed reverence for God and performed actions and rituals associated with the worship of God*...
- It's important to see that she was **religious** but she was not a **Christ-follower**.

See, she mentally ascended to the fact that there was a God—she even did things for God—but she had never surrendered to what God had done for her through Jesus... For her it was a religion... But being a Christian is more than just believing in God, or acknowledging that He exists... Our society is full of people who are a

lot like Lydia. They show reverence for God, they talk about Him as a higher power, but that's about all there is to it...

They're really not sure about Him but they know, He exists and they want Him on their side...

- And the assumption is all we have to do is just acknowledge God and that's all there is to it...

This a lot like where Lydia was... ***There may be some of you listening that relate to Lydia***... And you need to know that God wants you to see what Lydia saw and that's that **Knowledge of God doesn't give you access to God**...

See, knowing God exists doesn't deal with the problem of sin and our separation from God...

- Our sin makes us impure, unclean, **separated** from a perfect and Holy God- this is what all of the OT is pointing to...
- **Romans 5:10** shows us that our sin also makes us enemies of God, because we choose to run after all of the things that are counter to everything that God is... Our desires over Him...
- We stand condemned and guilty as an enemy of God...
 - You say, **what an enemy that sounds harsh**- Let me ask you this: if you're not an enemy of God what are you??
 - *You can't be anything else because of your sin – there's no neutral*...
- There's a penalty as an enemy of God because of your rebellion- the wrath of God and separation from Him forever...

But God made a way- Gospel...

It's not just about knowing God, it's about surrendering to the work of God through Jesus Christ- which means He becomes your **Savior** and **Lord**... His sacrifice demands surrender...

This is the news that Lydia needed to hear- **And it is the news that some of you need to hear.**

Lydia was spiritually interested, but on this day, she became spiritually renewed by the message of Jesus...

Some of you need to ask yourself the question: Have you surrendered to Jesus, has He captivated your heart, has He changed your life, has He changed your perspective and reoriented your priorities?

See, when Lydia responded to the gospel it immediately led to her **opening up her hands** as she extends hospitality to Paul and the guys that were with him... When you receive and believe the message of Jesus it changes you!

So, here's how the church is beginning, you have Lydia and her whole family who surrenders to Jesus... Let's look at what happens next:
Verse 16 in Acts 16:

16 Once, as we were on our way to prayer, a slave girl met us who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She made a large profit for her owners by fortune-telling. **17** As she followed Paul and us she cried out, "These men, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation, are the servants of the Most High God."

*By the way, notice that the **demons** acknowledge who God is... What they say is true- but they certainly have not submitted to the Lordship of Jesus!*

- Like we saw earlier, knowing **about** God and surrendering to Him, are very different things...

I love this next part, **verse 18** She did this for many days. Paul was **greatly annoyed**. Turning to the spirit, he said, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out right away.

So, you have **the slave girl** was most likely a teenager who was enslaved- making money for several men through fortune telling because she was possessed by a demon...

And what you need to see is that this girl stands **in complete contrast to Lydia...**

Where Lydia is free, this girl is a slave, Lydia is in control, this girl is not, she's possessed, Lydia is wealthy, this girl is poor... Lydia is an intellectual seeker, this girl is exploited with no ability to seek anything...¹

And what we see in this is that Paul specifically performs this **exorcism** in **JESUS NAME**- it's Jesus' authority and power that's at work here, showing that Jesus has divine power over the dominion of darkness!

- **There's no limit to the power of Jesus name and His ability to save people even in the worst of places...** God is a God that brings people out of bondage...

Listen, this girl was able to experience the liberating power of God's grace through the name of Jesus...

- There are some of you here today and you **need to experience the liberating power of Jesus name**- that in Him you have hope and freedom no matter what your experiencing...

Now, we don't know for certain what ends up happening with this girl, but a lot of scholars assume that she responded with gratitude and trusted in Jesus and became part of this new church that was forming in Philippi...²

- Given the placement of this story within **Acts 16**, that would make sense...

And so, let's assume based on the surrounding context that's true, at this point we now have two completely different people Lydia- a successful business woman, her family, and a former possessed slave girl as the first to be part of this new church...

Let's keep reading:

¹ Thought from Matt Chandler, Philippians 1.

² John Piper, *Treasuring Christ in Planting Churches and Loving the Poor.*

As you can imagine the owners of this girl were not happy about what just happened- they are ticked, so they report them to the “police.” The crowd jumps in on ridiculing Paul and Silas, so they’re arrested, beaten and thrown in prison and under watch of the Jailer.

Pick up in **verse 25**:

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

This is amazing me- it’s midnight, their locked up, and they had the tar beaten out of them... But in this you see a key theme that’s going to appear in the book of Philippians, and that’s joy in the midst of hardships and suffering...

- *Paul has to be the most frustrating person to deal with if your anti-Christian...*

Verse 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the jail were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s chains came loose. **27** When the jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison standing open, he drew his sword and was going to kill himself, since he thought the prisoners had escaped. [his life was at stake- prisoners get out and he will be killed]

28 But Paul called out in a loud voice, “Don’t harm yourself, because we’re all here!”

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. **30** He escorted them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

31 They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”

And now we have **the Jailer**...

This guy is a **blue collar, government employee** who guards prisoners... Completely different than both Lydia and the slave girl... He’s a gentile, so he’s not Jewish- maybe Roman, we don’t know but what we do know is he’s totally different than the first two...

So, this whole thing goes down which is incredible... *no big deal for Paul, but it’s incredible*... And after the jailer goes to take his own life, but Paul hollers out...

And the jailer immediately asks this question: *what must I do to be saved*...

Now real quick...

- You can’t help but notice that the jailer had been paying attention to everything that was going on...
- He had to have seen their **joy** hearing Paul and Silas praising God as they sat in their jail cell after they had gotten the tar beat out of them...
- And then when the earthquake happened and they were still standing there and that sealed the deal for the jailer, he knew he had to know this God they were singing about!

Side note: *let me just say this-* it’s important for us to realize that the outside world is always watching how Christians handle things, particularly suffering...

- ***You never know when your suffering will lead to someone else’s salvation!***

But look at the jailer’s question... *He says: what must I do to be saved*...

Isn’t it interesting that the jailer’s assumption is that he has to **do** something to be saved??

That is a great example of our **natural disposition**— we think we have to **do something** to make ourselves right before God...

But look at how Paul answers him, he answers him with **truth of the gospel** not a list of things to do. **Paul says:** “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”

- Everything has all already been done through the finished work of Jesus... Believe and receive that.

There's some of you listening this morning that need to hear that same truth this morning, stop trying to earn God's favor- you have it in Christ... **Let the gospel drive you to action, don't try to direct your actions to drive you to God, it just won't work.**

Look at verse 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him along with everyone in his house. **33** He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. Right away he and all his family were **baptized**. **34** He brought them into his house, set a meal before them, and rejoiced because he had come to believe in God with his entire household.

Can you imagine how this looked as an entire family heard the gospel for the first time, and then when they hear the amazing news of Jesus they believe it and they **rejoice** together! What a powerful moment as they celebrate their new found hope in Jesus!

Ok, so there you have it, that's the very beginning of the church in Philippi... It was composed of **a rich business woman** and her family, a **slave girl**, and a blue color Gentile **jailer** and his family, all led by a **Jewish guy** named Paul...

Why is this so important?? Two main reasons...

1. The new church literally defied every racial, socioeconomic, cultural, and religious barrier that there was...

Do you see what God does here!?!

The **first church in the European world** is a community where the gospel unites people who are completely different in every way around the **person of Jesus** and not **cultural preferences**...

This is so powerful... The diversity, the stories of each of these people... And the fact that **only the gospel could bring them together!**

This is a beautiful picture of what the church should look like... A community of people who are different come from different backgrounds, who are in life on life relationships- they were in Lydia's

home- her house would actually become a central hub for the church in Acts...

- I know we can't do this now physically but we can still do it relationally... As we wait and then we can!
 - Digital community group...

Here's the second reason the beginning of this church is important: **2. The beginning of the church in Philippi shows off the saving power of God.**

What we see is that God can save anyone... **Picture this**, this is a city where there were no Christians... No access to the gospel until now...

And in the midst of that we see and encounter with 3 people who all have different vices, different hold back, different perspectives, different pasts, baggage, religious perspectives...

And yet none of them are outside of God's saving power...

Listen there are some of you that feel like your outside God's saving power... This story shows you that's not true...

- *Appeal...*

There are some of you that think people you know are outside of God's saving power and this story shows us that's just not true!

- Don't put God in a box...

So, you have this incredible story of the start of this church in Philippi...

And how it's this is a new community that's being formed in a way like no one's ever seen before here in Philippi, which means there's going to be challenges, and we're going to see that in the weeks to come...

*But, in light of the context that we know have I want to close out by reading the first 11 verse here of **Philippians 1** to help you connect all this, and then I want to leave you with a challenge.*

Philippians 1:1-11

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus:

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons. **2** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **3** I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, **4** always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, **5** because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. **6** I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Paul thinking about Lydia, and the slave girl, the jailer and their families!

- He knows where they started, he watched them go from **death to life...**
- And He's confident that God's going to continue to work in and through them...

7 Indeed, it is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. **8** For God is my witness, how deeply I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. You have to see how genuine this is, how personal it is for Paul...

And then here's Paul's goal for them...

9 *And I pray this:* that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment, **10** so that you may approve the things that are superior and may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, **11** filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

*Paul wants the church in Philippi to grow in their **knowledge of God** so that it will increase their **love for God** which will help them to have discernment in how they should live as a Christ-followers, and as they walk in this it will prove that they have been made pure and blameless through Christ!

He wants to bring them along in their spiritual journey... He wants them to grow....

So, here's **the challenge:** *Where do you need to grow in your knowledge of God's love, where do you need to be stretched so that you can grow as a Christ-follower?*

Let me start with this, **do you have a spiritual beginning?** Every person that was part of this new church all had a spiritual beginning where they surrendered to Jesus- have you done that?

Some of you have been around religion for a long time, you've known about God, but you need to surrender to him...

Some of you may be like:

- **Lydia**- know about God but never surrendered to Him...
- **Slave girl**- you're in bondage in some area of your life and you need to apply the power of Jesus... you need to apply the gospel...
 - *Remembering the*
- **The jailer**

Others of you need to be stretched in your view of the power of God and the message of Jesus...

conclusion [VAMP]

Where have you been doubting the power of the gospel personally??

- Walking in guilt?
- Not feeling good enough?
- Sin in your life that you're enslaved to?
- Situationally, not believing God?

- Circumstantially, things are hard and you're doubting God- The start of the church in Philippi should show you just how much God's in control...

Where have you been doubting the power of the gospel in others???

- Who have you labeled *no way they're ever getting saved*?
- Who have you stopped praying for because you think they're too far gone?
- Who have you not shared the gospel with because down deep you doubt God's ability to save them??

The book of Philippians is going to push you beyond where you are, and it's going to challenge you in new ways, and it's going to show you what it looks like to go deeper in your faith...

We've said this before but Christianity isn't **stagnant** or **static**... It's about forward progress in the gospel, and Paul's going to show us what that looks like and the **joy** that you can find in running after Jesus!

Where do you need to move forward in your belief??

Pray

Outtakes:

See, what the book of Philippians is going to do, is it's going to challenge us and stretch us on what it means to be a Christian, and what it looks like to grow as a Christian...

And so, he's writing from a place of **isolation**- in a lot of ways he is **quarantined** but, in a way worse sense...

Something else about **Philippi**, there were no Christians...

Then enters **Paul** who ends up planting a church there... The story is in **Acts 16**... And here's something that's important for you to understand about this **Philippian Church plant**...

- The first members of the church are a **woman**, a **slave** and a **Gentile** all lead by a **Jewish** pastor...

So, these new Christians would have been going against the flow in a big way...

Which means that this **new community**, this **church** that been formed *would have stuck out like somebody in a Midtown business building walking around in camo*...

And they would have been looked down on, labeled as bad citizens, and even persecuted...

And so, Paul's writing from prison to

So, here's

Here's the deal regardless of where you are on your spiritual journey...

- Maybe your joining us and you're **not a Christian** and you're searching, this is an incredible series for you to be a part of where you're going to get a glimpse into what Christianity is all about...
- Maybe you're a **new Christian**...
- Maybe you've **grown up in the church** or you've **been a Christian for a long time**...
- Maybe you're stagnant in your faith