

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

Philippians | A Local Church is Born in Suffering and Joy

North Center | August 14, 2022

Pastor Jeremiah Knoop

Please open your Bible to the book of Philippians.¹ We are continuing our sermon series “*Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet*,” and today we are going to be looking at the letter, that Paul wrote to the local church in Philippi.

Read **Philippians 1:1–7**

These first 7 verses help **orient us** to what this little book is all about...

- Written *by* the Apostle Paul and Timothy (**1:1**)
- Writing *to* the local church in Philippi – along with the church leaders (**1:1**)
- Writing *from* prison (**1:7**). So, we refer to it as one of the “*Prison Letters*”
- Writing *with* an unwavering confidence in God (**1:6**)
- Writing *about* joy (**1:3**)

Paul *begins* by praying with joy (**1:3**), and then he continues to talk about joy for the rest of the letter. Toward *the end* of the letter, he writes two sentences that many Christians have memorized:

“**Rejoice in the Lord always.**
Again, I will say, rejoice!”
~ *Philippians 4:4*

That’s an amazing command from Paul. On my desk there is **a photograph** that my sister took when she was spending some time in Rome years ago. It’s a photo of an ancient Roman prison. Nobody knows for sure, but it could have been the same prison that Paul was in when he wrote this letter.

¹ As your pastor, I want to encourage you to bring your physical copy of God’s Word to the gathering on Sunday mornings. Let me share just two reasons why I think it is so important to bring a physical copy of the Bible with you. **1.** I think it helps you learn better. **2.** I think it sets a good example to those around you.

1. In the book of Ephesians, we read that we are in a spiritual battle, and this book is our only weapon. And it’s much harder to learn how to use a weapon well when you only watch other people use it. When I preach on Sunday morning, my main goal is not just to teach the Bible. My main goal is also to teach you how to study the Bible for yourself...and (in my experience) that rarely happens if you don’t have a Bible open in front of you.
2. I want to encourage you to bring **your own physical Bible** with you – *instead of using the Bible on your cell phone*. Why? **1.** A physical Bible doesn’t have the possibility of receiving a text message, or a Facebook alert, or an email notification...and there’s no temptation to check the score of the game or quick glance at your social media feed. It’s just God’s Word on a page in front of you. **2.** It also sets a good example to those around you who can’t see your screen. If they see you holding a physical copy of God’s Word in their hand, they know exactly what you are doing. If they see you thumbing through your phone, they don’t know.

And I want to encourage you to bring **your own Bible** – *instead of using the pew Bibles*. Why? **1.** Because of the message that it communicates to those around you. When you open your own Bible, it communicates to people that God’s Word isn’t just a Sunday thing for you. **2.** I think it helps you memorize God’s Word when you are looking at the same Bible, the same words on the same page in the same font on Sunday that you are on Monday. So why do we have pew Bibles? I think primarily they are here for visitors who don’t have a Bible of their own... or perhaps for those Sundays when you realize that you accidentally left your Bible at home.

- And that photo reminds me that a follower of Jesus can experience joy **anywhere** and in **every** situation when we are trusting Jesus with our life.
- Paul said, “*Rejoice in the Lord always.*”

Paul knew what it was like to suffer. He knew what it was like to experience loss. He knew what it was like to be abused, mistreated, abandoned, hunted, outlawed, maligned, beaten. And he knew what it was like to experience the kind of sorrow that makes you wish you were dead.

So, he is not naïve to the suffering that followers of Jesus experience. He knew full well that Christians suffer in all kinds of ways – which was one of the main points in **2 Corinthians** (which we looked at several weeks ago).

Yet, Paul could say that, even in our deepest sorrow, we have reason to rejoice.

“...sorrowful, yet always rejoicing...”
 ~ 2 Cor 6:10

WHY?

- Because Paul knew that God was in control of the circumstances in his life. All of them. Every single one. All the time. No exceptions.
- And Paul knew that God is always working all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.
- Paul knew that his suffering (our suffering) isn’t going to last forever. **We know how this story ends.**
- Paul knew that Jesus makes Himself known to His children in powerful ways in the midst of our suffering – Paul actually talks about that in this letter.
- Paul knew that God is using our suffering to accomplish His purpose in ways that we could never even begin to imagine.

So, Paul is in prison – writing a letter about what it means to be a joyful Christian – and he is writing to the local church in Philippi.

Brother Odysseus is going to help us think about what this joy looks like in the life of a Christian... so what I want to do is to look briefly at Paul’s relationship with this church & how this local church got started – and that brings us to **Acts 16**.

ACTS 16

Paul is on one of his missionary adventures, and he’s traveling with a couple companions: Silas & Timothy.

1. God gives Paul a vision (while he was sleeping) of a man crying for help (**16:6–10**). When Paul wakes up, he determined that the Lord was calling them to that part of the world to preach the gospel. So, they pack their bags, and they head to Philippi.
2. Their first convert to Christianity there in Philippi is a woman named Lydia (**16:11–15**).
3. They continue preaching the gospel for many days, and eventually the leaders of Philippi take them, spread lies about them, beat them, and throw them into prison (**16:16–24**).

How did they respond?

“But at midnight Paul and Silas were *praying* and *singing* hymns to God and the prisoners were listening to them.”

~ Acts 16:25

So... they have been wrongly arrested, publicly humiliated; they're covered in blood, chained to a wall in a miserable prison, and their response: *praying & singing*.

- “And the prisoners were listening to them.”
 - If you are a follower of Jesus, be sure of this: when you suffer, people are watching to see how you respond.

Instead of responding with anger, rage, bitterness, complaining, arguing, pleading their case... they're praying and singing. There was this joy in God (beating in their chest, running through their veins) that the circumstances in their life couldn't touch.

- That doesn't mean that they were happy about *their situation*.
- It means that, in their situation, they were happy *in God*. It means that they were “*confident...that He who had begun a good work...would complete it*” (1:6).
- It means that even as they cried out to God in anguish, there was a joy in their soul.

Maybe you are thinking, “There's no way that I could do that.”

Paul says, “No, that's not true. On the contrary...”

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

~ Philippians 4:13

While they were praying and singing, something awesome happened... **Read 16:26–34**

What happened?!?! God **used** their *suffering* & their *singing* [together] as the catalyst to bring the Philippian jailer and his entire family to faith in Jesus. Their *pain* & their *prayers* [together] were the foundation that God used to build the first church in Philippi.

Q. So, as Paul writes this letter to the church in Philippi (from a jail in Rome) who does he have on his mind? **A.** Among others, he's thinking about a certain jailer and his family – a family that came to trust in Jesus because they saw how a follower of Jesus responds in the midst of suffering. They saw a contentment and a joy *in Jesus* that they couldn't understand, and they wanted it.

And not only did this happen through Paul's imprisonment in Philippi, but it was happening all over again in Paul's imprisonment in Rome. In the beginning of Philippians (**verse 12**), Paul writes,

“But I want you to know, brethren,

That the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.”

~ Philippians 1:12

So, that's the **context** of this little book. It started with Paul in *prison in Philippi*, and it picks up with Paul in *prison in Rome*. It started with Paul *showing* what it looks like for a follower of Jesus to rejoice in the Lord always, and it picks up with Paul *explaining* what it looks like for a follower of Jesus to rejoice in the Lord always. This is the kind of life response to life that God is calling His children to have, and Paul said, “*I can live this way through Christ who strengthens me*” (4:13).

Part Two

Encouragement in Philippians

Philippians 1–4

North Center | August 14, 2022

Odysseus Kruah

Theme: Be Content; the Life of a Joyful Christian

Key Points:

1. Joyful Servant | **1:27**
2. Joyful Unity | **2:5–13**
3. Joyful Qualities | **3:1–9**
4. Joyful contentment | **4:4–8**

If we've been paying attention to the sermon series on looking "*Through the Bible at Thirty Thousand Feet*" (particularly in the New Testament), we would have noticed by now how great of an influence Paul, an apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ, is having on shaping what is believed to be the fundamental doctrines of the church and of the gospel that is being preached in Bible-believing churches throughout the world today. And the letter to the Philippians is no exception. Here, we see some of the most beautiful teachings from this great and humble of man God – talking mainly about maturing and rejoicing in Christ.

Let us pray: "*Lord Jesus, here is Your Word. Open our hearts and mind to trust and obey You through the help of Your Holy Spirit in us, for the sake of Your name. Amen.*"

My family and I were blessed (by the will of God) to have sat under the leadership, teachings, and counsel of Pastor Stan for more than 18 years, and I owe a lot of my understanding of Scripture to him – until Pastor Jeremiah stepped into that role. I was called to serve in the deacon ministry by Pastor Stan, and then I was called to lead that ministry by Pastor Jeremiah and the elders. It has truly blessed me and strengthened my faith in the Lord. And I am deeply humbled to work with people in the deacon ministry who also truly love the Lord.

So, when Pastor Jeremiah asked me to share a message from the book of Philippians, I was surprised, and of course I have been nervous! I said to him, "What a coincidence, Pastor Jeremiah, this letter contains one of my favorite verses in the Bible – speaking about **Philippians 4:6–7**. The revelation of this verse came to me at one of the lower points in my adult life. But through the grace and wisdom of our Lord Jesus, He made known to me the power of the gospel to transform and to build up his chosen ones to be strong in him.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable
for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.
That the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good works.

~ 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I'm not a pastor, and I'm certainly not a preacher, so, I'm sure you will pardon me if I'm not digging as deep and laying this out as beautifully as Pastor Jeremiah does every given Sunday. I am just blessed to share from my heart. It is my hope and prayer that as you have come (and for always), that God will make His scripture profitable unto you for the sake of his son Jesus Christ. Amen

So, let's go into our passage:

Generally, we often refer to this as *the book* of Philippians, but it's actually *a letter*, written by Paul while still in prison, to the church in Philippi. He sent the letter by his good friend, Epaphroditus, whom the church in Philippi had sent to care for Paul in prison.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

So, for a little **historical background**: the city of Philippi was a Roman colony established by retired military officials. Paul first visited the city in **Acts 16**, and he established this little church as the firstfruits of his labor in the Lord. So, the church knew Paul and loved him very much. Paul writes to them to thank them for their faithful support and ongoing prayer for him. And whenever Paul writes, he writes to teach, to encourage, to rebuke, and to command. And he writes with deep emotion, compassion, and sincerity. And this letter to the Philippians is no exception. He was very direct, and he stirs them toward humbleness and Christian maturity.

THEME

So, for our **THEME** today I will say, "*Be Content; the Life of a Joyful Christian.*" For those of you who take notes, let me repeat: "*Be Content; the Life of a Joyful Christian.*" Church, life on this planet is unarguably challenging. Each one of us has, at some point in our lives, encountered adversity of various kinds.

It is commonly said that **you either coming out of some kind of problem, or you're already in one, or you're heading for one.** There's always something!

We live in the day and age where anything or anyone can snap your life away within seconds: The weather: too cold and you can freeze to death, too hot and you can die from heat stroke. You might go groceries shopping and never come home to see your family. You can go to school and never come home to see your family. Life can be confusing, complicated, unfair, dreadful, you name it.

Recently, a nurse in California, driving her car at a speed of 90mph, ran through a red, and struck crossing vehicles. Six lives were taken away. Amongst them, a 23-year-old pregnant mother and her 2-year-old son alone with her 24-year-old fiancé.

Paul was put in prison for preaching the gospel of our Lord Jesus, treated very badly, and was probably waiting to be executed. I had a hard time trying to equate Paul's extreme condition to our everyday reality. Maybe at one level we could draw some parallels about our hardships and the consequential maturity in Christ. But before that, here are the four things I want us to take away today from our theme:

1. Joyful Servant
2. Joyful Unity
3. Joyful Qualities *and*
4. Joyful contentment

That's a lot of joy! We will blame that on Paul – because 17 times he used the word JOY and REJOICE in this letter to get his point across. Paul opens this letter with greetings and gratitude to the Christians in Philippi, and he clearly calls out a charge to the leadership as well when we read **verses 1 and 2 of Chapter 1.**

1. JOYFUL SERVANT

One of the attributes of being a matured Christian is being a joyful servant. We must serve Christ through the local church by serving each other. Not with rivalry and envy, but with knowledge and discernment through the fruit of Holy Spirit in righteousness – as Paul mentioned in **verses 13–14**.

That fruit of a joyful servant is seen when we build each other up, working for Lord within our various gifts. When you serve the Lord through your service to the local Church and through using your gifts to share the gospel, the fruit is that of **Odessa's testimony** to the church last week. Praise be to our Lord.

2. JOYFUL UNITY

Paul follows that by making a strong emphasis on unity because the true joy of a Christian life is the joy of oneness in Christ. And we see that in **Chapter 1:27**

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

~ *Philippians 1:27*

So, what Paul is saying here (in my view) is not that we just serve but that we serve *in unity*, working together as one body – the hands and feet coming together. But what we see most often in so many churches is fighting and division in the body of Christ – either because of doctrine, jealousy, personality, money, you name it... and that's not the will of God. Remember, this a young church, and Paul doesn't want them fall into the trap of division.

I pray that North Center will continue to stay worthy of the Gospel of Christ in *working together*.

3. JOYFUL QUALITIES

A joyful Christian understands the quality of his salvation in Christ. Last week, brother Adam unfolded Paul's argument to the Galatians against attempting to earn salvation by keeping the law. And Paul is bringing the same reminder to the Philippians.

And being found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.

~ *Philippians 3:9*

Paul is also saying here that my salvation is not by the work I do. Paul helps us see that it took the life of God's only begotten son, pure and holy, without sin, made a sinner for me.² That is the quality of my salvation. A joyful Christian understands this, and he rejoices in the cross. Christ paid the full price. It's **not** a credit card that you pay back each month. It's **not** a shared responsibility. **Christ paid it all.**

² 2 Cor 5:21.

4. JOYFUL CONTENTMENT

Because of that, I am joyfully content. Content, first and foremost, in the knowledge that my salvation is in Christ, and secondly, content with whatever life throws at us – as we wait on God’s timing. Contentment carries the idea of being in an emotional and mental state of satisfaction

Paul said in **chapter 4:4–8**,

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice!
Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.
Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication,
with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;
and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

~ *Philippians 4:4–7*

What we are anxious about? Whatever it is that we are going through, God is faithful, and He knows it all. Let us lay it on the Lord.

I had the pleasure of taking my family to **Puerto Rico**, and it was a fun time. Sipping on tropical drinks and having a good time. In this day and age, we have the **luxury** to drive and fly wherever we want to go, open the fridge, and there’s food everywhere.

Paul was in prison for crying out loud.... but he counted it all joy.
Let nothing stand in our way of being a joyful Christian.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble,
whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are
lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there
is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

~ *Philippians 4:8*

Let us Pray.