

Philippians 1:1-2

The Blessings of Bondservants

Let's start by taking a look at what else we know about Philippi – this letter is written to the church in a city, and it's a city we happen to know a few things about from the Bible and from secular historical sources.

It's a city Paul visited on his second missionary journey, remarkable because it was the first city in Europe in which Paul preached the gospel...

Acts 16:[11](#) Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next *day* came to Neapolis, [12](#) and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. [13](#) And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met *there*.

Paul's typical approach was to start by sharing the gospel in the synagogue. But, you had to have at least ten Jewish men in order to have a synagogue, and apparently there weren't even that many Jews in this city, but there were a group of people who went down by the river to pray each week.

[14](#) Now a certain woman named Lydia heard *us*. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. [15](#) And when she and her household were baptized, she begged *us*, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded *us*.

[16](#) Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met *us*, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. [17](#) This girl followed Paul and *us*, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to *us* the way of salvation." [18](#) And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. [19](#) But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities.

[20](#) And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; [21](#) and they teach customs which are not lawful for *us*, being Romans, to receive or observe."

Philip of Macedonia, the Father of Alexander the Great, founded Philippi in fourth century BC. It was a small city of around 10,000 when Paul arrived, located near the Southeastern coast of modern Greece. Residents worked in nearby mines for copper and gold, so the place wasn't too bad off economically. But as the centuries rolled on and the Romans overtook the Greeks, it gained a new significance.

You may remember some of the details of the life of Julius Caesar, perhaps from the play written by Shakespeare – “et tu Brute,” right? He was the leader of Rome (back when it was a republic, before it became an empire). But Caesar was assassinated in a plot that included a bunch of senators, including a guy by the name of Brutus.

After the murder Brutus and a guy by the name of Cassius (not Cassius Clay, he came along a LOT later), tried to take over the empire, but Mark Anthony (who later had that whole relationship with Cleopatra) and Octavian (later known as Caesar Augustus, the first Emperor of Rome, and Julius’s appointed heir) opposed them. Everything culminated in the Battle of Philippi where the armies of Brutus and Cassius were bested by the legions of Mark Antony and Augustus. After the victory Antony and Augustus let some of their soldiers stay and retire in the area to keep an eye on it.

So, when Augustus was finally entrenched as the new leader of what would become the Roman *Empire*, he made Philippi a Roman colony. They were governed by Roman law, dressed like Romans and spoke Latin and a bunch more retired Roman military guys were sent there to retire and keep an eye on things because the city also overlooked the Via Egnatia, the main highway heading East out of Rome toward Asia Minor (modern Turkey). That happened only about 100 years before Paul showed up, so they’ve just recently had their big centennial celebration.

And now the crowd is agitated against Paul and Silas and they accuse them of being Anti-Rome, which isn’t going to fly too high in a place filled with a bunch of flag-waving vets and citizens who are proud of their citizenship.

[22](#) Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods.

The magistrates were the Roman governors or mayors for the town.

Beatings were administered by men called *lictors*, (which is where we get the saying ‘taking your licks’) these were bodyguards for the magistrates, essentially like our Secret Service, but they also administered punishments when directed. They carried fasces everywhere they went. Fasces were a bundle of rods cut from white birch, tied together with a strap of red leather, and had a bronze axe extending out of the center to symbolize their ability to administer the death penalty. As a result, fasces have become a common symbol to this day of power and jurisdiction, you find them on the back of old dimes, on the symbol of the National Guard, and even on the arms of Lincoln’s seat at the Lincoln memorial, without the axes.

[23](#) And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. [24](#) Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

[25](#) But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. [26](#) Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the

foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. [27](#) And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. [28](#) But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

[29](#) Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. [30](#) And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

[31](#) So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." [32](#) Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. [33](#) And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his *family* were baptized. [34](#) Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

[35](#) And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go."

[36](#) So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace."

[37](#) But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, *and* have thrown *us* into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out."

Uh-oh. The magistrates had just assumed that these guys were Jews and they could be treated like second-class citizens. They had no idea they had beaten fellow Romans – which was actually a crime, there were certain punishments that no Roman citizen was supposed to be subjected to, like crucifixion for example, or any punishment without a trial.

So Paul says, "No way. We're not getting run off like stray dogs. Let's get this thing settled appropriately."

[38](#) And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. [39](#) Then they came and pleaded with them and brought *them* out, and asked *them* to depart from the city. [40](#) So they went out of the prison and entered *the house of* Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

Paul used his Roman citizenship to protect the fledgling new church. He made sure to leave on his terms, not those of the political leaders. And in so doing, quite likely made sure that nobody messed with the new group of Christians that had just been formed.

Which is why it is so interesting that when he writes that church a letter 10-12 years later, he opens it the way he does:

[1](#) Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ,

What is a bondservant?

- Diakonos (a hired servant) vs Douloi (bondservant)

- Zondhiates “A slave, one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another, his will being altogether consumed in the will of the other.”
- The lowest of the Roman social order
- Shocking to the sensibilities of a Roman garrison town, especially a place where he had used the benefits of his citizenship so well it seemed.
 - Despite the benefits of citizenship, Paul frequently said that he counted every thing he was, everything he had attained to be as worthless compared to Christ.
 - Phil 3:7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Being a bondservant isn't always a bad thing, it just depends on who you're serving and what you're getting out of the exchange.

- enter the military, sign away a portion of your life. Why?
 - Patriotism
 - Education, either in or after
 - Experience
 - Job
 - In exchange for some of those things, they surrender some of their freedoms

Paul and Timothy were serving Jesus, but what were they getting in return? There are three things I want us to notice this morning:

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:
2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As a result of serving Jesus we become saints. The word means “holy ones.” The Catholic church appoints certain people as saints, but you have to be recognized as a martyr or someone extra holy, and then you have to do miracles including miracles after you're dead, then you can be recognized. It's kind of a rigorous process.

But the Bible says we are all saints – so, as someone once said, there's only two categories, saints and ain't's. And if you're a Christian, you're a saint. Chuck Smith said, “Maybe the church has not recognized it yet, but the Lord has.”

But, it's important to notice, we become saints “in Christ Jesus.” We become special because of who we are connected to. Paul calls every one in the church a saint, ALONG

WITH the elders/bishops and the deacons, “full-time ministry” doesn’t make you special, every one of us is seen as holy because when God sees us, He sees us “in Christ.”

We talked about some of the benefits of being in Christ last week.

But let’s look at two more very specific and important benefits, grace and peace.

They are a typical greeting for Paul, every one of his letters starts off this way, and they always occur in this sequence – except the Pastorals, where Paul adds “mercy” between the two.

Grace, *Chairein*, “to rejoice” – standard greeting in Greek, even to this day. And for the Christian, the greatest thing to rejoice in is experiencing God’s grace, which leads us into peace.

Peace – “Shalom” the standard Hebrew greeting, it means “peace” but more so, “wholeness” or “well-being.”

Paul started all of his letters this way because he wanted people to know that the Grace and Peace they were looking for could be found in Christ.

Grace brings Shalom. Grace is what is given, Peace is what results. Last week we talked about being content. Look at what Paul writes to the Philippians in Chapter 4: [6](#) Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; [7](#) and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

If you want true peace, you must experience true grace, and that comes only through Jesus.

Because of these benefits, Paul had no problem surrendering all the privileges of his precious Roman citizenship and calling himself a bondservant. But the Bible actually says we are all bondservants, or slaves to something.

Romans 6: [16](#) (NLT) Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living.

Where are you seeking peace? What do you think you need, where do you think you need to go? What do you think you need to buy? What needs to finally roll around? What is the source of your peace and who do you serve?

Is there somebody that you live to please, some authority figure, maybe your boss or your dad? Maybe even your kids – do you live to serve them, not just to take care of them, but to please them?

Is there someone whose eye you just want to catch, so you wear certain clothes, do your hair a certain way, strategize your actions, your errands, and your words to try and get noticed?

Do you serve acceptance, craving for someone or for some crowd to like you?

Do you serve success, or perhaps money?

Or are you more concerned with serving yourself and making life easy and comfortable?

Do you serve pleasure – whether raw or refined? All out hedonism or well dressed Epicureanism.

What is your master passion?

A slave has only one true master – he may serve the whole house, but he only has one true master. Who is yours?

Don't tell me Jesus just because that's the easy answer. What's the real answer?

You see, everyone in this room in some way, is, or is tempted to be, a run-away slave if we're not serving Jesus. We are not our own, we were bought with a very precious price. And we are not owned on the basis of our skin color. We are not owned for the sake of economic profit. We are not owned to be mistreated. We are possessed by one who gave His own life to provide us with a better future than we could have ever earned.

Yes, the concept of slavery has many negative connotations to it, yes, it conjures up many horrible images in our minds, but that doesn't change the fact that Paul used this term. And so did Peter, and James, and John, and nearly every other New Testament author. They saw themselves, and they saw every Christian, as the rightful property of a generous, merciful God.

We are called to be slaves of the most worthy Master in the universe. This morning we celebrate all that He did by receiving communion. You are His servants, but He offers you this meal.

As you prepare to receive it this morning, I encourage you to consider the fact that you can only receive this memorial meal while you're sitting at the Master's table.

If you have run away, if you've been serving someone or something else, take this time to return. And if you have never surrendered, do so now. Tell God you have been serving the wrong masters, trying to please the wrong people, and you want to receive the forgiveness He offers starting right here, right now, by receiving communion today. "What must you do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved...and maybe beginning with you it will also spread out to your whole family."