

XLVIII. Traveling Route 66: The Bible in Biblical Perspective
The Journey with Christ, the Promised One
“Philippians—A Missionary Prayer Letter”
Book of Philippians
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We are in the book of Philippians in this Route 66 study series. Let’s start by looking at Philippians 2:14-18 says [14] *Do all things without grumbling or disputing, [15] that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, [16] holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. [17] Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. [18] Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.*

The book of Philippians is unbelievably rich, very practical, highly theological yet the handling of making sure we don’t fall into the heresy of dismissing the deity of Christ in His humanity nor missing the humanity of Christ and His deity for which is takes on that subject. It takes on the subject of what it means to live for Christ, what the Gospel blessing is, what the Gospel imperatives, calls and commands are and this four chapter book is unbelievably rich. When people like to put a verse of Scripture under their signature I’m sure the book of Philippians has more quotes that people use at the end of notations and letters than any other book of the Bible. Here are some...I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, be anxious for nothing, rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice. There is verse after verse after verse that is drawn from this unbelievably rich book.

We are in the 48th study of 67 studies, travelling Route 66 through the Bible. We had an introduction and then in each study thereafter we have taken one book of the Bible to try and grasp from a 30,000 foot level things from each book. We have looked at how the first 39 books of the Bible point to Christ and we are now in the 27 books of the New Testament to see how these books are the journey with Christ. We are now at the book of Philippians and this particular book is extremely rich so let’s get started by looking at the introduction in Philippians 1:1-2. Then we’ll look at our normal overview of the book, its content and its themes. Philippians 1:1-2 says [1] *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers (or elders) and deacons: [2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

First of all, who writes the letter to the Philippians? The answer is clearly in the text and it’s Paul. In the early church there was uniform acceptance that this was a Pauline letter. From about the middle of the 19th century on some of the radical liberal scholars have questioned it but it has been accepted for ions and good scholarship that take the Scripture rightly there is little doubt that this is a Pauline letter. The grammar, the Pauline-isms in it, the way it’s constructed, giving first the Gospel blessings and then the Gospel commands runs throughout the letter just like all of Paul’s other letters, so very clearly it’s a Pauline letter.

To whom is this letter written to? Clearly it’s written to the church at Philippi, unlike the book of Ephesians that went to the Ephesus church but it was a general epistle

to be passed to all of the churches. This is very much a specific letter written to the church at Philippi. This is one of those letters that I like to advertise to missionaries. I tell missionaries to take note of this letter for this is the way you write a missionary prayer letter. Paul was the missionary that established the church at Philippi and he was also a missionary on the mission staff. In other words, Paul was getting some of their faith promise giving. This was the only church that we know he allowed to give to him. I believe that there were other churches that gave to him but this is the only one we know for sure. Most of the time he would not let others give for he would work with his own hands making tents or there were other ways he'd be supported, but he did allow this church to give to him on more than one occasion. So this was a church that was very dear to him at Philippi.

Let me tell you a little bit about Philippi. He is writing to a church that he planted on his second missionary journey, when he along with Silas and Timothy came across to Europe. The vast majority of those reading this are of European descent and the early churches on this continent were planted by European missionaries and preachers. The very first church in Europe where are all of those churches came from which the vast majority of the churches on this continent came from, was Philippi. This is the first church in Europe and Paul planted it. The historical narrative to the planting of this church is found in Acts 16. I don't have time to cover it in this study.

We know that one of the best ways to plant churches is to get a core group. Another way to do it is to send in an evangelist and he'll pull together a core group. Now a days we send a group of people out from an already existing church to plant another church either purposefully or non-purposefully, which is an unplanned church planting that means people get mad, leave and go start a church. Early on that wasn't the pattern of the Reformers or the Great Awakening or the 18th century. The pattern followed was in Ephesians 4:11 that says *[11] And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.* They would follow that pattern and they took God's Word given by the apostles and prophets and then they would send evangelists out. They would set up preaching points and they would lead people to Christ and get them started in their Christian life with evangelism and discipleship.

They followed the Pauline method. Paul would go to a city and do evangelism and discipleship. He would go to the synagogue to find the Jewish people and he'd go to the marketplace to find the Gentiles. Then he would evangelize. Then he'd plant the church. Then they would raise up a pastor/teacher to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. I actually think that is a much better approach than the ones we use today in terms of effective evangelism and the planting of churches.

One of my favorites was Samuel Davies. He only lived until he was 37 years old but you have no idea how many churches he planted throughout Virginia because he would just go in and preach and preach until he won people to Christ. That's the way Paul did. He went into Philippi, went into the synagogue and the marketplace and began to preach the Gospel. He through evangelism was able to get his first core group. At first there wasn't a synagogue in Philippi so he went down to a river. When there is no synagogue because of the ritual cleansings and the baptisms in the Old Testament the Jews would go to a river to set a place of prayer and teaching. There he leads Lydia and her household to Christ and then he baptizes them.

Then he is followed around by a slave girl who is demon possessed. The Apostle Paul delivers her from her demons and she then joins the core group. So we have a Jewish business lady and her household and very likely a gentile demon possessed girl that has just been liberated. Now he and Silas get thrown into jail and the Lord delivers them. As the jailer is about to cut his throat for being responsible for all who have just escaped, he finds out no one has escaped. In other words, Paul and Silas who had been preaching, teaching and singing songs and hymns, had so impacted that jail that just in that brief night when the earthquake came and all the chains were loosed, no one escaped. That jail was just off a main road and there were two reasons why Philippi was a very important area. One, is that the main road (via Ignacio) went right through it and 30 yards from that road is where that jail was. Secondly, Philippi was a place where people mined for gold in Greece.

Actually there is a third reason. Philippi is named from Philip of Macedon and he is the father of Alexander the Great. Then when Rome conquered it Mark Anthony decided this was a famous place, this place has spring water and this would be a good place for Roman soldiers to retire. So it became a roman colony for the retirement of Roman soldiers and that charter was reestablished under a Caesar named Caesar Augustus around the time of Christ. There were retired Roman soldiers but mostly a Gentile area with a few Jewish people and so that's the place where Paul shows up.

Then out from the dark that jailer hears "don't harm yourself, we're all here." Let me ask you a question. If there was an earthquake out at Donaldson and all the walls fell down, the chains fell off, all the locks came unlocked and the all the doors flung open, how many of you would think that you would hear coming from the darkness "don't worry we're all still here"? That just tells you the powerful impact of two people that were arrested for the sake of the Gospel but they didn't go to jail to have a pity party. They went to praise the Lord. The jailer is so moved that he says "What must I do to be saved?" The Philippian jailer and his household are saved and baptized. He comes to Christ that very night. There is your core group. There is a demon possessed slave girl, a Jewish business woman and a converted Gentile jailer. Then this church grows into this glorious testimony for Christ and that's who gets this letter.

Where is this letter written? Paul is writing from prison. This is Paul's first imprisonment. Paul has finished his third missionary journey. Paul would visit Philippi, we know, three times. First he would plant it and then he'd come back again in relation to his third missionary journey. Then it is stated in Acts 20 and II Corinthians that he had made two other visits to Philippi, brief, but other visits as well. Now he is in prison in Rome and from Rome he writes four epistles during his imprisonment. We have already covered two of them – Galatians and Ephesians. Philippians is the third one and the fourth one is Colossians. In our next study on Route 66 Colossians will be the next one we get to.

When was this letter written? Paul wrote this sometime between 61 and 62 A.D.

Now why did he write this letter? He is responding to a gift. This church had sent him another gift. Philippians 1:12 says *[12] I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.* What has happened to him? He has been put into prison. We would probably be asking the Lord why He let us go to prison. Here Paul gets put into prison, doesn't have to raise funds and starts a prison ministry, fully paid for by the Roman government. It goes on to say in Philippians 1:13,

[13] so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard (those who work for Caesar) and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

In other words, when this letter showed up at Philippi and it says that even though he was thrown into prison, it's done nothing but advance the Gospel for I have a prison ministry going. By the way, some of my jailers, the imperial guard, have been brought to Christ. I can just hear when the congregation is reading Paul's letter, the Philippian jailer understanding what Paul is writing here. The Lord used that for his conversion when Paul was in prison with the Philippian jailer. So Paul hadn't changed anything at all. He loved to not only lead prisoners to Christ, but he loves to lead the jailers and the prison keepers to Christ as well.

Let's look at Philippians 4. Philippians 4:21-22 says *[21] Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. [22] All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.* He has already worked his way through Caesar's household. That will teach you to put Paul in prison, Mr. Caesar. So here Paul has this effective prison ministry going on from prison and the Lord is using him wonderfully and gloriously. What was the occasion?

Philippians 4:10-13 says *[10] I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. [11] Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. [12] I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. [13] I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* In other words, my dependency is on the Lord, not you or the gifts, but I'm glad you have revived your concerns for me. Why?

Philippians 4:14-18 says *[14] Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. [15] And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. [16] Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. [17] Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. [18] I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.*

Here is a word for missionaries. Missionaries rightly and with integrity will say, "Here is my ministry. I ask that you pray for it and if you're led support me financially, but the most important thing to me is your prayers." I know they mean it and it's true but here's what I tell missionaries. I love our mission system here at Briarwood where we don't just take money and divide it up to missionaries but you go around and itinerate. You go around and share your vision and every time you do that you awaken missions in a congregation. With all due respect, continue to highlight the primacy of prayer over finances but don't back off asking for people or a church to give. Why? You're not seeking it for your dependence is on the Lord but you're seeking it for what it accrues to their account.

Paul says "I've learned to be content. I loved what you did because of what it means for you that you have now made visible not only by your prayers but your giving, your concern not only to me but to the mission for what God has called me to do and that is that the Gospel would go to all the nations." So Paul is responding to the gift but he's also throughout the book exhorting them to an intimate and intentional relationship with

Christ. He will tell them that they must know the Hope of the resurrection and they must press on toward the calling. Notice is this isn't a let go and let God. It is utter dependence upon God and then utter dependence to follow the Lord. Take hold. Hold fast. Be anxious for nothing. He is constantly giving commands in light of the sufficiency of Christ in our life as to how we are to live our life.

Here is a brief outline of the book. There is the introduction in Philippians 1:1-2. Then there is the prayer of thanksgiving in Philippians 1:3-11. Then he tells how to advance the Gospel in Philippians 1:12-30. Then he tells of the living of the Gospel in Philippians 2:1-21. Then he tells about how to defend the Gospel in Philippians 3:1-21. Then he gives basic, general, Gospel exhortations with a positive and a negative that stand forth in these exhortations and those are in Philippians 4. So that is the basic outline.

So what is it that the content of this entire book is holding? He is calling us to proclaim, hold fast, hold forth, and living the Gospel with conviction and clarity, personally and corporately as a body of believers. I want to conclude by showing you some highlights from the book of Philippians. Let's look at Philippians 1:3-11. I commend this to your personal study for it's a prayer of thanksgiving. There are 17 prayers of the Apostle Paul recorded in his 13 epistles. Here is one sentence part of this one. Philippians 1:7-11 says [7] *It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. [8] For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. [9] And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge (the love of a Christian is not sentimentality clichés, it is Biblically informed deeds of affection) and all discernment, [10] so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, [11] filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

He calls us to not only a knowledgeable holding to the Gospel, defending it and proclaiming it in this prayer but he also prays that this Gospel will be seen as we seek to be pure and blameless that we intentionally and with integrity attempt to live out what we believe. None of us in our Christian life will ever experientially be pure, holy and blameless. We all have indwelling sin. Our best moments are polluted with indwelling sin. Yet the call articulated by Peter where he says "Be ye holy even as your heavenly Father is holy" (I Peter 1:15-16) and Paul calls us to be pure, holy and blameless (Philippians 2:15), this call is not to be saved. The only pure, holy and blamelessness that will save you is found in Jesus Christ and when you come to Him it is credited to your account and you are clothed with a perfect righteousness. It is the garment of Christ's perfect righteousness.

You have clothing you the garments of Christ's perfect righteousness but no unbeliever can see that. What we are called to do is to let them see our journey of grace where every day we are putting off the old man and putting on Christ so that they might be drawn to ask us why. Then we can point them to the pure garment of Christ that is theirs when they come to Him. Here is this call to intentional, integrity of the Christian life, not to be saved but out of love to a Savior, to present a witness to the world of humility, courage, compassion, passion, one that is set to live Christ, knowing that with

every fault and failure we have a Savior ready to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

After this section of that prayer Paul goes to the section on advancing the Gospel. Basically Paul is saying in this section, "There are some out there preaching and they think the more they preach about Jesus the longer I'll be in jail and I say praise the Lord, keep on teaching. They are not converted and they don't have to be converted for the Lord to use the Gospel." When I was 16 years old my dad told me I was going on the youth retreat from church. I didn't want to go. I had other things I wanted to do. I wasn't a Christian and wasn't close to being one but when my dad said 'go' I'd go because the alternative wouldn't be enjoyable. So I went. My dad didn't send us to church he took us to church and wasn't a church of our choice. As long as they preached the Gospel my dad would go to that church. This retreat was not going to be pizza, fun, games and playing sports. Some came from a Bible college and taught us how to share the Gospel in the morning and then took two of us out that afternoon to share the Gospel. This was not my idea of a youth retreat but it was theirs.

People ask me "Does God answer the prayers of unbelievers?" I will give you a firm "yes." He answered my prayers that day because I remember the first house we went to that afternoon. All the way up the sidewalk I was praying as an unbeliever "Oh Lord, please don't let anyone be at home" and the Lord answered "yes" because nobody answered the door. On the next house I prayed "Oh Lord, please don't let anyone be at home" and the Lord answered this time "no." The leader of our group began to share the Gospel and then turned to me and said "Now Ike (my nickname), has something else to share with you." I had memorized what they taught us that morning so I rolled it right out and ended with "You wouldn't want to be a Christian would you?" The man said "Yes I would" and I looked at our leader and he realized he better step in and do the prayer part right there. So during this time I'm not saved and these people come to Christ because the power wasn't in me, it was in the Gospel.

So Paul says "I would rather them know the Lord and preach it from a sincere heart but if they want to preach just to keep me in jail, as long as the Gospel is out there that's all I care about." Paul wanted the Gospel to advance. Do you want the Gospel to advance? If we did we would quit luxury living and we'd go to wartime living. I'm about to say something some won't like but I'm not commenting on foreign policy or whether there is a just war or not. With all due respect to President Bush, and I try to respect my presidents, when we went to war with Iraq I think he was dead wrong when he was asked "What does this mean for the citizens of the United States?" and he replied "Nothing, keep going to your stores and keep your lifestyles the way they are." Can you imagine that happening in WWII? If you go into war everybody antes up. Some people go to the front lines, some stay in the back lines, but everybody antes up.

One of the reasons we're not winning the world to Christ, not even our own nation because we haven't anteed up, our lifestyle is being directed by the comforts of this world and not the war for the souls of men, women and to advance the Gospel. Paul is thinking "From prison? Is that the best way for me to do this?" One of my favorite preachers was a French Reformer who got a heart for slaves that were in the servitude of slavery. It was Lafontaine. Do you know how he evangelized them? He put himself on the block and was sold into slavery, because where he was previously they would not let

them talk to the slaves. He could talk with slaves if he was a slave. So he sold himself into slavery.

It is that kind of a heart in the lives of men and women that the Apostle Paul is calling for at the church at Philippi. It is for us to advance the Gospel and what are we to do when we advance the Gospel? Philippians 1:18b-21 says *[18] Yes, and I will rejoice, [19] for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, [20] as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. [21] For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*

Paul, how come you can be content in every circumstance? Why is it that your smile doesn't go up when things are going good but it remains the same even when things are going bad? It is because my life is not defined by the happiness of happenstance, my life is defined by rejoicing. It is the joy of the Lord in every circumstance, because my life is Christ's and that's why death is gain.

I'd like to now look at Philippians 2 which probably became an early confession of the church. Philippians 2:1-11 says *[1] So if (if could be translated 'since' in the Greek) there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy (this is what he wants to see among God's people – personal integrity and corporate integrity and intimacy) by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. [3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Four times he says the key to the Christian life begins, doesn't end, but begins with the mind. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2). The Christian life is not lived reflexively or intuitively or by imagination. It is lived out of Divine revelation. The mind of Christ is revealed to you in the Word of God. It doesn't get from those pages into our lives until it gets to our mind and it doesn't get to our mind until we bend the knee in prayer of humility and say "Lord, teach me" and then dig in. Preacher, get me into the Word. Discipler, mentor, get me into the Word. I want into the Word so that the Word will get into me so that Christ will come out of me. Paul says that one of the first evidences of this is how we deal with one another. With humility the other person becomes more important than us.

Where do you learn humility? Because of the work of Christ you can have humility and in the work of Christ He set the pattern of humility, as He left the Father and humbled Himself to be found in appearance as a Man. He didn't give up His deity. He gave up the privileges of His deity. He is still the Son of God. We didn't have 33 years without a Trinity. He is still the Son of God but takes upon Himself humanity. He humbles Himself and that humility went all the way to death on a cross between two

criminals and to a borrowed tomb. Then God exalted Him through the resurrection, the forty days, the ascension and the second coming. Why? It is so that every knee will bow to Christ to the glory of the Father who sent Him. That same humility that you see in Christ, to the glory of the Father to the salvation of sinners ought to be in us, but it won't get to your life until it gets to your mind. However it doesn't stay in your mind for it goes from your mind to the heart and then to the will as we live it out in the power of the Holy Spirit. Without Him it is impossible. So that is that glorious advancing of the Gospel that takes place.

I'd like to leave you with two final exhortations. Let's look at Philippians 4. Here Paul gives you a positive and a negative. Rejoice in the Lord when things are going well...it doesn't say that. Let's look at it closer. Philippians 4:4-7 says *[4] Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. [5] Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; [6] do not be anxious about anything, 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* (literal translation, will stand century) *your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*. The peace of the believer is inexplicable in the adversity and brokenness of this world.

Paul says "I want you to rejoice" and the enemy of your rejoicing is your anxieties. What's the problem with your anxieties? Your fears are the revelation of the smallness of your view of Christ. The answer to fears is a full, robust understanding of the God of glory revealed in Christ. If you have a big God, there are no fears. A Biblical view of God, beginning with our mind, embraced with our heart begins to banish all fears. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything and here is the means – get into the Word to see the Lord who is at hand, near you, with you all the days to the end, go to your knees in prayer – so that by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your requests known to God. Now what's the result? It is not anxiety but it's a peace that's inexplicable beyond all understanding and will stand guard over your heart and mind, in Christ Jesus. Your anxieties have been banished as you sit in the schoolroom of God's Word, kneeling at the bench of prayer.

By the way, that's almost where everybody quits. Don't quit there. Let's look at the next part. Philippians 4:8-9 says *[8] Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. [9] What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me— practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you*. This is so rich! I'm sorry we can't look further into this letter but here is what he's saying. You not only need prayer but get into the Word. Make sure your mind is receiving that which is pure and excellent.

I'm not a fuddy-duddy or an un-reclaimed fundamentalist who thinks that movies are evil. I know celluloid is not evil. I know that movies aren't evil and I know I have Christian liberty in my life but I want to tell you what my liberty is there for. My liberty is not to walk on the edge of sin with things that pollute my mind and my heart for I've now been set free and now want to go to that which will fill my mind and heart with what is excellent, of good reputation, and pure. So I want to move not just over here to see how much I can get away with and still walk with Jesus but I want to get into what will fill my heart and mind. Computers aren't evil and I understand that.

I do know this. What goes into the mind goes out of the heart. GIGO – Garbage in, garbage out. What you are letting teach you is what you will learn and that's what will get your heart. That stuff that's evil already has within you an ally called the old man. So what you want to do is kill the old man and then go feast on what is good and pure, not to be saved, but because you love Christ and you want to know Him intimately, intentionally and accurately that people will see Him in you and His peace will reign in your life. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for this wonderfully rich book and thank You for allowing us to spend these moments in it. We are grateful to You that you have left us, not without the witness of truth and while not all truth is in the Bible, all that is in the Bible is true and has all the truth we need to know, love and follow Jesus. Thank You that Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for doctrine, reproof and correction in training and righteousness that the man of God may be adequate and equipped for every good work. So God with Your Word drive out the thoughts of sexual immorality, greed, self-centeredness and self-absorption so that I might think and speak rightly so that I might do what will draw people to Christ. Father, please let me not make myself vulnerable to the charge of hypocrisy. I know I'll never be perfect but we want to live in a way that unmistakably people can see the transforming metamorphosis of our mind infecting our hearts and seen in our lives where all anxieties of this world are banished and the joy of the Lord fills and overflows. In Jesus' Name, Amen.