

Fellowship of Joy: A Study in Philippians, 1:1-2, Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on July 6th, 2008

"We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints, and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us"

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

Intro:

I am excited to begin this short letter of Paul to the Philippian (Macedonian) church. This church is exemplary of the reality of the church of Jesus Christ. It is a "*Beautiful Mess!*"¹ This is a church that Paul describes in **2 Corinthians 8:1-5** as an incredibly giving church, who desired to always "*Participate in the gospel*" (**Philippians 1:5**), yet they struggled with unity and humility (see **Philippians 2:1-4; 4:1-3**). There is no "Perfect" church. We are all sinners saved by the incredible grace and mercy of our Lord and Savior, and yet we are called to be on mission with Him, in spite of our warts. In this sense we are like a family, who stays together and loves one another in spite of our faults, as we learn to love one another and the calling by which we are all called! Please join me in this 13 week adventure in the book of Philippians.

In spite of its many themes, I believe that this book's main theme is a theme of Joy that comes from participation (Fellowship) reflecting the true biblical idea of community. I almost named this study the "Joy of Selflessness," since this theme is apparent in every page of this text, but I came to believe that the main theme is not about the joy of selflessness (Which places the joy in us and our work), but it is about the selflessness that comes from our joy in Christ!! That's our theme, and I pray it unfolds into our hearts as we unfold the words of this letter!

From the Head...

Who?

As we see in verses 1-2 Paul and Timothy are the senders of this letter, and "Saints" in Philippi are the recipients of the letter (See booklet). A couple of interesting points need to be stated. **First**, Paul and Timothy refer to themselves as "*Bondservants*" (*Doulos*), which means that they have connected themselves to Christ as their master. This type of servant is one whose debt had been paid, but they decided to stay and serve their master because of his benevolence toward them. They are volunteer servants. They are "Set Free," but decide to stay and serve him. What a picture of our lives in Christ. A **second** point is that this is written to the "*Saints in Christ Jesus*." Nothing is possible outside of Jesus Christ! We are forgiven because of Christ. Salvation has nothing to do with us, but totally dependent on the work of Christ on the cross, and His subsequent resurrection. You are IN Christ, or not. We are called "Saints" because we are "*In Christ*." Saints are made "Holy" (Set Apart) for God's purposes. **Thirdly**, Paul includes the "Overseers" (Elders) and "Deacons" which made up the leadership structure of the early church, and has been adopted by the leadership of Harambee Church. We believe that the bible teaches that the pastors are responsible for the teaching and spiritual direction of the church (Primarily prayer, bible study, teaching/preaching and guarding against false teaching), and that the deacons (Literally servants) are those that minister in their respective areas (See **Acts 6:1-4**). There are those that want to denigrate leadership in a culture that hates any authority in their lives. While we are all ministers, God calls and gifts certain men and women to take responsibility for the body of Christ, and we, as leaders are called to lead in humility, not "*Lording it over*" those we are asked to lead. As leaders we are called to be "Humble Servants," yet we are called to lead sacrificially.

So who are these Philippians? In Acts 16 we see Paul and Barnabus leaving the Jerusalem Council, where they are commissioned to go and preach the gospel to the gentiles (**Acts 15:7ff**). In **Acts 15:36-41**, we see Paul and Barnabus have an argument over the usefulness of John Mark, and they separated their ways for a time while Paul planned to retrace their first missionary journey (**Acts 15:36**) with Silas. However God had a different plan for Paul and his new comrades, Silas and Timothy who met them in Lystra (**Acts 16:1-5**). In **Acts 15:9** we see that Paul had a dream about a man asking Paul to "*Come over to Macedonia and help us*." Paul immediately went to Macedonia and landed in Philippi (Which was originally named by Alexander the Great's father, Phillip of Macedonia), "*Which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia*" (**Acts 16:12**). This city was a key bridge for the Roman Empire in the area that is now southern Greece. Although the city was fairly small (Aprox. 10,000) it was situated strategically on a citadel that helped guard the "Via Egnatia" a famous highway that connected Rome to its eastern empire. It was strategic in that much business traveled to and from Rome, and it was a key area for the early spread of the gospel. When Paul and his guys entered into Philippi on the Sabbath, they most likely found the place without enough Jewish men to form a Quorum (A quorum was the necessary 10 Jewish men needed to form a Synagogue, which was where Paul normally went **Acts 17:1-2**), so they took

¹ A term coined by friend and Pastor of Imago Dei Church in Portland, Rick McKinley

their mission to the streets, and found some praying women down by the river. It is there that they met Lydia (“A seller of purple”) who the *“Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul”* (**Acts 16:14**). Once again God begins a movement with a woman, who would have been looked down upon in that culture. Even so, the church began in Lydia’s home (**Acts 16:15**), and soon the Philippian jailer was added due to Paul and Silas’ imprisonment (**Acts 16:22-34**). It’s amazing to see what God can do when we faithfully are open to His will, and preach the gospel to those that God puts around us.

What?

In verse two we see Paul extending both “Grace” and “Peace” from God. This is the heart of the gospel. The question of any book should be *“Why is this letter/book being written?”* What was the occasion for Paul to write such a letter?

It is clear that Paul loves this church and the people in it (see **Philippians 1:4-11**). There is no doubt that part of Paul’s occasion for writing is his desire to commend the Philippian church for their graciousness and participation in the gospel (**Philippians 1:5**). However, in spite of Paul’s love for these people, there appears to be a few important concerns that Paul wanted to nip in the bud so they don’t fester and destroy the witness of the gospel apparent in this community of faith.

One concern seems to be that the church (as gospel oriented as it was) appeared to be getting weary of persecution, especially that which had fallen on Paul. The first chapter tackles this issue and attempts to encourage them that his imprisonment was for the betterment of the gospel; that even the persecution of death is a good thing and not a bad thing (**Philippians 1:21**). It is quite possible that they were missing the prize (Jesus Christ) in order to do the ministry (see **Philippians 1:21; 3:7-14**). This is common for many of us who are battling for the sake of the gospel. We get caught up in individual skirmishes, only to lose sight of the goal.

Another obvious concern was that some members were not living in harmony, and were exemplifying a potential gospel-less attitude toward one another. Paul calls out Euodia and Syntyche in chapter 4; and chapter 2 is one of the best chapters anywhere with regard to the gospel attitude of selflessness, with Christ being the prime example on the cross. These verses weren’t placed here in random fashion. There must have been some form of disharmony in order for Paul to write these words and include this charge to the Philippian people. The centerpiece of this letter is the gospel, and timidity and disharmony can and does destroy the truth and witness of the gospel.

Why?

Although the word “Joy” or any of its derivatives (Rejoice) are used some 16 times in this short 4 chapter book, and many see this book’s main theme as joy, I think its main theme is connected more to **Philippians 1:21**, and the joy that comes from “Knowing” Christ (**Philippians 3:8**) than it has to do with joy in of itself. Christ, like usual, is central to this book, and the motivation for Paul’s writing. Another theme that jumps out at you is the theme of unity, and “Selflessness,” but once again, that obvious theme comes as a result of knowing Christ, and the gospel work in our lives. A third reason for this writing is the joy that comes from *“Participation in the gospel”* (See **Philippians 1:5**). Our joy is enhanced as we join God in His purposes in this world. Another key aim for this letter is the theme of suffering. This church was a great church, but they were dismayed over the suffering of Paul and others, and Paul clearly addresses this issue, and reminds them that it is their privilege to suffer for the gospel, as it often helps the spread of the gospel (See **Philippians 1:12; 29**). Paul wants his people to live in harmony and contentment, and to look toward Christ for their source of joy!

...to the Heart

Philippians is a book about joy that comes from “Knowing” Christ, and being acquainted with His sufferings as we “Participate” in the gospel. I believe this is going to be a rich study, but one that is going to challenge our comfortable western mindset in regards to joy, and our role here on earth. I pray you come along with us on the journey, and drink in the riches of this great book!