

/// The Earthly Walk of a Heavenly People

Philippians 1:1

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~ Our Spiritual Safari left Paul alone in prison when we were last in the New Testament book of Ephesians. Philippians is the second of the four "*prison epistles*" chronologically in Scripture – but it was written at the same time as Colossians, Philemon and Ephesians. It is difficult to conceive of Paul writing these tremendous letters from such a dark, dank, damp, desperate and desolate condition as a Roman Mamertine prison cell. Even so, Philippians is, in my estimate, the loveliest epistle Paul wrote. It contains no harsh criticism of the church at Philippi; everything seems to have been just fine with them. It would seem that Paul was closer to this church than he was to any other church that he founded. In return, these people seem to have cared for and loved Paul more than anyone else did.

The church at Philippi was founded on Paul's second missionary journey. This is around the same time Paul and Barnabus had been divided by a difference of opinion concerning John Mark; who had abandoned them both and returned home. Now, let's not be too hard on John Mark; because when they faced the interior of Asia Minor, and Paul wasn't even sure which way he should go, I'm sure the situation was terrifying and seemed hopeless. I am also sure that almost all of us would have done the same thing under the circumstances. Well, Silas remained dedicated to the mission with Paul at that time; and Barnabus and John Mark went their own way.

This was when Paul entered the Galatian country and visited all of the churches that he had founded on his first missionary journey. According to the record in Acts chapter sixteen - written by Luke - this is when Paul attempted to go into Ephesus. We're told that "*they*" were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the Word of God in Asia at that time. Paul would later preach to that area but, at this time, the door was closed. Remember, when Paul could not go south or north, and having just come from the east, the only direction remaining for Paul was west! So, they traveled to Troas — known as Troy today — and waited there for their next set of orders.

Now, if you had been in Troy at that time, and if you had met Paul, you could have asked him what he was doing hanging around there. Paul would have told you that he was out on his second missionary journey. Then, if you had asked him where he was going from there, Paul would have told you, “.... *I don’t know.*” Naturally, you and I, being rock-ribbed conservatives, and fundamental Bible believers, with two thousand years or so removed, but still having all the data that followed, we would have chided Paul, “.... *you mean to tell me that the great apostle to the Gentiles doesn’t know where he is going?*” Well, Paul would have answered, “.... *that’s right – I have no earthly idea where I am going next.*”

People today talk incessantly about the leading of the Lord and, quite frankly, it makes me a little bit weary to even hear anyone make that statement. Most people act as if the Lord gives them specific instructions down to which restaurant to eat dinner at. I’ll be honest with you – because I always am honest with you dear readers – I don’t have leading from the Lord like that. People tell me things like, “.... *I prayed about it; and God told me exactly where to go and who to talk to.*” Well, alright – but – I don’t believe you; and neither does anyone else. See, when I read the Book of Ruth, I see her coming out of Bethlehem, and walking down the road past all of those fields, and I understand she didn’t know where she was going at the time; no, the only way she ended up in the right field of Boaz at the right time is because the Spirit of God Personally led her there. See, Paul didn’t know where to go at this time. I find myself in that position quite frequently; in fact, it just happens to be my predicament as I edit this report.

So, as Paul was waiting in Troas for his marching orders, he was given the vision of the man of Macedonia. It took the extremity of a direct appearance of the Lord to move Paul and call him out of Asia Minor; which was then the center of the Roman Empire. Asia Minor is what we know today as modern Turkey. As far as I can tell from reading the record, Paul had no inclination whatsoever to go into Europe at that time. However, that’s when Paul was led to go west; and the first place he arrived at was Philippi.

Philippi was a Roman colony that had a much higher cultural level than most of the other cities Paul visited. Those who have a European heritage can thank God it took place this way; because my ancestors were from Germany and England – and they were truly pagan savages at the time in which we are studying. If the Spirit of God had sent Paul into China, then who knows what would have happened regarding the Gospel and to the Word of God in Europe.

When Paul arrived in Macedonia I think he was a bit disappointed to find out that the “*man of Macedonia*” was actually a woman by the name of Lydia; who had come from Thyatira. As we know, Lydia was a seller of purple and, apparently, she was quite a businesswoman. The prayer meetings she was holding down at the river must have had something to do with the Holy Spirit leading Paul there. She was Paul’s first convert. We also know there was a jailer in Philippi; a brutal man who was also led to Christ with his entire family. Many others came to a saving knowledge of Jesus because Paul established a church there. The Philippian church followed him throughout his subsequent missionary journeys. They were interested in Paul, and they loved him very much — and he loved them, too.

It was to this church at Philippi that Paul said, “.... *I thank God upon every remembrance of you.*” Paul never said that to the Corinthians, nor to the church in Galatia. The church in Philippi was wonderful and supportive. They were much more Gentile than Jewish; and women occupied a prominent place. Unfortunately, they lost contact with Paul after his arrest in Jerusalem. For the next two years, they had no idea what had happened to him. When they received word that Paul was in prison in Rome their hearts went out to him. They took up an offering and sent it to him with their pastor Epaphroditus. So, this epistle is sort of a thank you note! There is no correction of doctrine as there was with the letter to the Galatians. There is no correction of conduct as there was with the letter to the Corinthians. This is simply a lovely letter regarding their shared Christian experience!

Of course, there were problems in the church at Philippi; just as there are problems in any modern church. Obviously, there were two women in the church, Euodias and Syntyche, who were not on speaking terms. Paul

pleads with them in chapter four to put their differences aside. When two Christians will not speak to each other then they cannot be of the same mind in the Lord. I wonder what their problem really was; I am sure it was some petty disagreement that was really insignificant overall. This type of thing happens in the church today when, for example, a church missionary and the choir leader double-book the church kitchen for a meeting they are holding and the schedule conflicts. They both get bent out of shape and divide. Well, it ought not to be that way – but, unfortunately, it does happen. There are always certain people who, when they rub up against other people, make sparks fly! Simple misunderstandings can lead to deep divisions – and the result is always tragic.

See, irrespective of our personal needs and hurts, we all need to remain of the same mind in the Lord. One of the phrases Paul used again and again is “*you all*,” speaking to and of all believers. This epistle is practical; its key thought is joy. It has been labeled “*The Secret of Joy*.” Some form of the word “joy” occurs nineteen times. This epistle answers the question, “*How can I have joy in my heart?*” The man who wrote, “*rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, rejoice,*” was in the Mamertine prison in Rome when he wrote it. That means joy simply does not depend upon our circumstances, friends....

1 Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

~ We’re not in the Heavenlies as we were in Ephesians. This epistle is going to bring us right back down to earth where we live today. We’re going to spend a relatively lengthy amount of time with this little book; so we can bask in its sweetness. In ascribing this epistle to himself, Paul links his name with that of Timothy. Since there is no doctrine to correct or conduct to condemn, Paul does not assert his apostleship; but, rather, identifies himself with Timothy as “*servants*” — which means bond slaves — of Jesus Christ.” “*All the saints*” are “*in*” Christ, but they are “*at*” Philippi.

Where are *YOU* “*at*” today, friends? We have talked about being “*in Christ*” many, many times; so, we aren’t going to dwell on that again here — other than to say that is what it means to be saved by faith; to be in the

body of Christ. Paul is careful not to address any of them as a “*leader*” of any group. Paul is speaking to a local church with officers. Bishops are shepherds — and that is an office. Elders are individuals who are mature in the Word of God. Those two are the same; and deacons are spiritual men who perform a secular service; according to Acts chapter six.

Paul isn’t defending himself in this letter; and he isn’t writing to a clique in the church, either. Paul wrote to every believer; and every believer is a saint of God. Every saint of God is separated for the use of the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s sanctification. So, if you are reading this report, I am writing to you — as was Paul. That preliminary background is as far as our Spiritual Safari can go in this leg of our expedition through the entire Word of God — and we didn’t get very far; but we’ll pick back up right here in our next report. If these reports are a blessing to your heart and life, then I feel like you are one of my children. That means I have a whole lot of children all over the world. I hope each of you can and will come along with us as we learn the entire Bible together — from the Holy Spirit — teaching us sound doctrine....

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