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Introduction to Philippians - Something About Joy
Philippians 1:1-2
September 11, 2016, Jeff Germo

Today is the first sermon in our new series on Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. The first sermon in a book study is always the hardest because it's important at the outset to get some background information on the book, and author etc, which means that there is a temptation of just doing an information dump and leaving it at that. What I'm going to try to do this morning is give you enough background and a basic overview of the book so you have some foundational material to start with.

Chris Coon has been memorizing Philippians and at the end of this series he is going to do a dramatic recitation of the whole book for us, so you can be looking forward to that.

This morning we are going to just start with the introductory verses, which is Paul's salutation.

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Philippians 1:1–2 (NLT)

¹ This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the elders and deacons. ² May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

Paul begins this letter in the typical format of his day. He begins by stating who the letter is from, and then who it is addressed to. He mentions Timothy as a co-writer of the letter. Timothy may have had some input into it, but more likely Paul was merely honouring his young apprentice by mentioning him because he happened to be with him at the time taking care of his needs.

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Paul was in prison, likely in Rome, when he wrote this letter. Philippians is one of what are called the *Prison Epistles*. The other letters he wrote from prison were Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon.

He wrote the letter about ten years after he had planted the church in Philippi, sometime between A.D. 61 and 63, after the beginning of his Roman imprisonment which is recorded Acts 28.

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Paul calls both himself and Timothy slaves of Christ Jesus. The Greek word he uses for slave is *doulos*. Paul realizes that his life is not his own. He realizes that *he* was made by God for God, and not the other way around. He did not make God in his image. God made Paul in his image. He is the *imago dei*, the image of God, like we are.

Many times as Christians we can tend to have the mindset that God is up there somewhere at our beck and call. When you have that mindset, you will tend to get upset when things don't go as you think they should. If God is here for us, and not the other way around we will treat him like the-great-wish-giver-in-the-sky. We tend to make up a god in our own image who is not worthy of worship. We will see that in Paul's response to his imprisonment when we later read from Acts 16.

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One of the main themes of Philippians is "joy" and "encouragement". When we were trying to decide on what we would call this sermon series, Callista asked me what the title was going to be so she could make the banners and do the website design etc. I hadn't quite nailed down the title yet but I knew it would be something about joy, so I told her that it would be something about joy. And she said, "Oh, I like that." I told her that wasn't the title, but that I hadn't quite landed on one

yet, but when I do, it would be something about joy. We talked it over as a staff for the next couple weeks and Callista won.

Throughout the letter, you can tell that Paul was bubbling over with joy. And yet, Philippians is not a how-to book on how to have joy. He doesn't give us three steps to finding or maintaining joy. However, Paul's joy and thankfulness bubble over as he writes to the Philippians about other things. He can't contain his joy. It comes up several times in every chapter.

The kicker is that Paul was in prison while writing the letter, not because he did anything wrong, but simply because he was preaching about Jesus. He had no earthly reason to be joyful.

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You get the idea from reading this that Paul didn't seek happiness. Happiness found him as he served Jesus in the church, the body of Christ.

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I think the central verses in **Philippians** have to be, **4:10-13**.

¹⁰ How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. ¹¹ Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. ¹³ For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

How many of us can say honestly that we have learned to be content in every circumstance? I'm working on it, but I'm not there yet. There are times when I think I am doing well at being content, such as when all the bills are paid and I have extra money in the bank, and all my relationships are doing well, and my work is all caught up, and nobody is mad at me. So, I guess it never happens.

It's pretty easy to be content when everything is going well for us. But, how much of the time is life like that in every part of my life? I actually can't remember a time, except for brief moments during a vacation that is actually a vacation. In real life, it's not like that. The struggle, the pain, the obstacles, the relationship problems, the financial difficulties, illness; these are all part of life that we cannot escape, and if we wait to be content until everything is going well for us, we will never be content. We will live a miserable existence if we think that nothing should ever go wrong.

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I think the reason Paul could live with this kind of contentment no matter what his circumstances was because he realized **he was made for God not the other way around**.

Just think about it for a minute. If we have that same attitude, if something tragic happens to us we won't go running angrily to God shaking our fists and telling him how he blew it. A few years ago a young couple in Richmond lost their little baby during the delivery. It was so tragic. Ruthie and I visited them in the hospital just a couple hours later. We asked them how they were doing and Toby said, "Chloe was God's child and he has every right to take her whenever he wants." Now, of course, they had a huge amount of grief to deal with over several years, but they didn't blame God. They recognized that their perfect, sovereign, loving heavenly Father is big enough to handle their grief and they invited him into it with them. That is the same kind of attitude Paul had here. And this attitude bubbles over all the way through the book.

The centre of his joy is obviously Christ. There are 104 verses in Philippians and Christ is mentioned sixty one times. Paul was serious when he said that he was a slave of Christ, and

because of that you never get the idea that he feels sorry for himself. It was actually a choice he made to follow Jesus no matter what.

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Now, there is actually more to this idea of bond-slave. In the Old Testament, every seventh year, by Jewish law, slaves were to be set free. This was to protect the slaves from abuse. But, when a slave, by his own free will, chose to continue serving his master because of his love for him, he would put his ear against the doorpost; the master would take a hammer and awl and pound the awl through the ear. That act signified that they were bonded for life and the slave would continue serving his master from a deep motive of love.

That is what Paul meant when he said he was a slave of Jesus. He didn't serve him begrudgingly. He didn't see it as a heartache or a heavy burden. It was a pleasure. He had the privilege of serving the Almighty God who created the heavens and the earth. He willingly served Jesus because of his love for him.

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¹ This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the elders and deacons.

Paul addresses the letter to ***“God's holy people.”*** Most translations use the word, ***“saints”***. “Saint” isn't a word that is really understood these days. We might use it to refer to someone who is really good. “She's a saint,” meaning, you never hear her talk about other people behind their backs. She is someone you can trust. She's a hard worker and doesn't get into your business when you don't want her to. “She's a saint.”

What does it really mean? Are these people who have reached a certain level of spiritual maturity? Are they people the church has decided to deem worthy enough for sainthood?

I googled the phrase, “How do you become a saint?” and before I even finished typing the sentence (I just typed, “How do you become...?”) one of the options Google had for me was “saint.” There must be millions of people asking the same question.

One site that came up began like this:

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“The process of saint making takes a very long time, sometimes it takes centuries. First of all, the person in question must have lived a life totally devoted to God and the Christian ways of life. In other words the person must be an honest and pure servant of God and they must also have set an example for others to follow in life.”

And then it went on to tell exactly how sainthood is attained. So, there is something different about what this says about sainthood and what Paul says. Paul was writing to the average person in the church at Philippi. They hadn't reached any sort of spiritual heights. They were just like you and me.

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The Greek word here is *hagios*, and it simply means, to be “set apart”, or “holy”. So, the NLT rightly translates it ***“holy people.”*** By the grace of God, the members of the church at Philippi trusted in the finished work of Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified to pay the penalty for their sins, and they were thereby justified before God, and set apart for him. **They were all saints, not because of anything they had done, but because of what Christ had done for them.**

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Did you know that if you have trusted Christ in the same way, you too are a saint? It's true. You are a saint.

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Next, Paul says that these saints are in Philippi, which is why we call the book, *Philippians*.

I'm not going to bore you with too much information on Philippi except to show you where it is on the map.

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It is in Europe across the Mediterranean Sea and the Aegean Sea from Israel. It was a very important city along the Egnatian Way, which was quite a sophisticated road system that allowed Rome to move its troops easily from city to city. You can see on the map that Paul went to Philippi on his second missionary journey. It is the first city in Europe in which Paul planted a church, so it's very special to him. You can tell as you read *Philippians* that he loved them dearly.

Of all Paul's letters, *Philippians* is the most pleasant. The format of the letter is very personal, conversational and affectionate. Paul loved the Philippian church very much.

Just so you have an idea of how the church in Philippi was started, let's go to Acts 16 and read the story. You will notice as we read it that the first members of the church there were quite a diverse group. There was Lydia, a business woman and leader he met by the riverbank. She was his first convert in Philippi. Second was a prison guard who was guarding Paul and Silas in prison, and thirdly maybe a demon possessed girl. That is quite the eclectic motley group of people.

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Acts 16:6–36 (NLT)

⁶ Next Paul and Silas traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had prevented them from preaching the word in the province of Asia at that time. ⁷ Then coming to the borders of Mysia, they headed north for the province of Bithynia, but again the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go there. ⁸ So instead, they went on through Mysia to the seaport of Troas.

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⁹ That night Paul had a vision: A man from Macedonia in northern Greece was standing there, pleading with him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" ¹⁰ So we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, having concluded that God was calling us to preach the Good News there. ¹¹ We boarded a boat at Troas and sailed straight across to the island of Samothrace, and the next day we landed at Neapolis.

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¹² From there we reached Philippi, a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And we stayed there several days. ¹³ On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there.

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¹⁴ One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. ¹⁵ She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. "If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my home." And she urged us until we agreed.

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¹⁶ One day as we were going down to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit that enabled her to tell the future. She earned a lot of money for her masters by telling

fortunes. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved.”

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¹⁸ This went on day after day until Paul got so exasperated that he turned and said to the demon within her, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And instantly it left her. ¹⁹ Her masters’ hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace.

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²⁰ “The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!” they shouted to the city officials.

²¹ “They are teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice.” ²² A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. ²³ They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn’t escape.

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²⁴ So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. ²⁶ Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off!

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²⁷ The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself. ²⁸ But Paul shouted to him, “Stop! Don’t kill yourself! We are all here!” ²⁹ The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

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³¹ They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household.” ³² And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. ³³ Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized.

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³⁴ He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God. ³⁵ The next morning the city officials sent the police to tell the jailer, “Let those men go!” ³⁶ So the jailer told Paul, “The city officials have said you and Silas are free to leave. Go in peace.”

So, that was the beginning of church in Philippi. That took place about ten years prior to Paul writing this letter. He’s in prison again, not for anything that he did wrong, but simply for preaching the gospel (good news) of Jesus.

You don’t see Paul whining or complaining about his situation or wringing his hands thinking God has forgotten him. As a matter of fact, what does he do? He sings songs, praising God, with his jail mate, Silas, in their cold dark damp cell with their feet in shackles. Because of that act of worship they get the opportunity to save the life of the jailer and introduce him to Jesus. That is pretty cool. This all happened while all the other prisoners were listening. And then the jailer and his family become some of the first members of that new church plant. What a great story!

That should give us great pause. How do we handle disappointment and bad news? Do we shake our fists at God and get angry, or do we, like Paul, recognize that God is both sovereign and good and can handle it?

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Most of the letters Paul wrote to churches or individuals were born out of crisis, with Paul writing to try to help the church fix a problem, or correct some theological error in their thinking or lifestyle. Philippians sort of breaks that pattern. There are no major problems, aside from some bickering between a couple of the ladies in the church, whom Paul encourages to settle their differences and love each other for the sake of the Gospel. Aside from that this letter is full of joy. As a matter of fact, in this very short book, joy, or rejoice, or other similar words is used at least 18 times.

So, why does Paul write this letter?

The Philippian church had sent Epaphroditus to Rome to visit Paul in prison with a gift. Paul was overwhelmed with thankfulness, and so he sends a letter back Epaphroditus, thanking them for their care. And then while writing takes the opportunity to report on how he is doing and to encourage them to continue growing in their faith and their love for Jesus and each other.

That was his main concern for them, that they would grow in love. And that is the main concern we as a church have as well.

One of the things that can help us grow in Christ and learn to be content is to practice having that same attitude Paul had in this letter, being grateful. We will not become content if we do not practice gratitude. This is key, and so unnatural. So, what I would like to do for the next few minutes is give you an opportunity to share with the rest of us what you are grateful for.



Something About Joy
Philippians 1:1-2
Week of September 11^h, 2016

Objective of this study: To get a big picture of the letter of Philippians and increase our joy and attitude of gratitude.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 100** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome

When you receive some bad news, or something disappointing happens, what is your typical first response?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word/Work (45-90 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. To set the context, read Acts 16:6-36 in a contemporary version such as the NLT.
 1. Who are the characters?
 2. Review each of the events. What are Paul's responses to each of them?
 3. How did his responses contribute to the spread of the good news of Jesus?
3. If you have time read through Philippians in one sitting.
 1. What are the main themes?
4. What are you taking home from this study? What is the Holy Spirit saying to you personally about how he wants to change you?
5. Spend the rest of the time in prayer asking God to use you and your group to introduce people to Jesus in Campbell River.