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PHILIPPIANS 1:1-18

Today we begin a new study...a study in the *Book of Philippians*. This is a great little book. It's a book that majors on joy and rejoicing in the midst of bad circumstances. Let's set a little background before we get into the Scripture today.

Back in *Acts 16*, we're told that Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke wanted to go to Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit wouldn't let them go there. So, they went to Troas and it was at Troas that a vision from God appeared to the Apostle Paul. In that vision, a man stood before Paul and said, "*Come over to Macedonia and help us.*"

And the Bible says that immediately Paul and Timothy and Luke and Silas left Troas and made their way to Macedonia...to a city called Philippi.

Philippi was a Roman colony, named for Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. It was inhabited mostly by Roman soldiers, both active and retired. Everywhere Paul and his friends looked they saw the influence of Rome: Roman houses, Roman officials, Roman soldiers, Roman togas, Roman speech, Roman merchants, and Roman gods.

There were very few Jews in Philippi...in fact so few that there wasn't even a synagogue. There had to be a minyon...ten men in a town to have a synagogue.

It was in Philippi that Paul met Lydia and after he and his friends had witnessed to Lydia, she and her household were baptized.

It was also in Philippi that they encountered a slave girl who was demon-possessed. This girl was owned by some men who made a substantial profit from her fortune-telling abilities.

Paul delivered her of her demon-possession and her masters stirred up the people of Philippi against Paul and Paul and Silas were thrown into prison.

Remember that's the story of the earthquake. About midnight, when Paul and Silas were singing hymns, and the prisoners were listening to them, there came a great earthquake and the prison shook and the doors were opened.

The Philippian jailer was about to kill himself because he thought all his prisoners had escaped and Paul told him to do himself no harm, that all the prisoners were still there...and as a result of all that, the jailer and his household came to the Lord Jesus Christ!

It was to the church at Philippi, the church made up of folks like Lydia and the Philippian jailer and others who, because of Paul's preaching, came to know the Lord Jesus as their Savior...it was to this church that this epistle was written.

Paul wrote this letter to thank these folks for their financial support. Paul also wrote this letter to ask two women to set aside their differences. Paul also wrote this letter to teach the Philippians (and us), by his example, how to have joy in the midst of difficult circumstances...

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Some ten years had passed since Paul established the church at Philippi. Paul had been many places; he had preached to many people. Paul had been arrested, beaten, stoned and left for dead. Paul had been hungry and thirsty, he had been subjected to cold and exposure...all for the sake of the Gospel!

And at the writing of this letter, Paul was imprisoned in Rome, under house arrest, chained to a Roman guard twenty-four hours a day...with martyrdom a real possibility...and yet he was able by the grace of God to speak of joy, rejoicing and gladness!

You see, Paul had learned the secret of living above his circumstances!

I believe God wants to show us, through our study of this letter, how to live above our circumstances! He wants us to know the secret that Paul knew!

So, let's covenant together to learn this secret! Let's allow the Holy Spirit of God to teach us how to live...not burdened or weighed down by the things going on around us!

We've seen **who** wrote this book...**to whom** it was written...**the purpose** of this book...**where** Paul was when it was written... **So, let's get into this great old book!**

Remember that when a letter...an epistle...was sent to the church in a particular place, that letter was read before the assembly for all the members of that church to hear...

Verses 1-2...

As Paul always did, he began his letter identifying himself.

And don't you know when this letter was read to the church in Philippi that Lydia thought back to the day when she met Paul and his friends and they led her and her family to faith in the Lord Jesus?

Don't you know when the little slave girl heard that this was a letter from Paul that she thought back to the day when she had been delivered from demon-possession and came to know Christ?

And don't you know when the Philippian jailer heard this letter, he thought back on the night when the earthquake came and he was about to commit suicide and instead of dying that night he was given a reason to really live?

Did you notice that Paul didn't state the fact that he was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ? He usually did that in his epistles.

But, Paul wasn't writing this letter to correct bad theology as he did in his letter to the **Galatians...and so had to assert his authority to correct that bad theology.**

And he wasn't writing this letter to rebuke immorality as he did in his letter to the **Corinthians...and so had to assert his right to rebuke immorality.**

And he wasn't writing to folks who didn't really know him as he did when he wrote to the **Romans...and so had to introduce himself to them and prove his authority to teach doctrine.**

No! Paul was writing to **supportive friends**. He loved these people and he knew they loved him. Paul didn't have to set forth proof of his authority in order to **encourage these folks** and **thank these folks** and even **to get two women to settle their differences.**

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So, Paul simply identified himself and Timothy as “**bond-servants**” of Christ Jesus! He addressed them as “saints in Christ Jesus” and he extended to them the grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

By the way, have you ever thought of yourself as a saint? **EX:** Saint Lila, Saint Linda, Saint Dianne, Saint Geri? Well, whether you believe it's true or not...if you are a child of God, then you are also a saint.

Positionally speaking, before God we are saints...and the reason we are saints is because we are “in Christ Jesus.” Positionally speaking, we are saints! I read this week, “You cannot be half a saint. You must be a whole saint or no saint at all.”

And that's true of our position before God, but **practically** speaking, our “sainthood” is a work in progress. The Holy Spirit is working in us day by day so that our “sainthood”, our sanctification, our holiness, will be worked out in our lives in a practical way!

Verses 3-5...

Paul loved these folks and thanked God for them every time he remembered them.

Are there folks like that in your life? Folks who have made a great impact on your life spiritually? Folks who have shared with you when you were needy? Or folks who have opened their home to you when you needed a place to stay?

If there are folks like that in your life, I hope you thank God for them whenever God brings them to your remembrance.

Not only did Paul thank God for them, but Paul also prayed for them. Paul might have been prevented from doing many things he would liked to have been busy doing. Paul may not have been able to be out planting churches and preaching from city to city and visiting new believers and encouraging them...**but Paul could still pray!**

Paul was so grateful for the fact that these folks participated with him in the Gospel. These folks were in partnership with Paul! We do grow so close to those with whom we have a common goal...a common purpose, don't we?

The Greek word for this participation and partnership is the word “koinonia.” And this word has the idea of a kind of fellowship among believers made possible only by the Holy Spirit.

Not only had they participated in the Gospel on the day of their salvation, but they had continued to participate in the Gospel!

Verse 6...

Doesn't this verse give us hope?

God doesn't save us and leave us...God saves us and perfects us! He completes us! The good work here is salvation.

Our salvation is like the “I am” in this same verse. The Greek tense here indicates “I was,” “I am,” “I will be.”

I have been saved! I am being saved! I will be saved!

What does God's salvation do **for** us? It redeems us. It buys us back from the world of sin!

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What does God's salvation do *in* us? It sanctifies us. It sets us apart!

What does God's salvation do *through* us? It enables us to serve Him!

Verses 7-11...

What a word of commendation! Can't you just feel the deep longing in the heart of Paul for these folks?

The Philippian believers had stood by Paul, not only when he came and established their church, but also when he was imprisoned.

In fact, later in this letter, we're going to see that early in Paul's European ministry, no else **but** the Philippians stood by Paul.

In **verse 3**, Paul told these Philippians that he had them **on his mind**...he remembered them.

In **verse 7**, Paul told these Philippians that he had them **in his heart**...

In **verses 9-11**, Paul told these Philippians that he had them **in his prayers**.

And Paul tells them of his **three-fold prayer** for them.

- 1) **He prayed that their love might grow more and more...in real knowledge and discernment.**

The world tells us that love is blind. But, the Bible doesn't say that! Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." We have to know them to keep them! God gives us a spirit of discernment so that we can tell the difference between truth and error.

- 2) **He prayed for them to approve the things that are excellent.**

Most of us know the difference between good and bad...but Paul wanted them to know the difference between good and best and to choose the best!

Paul told them to be sincere and blameless. The word "sincere" means "**without wax.**"

In those days, when the potter fired a pot sometimes fine cracks would develop. The unscrupulous potter would fill these fine cracks with wax so that the pot looked fine to the person buying it.

But, if the buyer held the pot up to the sunlight, the wax would show...or if the buyer put hot liquid into the pot, the wax would melt...and the pot would be useless.

So, reputable dealers would stamp their pots with the Greek words **sine cera**, "**without wax**", from which we get our word "**sincere.**"

And Paul is warning these believers and you and me today that our lives should be "**without wax.**" Our lives should be sincere and blameless. When folks hold our lives up to the light of the Word of God, are they going to see any part of our life that we're trying to hide?

None of us are perfect. But, we shouldn't be trying to present ourselves to be something totally different than we are. Sooner or later the flaw in our character will be revealed!

- 3) **Paul also prayed that they be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through the Lord Jesus...and to the praise and glory of God!**

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We said last week that we are righteous...just as we are saints...**positionally** this is a fact right now today! But, we also said that we are to live in the light of that fact. And our **positional** righteousness should bear **practical** fruit!

We aren't saved by good works, folks...but Paul tells us we are saved unto them. In fact, God has already foreordained the works we should walk in, hasn't He?

Verses 12-14...

The problem of human suffering is one of the most difficult questions to confront, isn't it?

I mean, think about it...

Why does God, the God of love, permit those who trust Him to suffer?

How is human suffering explained as it relates to a child of God?

Why should one like Paul, who had been saved by grace, and whose sins are forgiven, and who served God so effectively be placed in a situation of imprisonment as Paul is experiencing?

Why does God allow suffering in the life of a Christian?

Well, I believe we could discuss this for weeks, but let me just give you **four reasons** I believe Scripture teaches...

- 1) Suffering may come into the life of a believer because the believer has failed to judge sin in his own life.**

Paul addressed this in **1 Corinthians 11**. He said if we judge ourselves rightly, then we should not be judged, but if we don't then we will be disciplined by the Lord.

- 2) Suffering may come into the life of a believer as a means of gaining spiritual experience.**

The life of Job is a good example of this. Job was an upright man who was allowed to suffer that he might learn more of God.

- 3) Suffering may come into the life of a believer as a device used by God to prevent sin in the believer's life.**

Do you remember why Paul received the thorn in the flesh? Paul had been allowed to go to the third heaven...and there he had heard "inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak." And God gave Paul that thorn in the flesh in order to keep him from exalting himself because of that wonderful experience.

God brought suffering to Paul's life to prevent sin in Paul's life!!

- 4) Suffering may come into the life of a believer to increase the effectiveness of his testimony.**

And this seems to be the reason Paul was allowed to be where he was.

Paul was chained to a Roman guard twenty-four hours a day.

The guards worked six-hour shifts...so Paul had the opportunity to witness to at least four guards a day! Not only that, but Paul was allowed visitors. And Paul could teach these visitors from the depths of his godly knowledge, and guess who was forced to listen? The guards!!!

Paul had no privacy when he ate, when he slept, when he wrote, when he prayed, when he preached, taught or visited with friends.

And for a period of two years, this very lack of privacy made it impossible for the Roman soldiers guarding him

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to avoid hearing the Gospel and witnessing the Christ-like way that Paul conducted himself!

Paul had always desired to preach in Rome...sometimes we get what we desire, just not the way we would have planned it!

Paul was in chains. Anyone else would have thought God had made a big mistake. Anyone else would have thought God had forgotten him.

Even John the Baptist questioned if he had missed something when he was imprisoned...remember he sent his disciples to Jesus to ask if He was indeed the One, or should they look for another! **But, Paul knew God hadn't lost control. Paul saw his chains as a challenge.**

He couldn't go and preach in the streets of Rome or even in the synagogues...**but he could write. And he could pray.**

And he could **witness personally to members of the Praetorian guard.** He could tell the precious Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to men who would never have stopped on the street corner or would never have attended a synagogue to hear Paul. And he could teach them.

And don't miss the fact that we never see Paul asking the Philippians or anyone else to pray for his release.

Through the prison ministry of Paul, many folks were won to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! We're going to see in **chapter 4** of this book that members of Caesar's own household were won to the Lord!

So, many times suffering is allowed in the life of a believer so that their ministry for the Lord Jesus Christ can be more effective! We don't see or hear Paul whining or complaining, do we? Paul accepted the will of God and made the most of his circumstances!

Paul knew this was God's will. When Paul was first converted God sent a man named Ananias to Paul to tell him that he would bear God's name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel and also to tell Paul that God had called him to suffer much for the sake of God's name.

Acts 23 tells that Paul had been told by the Lord that he would be His witness in Rome. Paul no doubt saw his imprisonment in Rome a natural course of events for his life. He had been told he would suffer. He had been told he would bear God's name before the Gentiles and specifically in Rome!

But, not only had Paul been faithful to preach the Gospel, but **verse 14** tells us that because of his imprisonment, the folks he had won to the Lord trusted the Lord and had the courage to speak the word of God without fear!

People follow examples...and because they do, we must be careful to set **good** examples...**especially** before new Christians! People may **observe** our behavior during the good and easy times, but people **study** our behavior when they know we're going through hard times!

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Don't you know that young Timothy learned much from the imprisonment of Paul? Don't you know that this young "preacher boy" didn't passively observe Paul...but really studied Paul's behavior?

This is what **we** need to learn from this little book:

We need to learn from Paul's example!

We're all going to go through hard times. I don't know if any of us will ever be called upon to be imprisoned for the sake of the Gospel, **but we can rest assured that we will suffer one way or another. And we need to be prepared ahead of time!**

Paul didn't have to **get** prepared when he was imprisoned...Paul was **already** prepared! Paul had determined sometime in the past that he would take whatever the Lord brought into his life and he would make the best of it, he would make the most of it! And in the midst of it all he would do all he could to further the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Do think it's possible for you and me to learn this? If the Lord could prepare Paul for all his difficult circumstances beforehand...don't you think He can do the same for you and me?

What I'm saying is this. I don't believe this is a lesson reserved for the Apostle Paul. I believe this is something the Lord longs for each of His children to know and to put into practice!

By the way, do you know how **The Pilgrim's Progress** came to be written?

John Bunyan was a very popular and powerful preacher of the Gospel in England in the 17th century and he greatly upset the leaders of the Church of England. These men put John Bunyan in jail to try to silence him.

Well, while he was in jail, he began to preach in the jail courtyard. There, not only did the prisoners hear the Gospel, but many, many folks from the nearby town of Bedford came to hear him preach.

Well, this just wouldn't do, so John Bunyan was thrown into the deepest part of the jail and forbidden to preach at all. And it was during that time that he wrote **The Pilgrim's Progress**. This great Christian classic has ministered the Gospel to **tens of millions** throughout the world for generations.

For centuries, next to the Bible, this book was the most widely read and translated book in the world. John Bunyan's opponents were able to shut up his preaching, but they couldn't shut down his ministry...and you and I can still be ministered to by John Bunyan, here in the 21st century!

Sometimes God allows suffering in a believer's life to make his ministry more effective! In both Paul's life and in John Bunyan's life...what man meant for evil, God meant for good!

Well, in the time we have left, let's look at the last four verses of our lesson today...

Verses 15-18...

Having said that there were folks who had the courage to share the Gospel because of Paul's imprisonment, Paul also told about folks who were sharing the Gospel with the intent of causing Paul pain.

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It's hard to believe that folks would preach to cause another pain...but that's exactly what these folks were doing. They were flaunting their freedom in the face of Paul's imprisonment!

But, if they sought to rob Paul of his joy, they did not succeed. Paul was a bigger man than they were. Paul didn't think much of the **messengers**. Paul didn't think much of the **motive** of the messengers. **But, Paul rejoiced in the message!**

Nothing could rob Paul of his joy! Paul knew he was not the only one who could preach. Paul knew he was **expendable**. The **Gospel** was not!

The desire of Paul's heart was that the Gospel be spread!

Paul knew that the Word of God would not return void no matter **who** preached it!

How can God use some men to preach His Word?

How could God use a false prophet like **Balaam** to bless His people when Balaam really desired to curse them?

How could God use a rebellious prophet like **Jonah** to bring the city of Nineveh to repentance when that was the last thing in the world that Jonah wanted to do?

How could God use a man like **Caiaphas** to make the statement that it was expedient for one man to die for the people. How could God use Caiaphas to prophesy that Jesus would die for the nation?

How could God use a man like **David** to write psalms and hymns after he had strayed so far from Him in committing adultery with Bathsheba and in having her husband killed?

God can use whomever He wishes. And Paul knew this! Paul didn't have a mean spirit. Paul's utmost desire was for the Gospel to be preached.

Paul had warned the church at Corinth not to accept anyone preaching **another** Jesus, or **another** gospel! But here, Paul says he rejoiced in the fact that Christ was proclaimed!

Paul knew that the "right message" has the power to change hearts and lives regardless of the reason it is delivered. It didn't matter to him that some were "for him" and some were "against him"...All that mattered was that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was proclaimed!

Paul seemed quite content to let God deal with those men and their impure motives. In fact, Paul said, **"...in this I rejoice, yes and I will rejoice."**

What an example Paul has given us in the **Book of Philippians**. He is teaching you and me to have joy no matter what! I pray that we will learn this lesson.

Next week we'll see the rest of this chapter. Please study! You can read this entire book in less than 15 minutes. Why don't you do that several times this coming week?

Really get acquainted with it! See how many times Paul refers to joy and rejoicing and gladness! I believe God wants to bless us through it!