

Philippians: Be Joyful!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 April 2018

Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help, and with the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the book of Acts.

The book of Acts, chapter 16. And if we read again at verse 6. Acts, chapter 16, at verse 6.

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him, and saying, Come over to Macedonia and help us.

And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

[1 : 1 2] And so on. And so as we begin a study on Paul's letter to the Philippians, I want to ask you the question, Are you a joyful Christian?

Are you a joyful Christian? Do you find joy in knowing Jesus Christ? Do you have joy in your salvation? Or do you still look for joy in other things other than Jesus?

Now, when I ask this, I'm not asking, Do you only find joy in Jesus? Because we can find joy in many things. And we can enjoy many things. We can enjoy our husband or our wife.

We can enjoy our children or our grandchildren or our family or our friends, our work, our hobbies, all these things. We can find joy and enjoy many things. But when I ask, are you a joyful Christian?

I mean, is your only true joy in this life, knowing, is it knowing Jesus as your savior? Is that your true lasting joy?

[2 : 2 1] Does knowing Jesus and being known by Jesus, is that what fills you with this inexpressible joy? Is that what warms your heart?

Is that what gives you hope? Is that what brings satisfaction and security and confidence? Does knowing Jesus and being known by Jesus, does that make you want to come to church and be among God's people and sing to the Lord with a cheerful voice?

My friend, does Jesus make your life worth living? Are you a joyful Christian? And I ask this question because there are many things in life that can steal our Christian joy.

There are many worries and anxieties and doubts and illnesses and sorrows that can steal our Christian joy. There are many, there are past problems, there are present concerns and even future fears that can rob us of our Christian joy.

And these things, which are genuine and real and sometimes very personal, they can steal our Christian joy. And they steal our Christian joy because sometimes when we're going through these things, we can take our eyes off Jesus.

[3 : 35] And that's obviously not intentional. But sometimes that's what happens. These providences which come into our lives, sometimes so suddenly and so unexpectedly, and before we know it, we have lost our Christian joy.

And you know, that's what happened to the church in Philippi. The Philippians had lost their Christian joy. They had lost the joy of knowing Jesus as their saviour and being known as a child of God.

And that's why Paul wrote this, his letter to the Philippians. He wrote it as a call to rejoice. And we'll see this as we begin our study in Philippians.

We'll see that the dominant theme of Paul's letter to the Philippians is the need to have Christian joy. In fact, Paul mentions rejoicing or joy.

He mentions it 16 times in his letter. And he reminds the Philippians that even though they have many doubts and many worries and many anxieties that would attempt to steal their Christian joy, Paul says that they can still have that Christian joy even while they're sorrowing, suffering, or serving.

[4 : 46] They can still have Christian joy while sorrowing, suffering, or serving. And you know, the same is true for you and for me. We are to have that true Christian joy of knowing Jesus as our saviour, whether we are sorrowing, suffering, or serving.

But as we begin our study in Paul's letter to the Philippians, I'd just like us to set it in its context. Because it's always good to have context in order to give us the bigger picture of things.

And so I want us to consider the context of the letter to the Philippians under three headings. The providence of Philippi, the people in Philippi, and the purpose for Philippi.

So the providence of Philippi, the people in Philippi, and the purpose for Philippi. So look first of all at the providence of Philippi.

The providence of Philippi. Read again, we'll read again at verse six, in chapter 16. I love these verses. It says, they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

[5 : 59] And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So passing by Mysia, they went down to throw us. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night.

A man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, come over to Macedonia and help us. And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Now the book of Acts, it's an exciting book. Because in the book of Acts, we see the gospel spreading. We see people being saved. We see homes being transformed. We see churches being planted.

And we see Christ's kingdom being established. The book of Acts is an exciting book. And by this point in the book of Acts, Paul has embarked on his second missionary journey.

He has embarked on, well, he's going to be arrested. We know that by the end of the book. He's going to be arrested and imprisoned. But before all that, Paul has three missionary journeys.

[7 : 10] His first missionary journey was with Barnabas. And it took him as far as Antioch, which is near Galatia. But Paul's second and third missionary journeys, they took him as far as Macedonia.

And to places such as Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth. But the reason Paul ended up in these places is because of a division. There was a division.

And we read that at the end of Acts chapter 15. That Paul and Barnabas, they were about to embark on their second missionary journey. A journey that was going to spread the gospel and encourage churches, the churches that they had planted.

But you know, the devil got in. And the devil caused division. The devil caused chaos. Because Paul wanted to go back to all the places that he had preached the gospel. He wanted to see how these congregations were getting on.

But Barnabas, he wanted to bring with them this young man called John Mark. And John Mark, he's the man who later wrote the gospel of Mark. But Paul thought it was a bad idea to take John Mark with them because on their first missionary journey, John Mark had abandoned them.

[8 : 23] And so from past experience, Paul said that John Mark, he shouldn't come. But as we read, Barnabas wasn't having any of it. And this contention, it spilled over and bubbled and boiled over into division.

And we're told in chapter 15 at verse 39, it says, And there rose a sharp disagreement so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.

But Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Paul and Barnabas parted ways over something that was so small, even trivial. And you know, that's often the case.

All it takes is for one argument. And the devil gets in and he causes chaos. And sometimes disagreements and sometimes divisions, they can easily be prevented or repaired simply by apologizing.

[9 : 29] Arguments can be disarmed by humbly admitting that, well, it's petty. What you're arguing over is not even worth arguing over. But you know, regardless of their differences, Paul and Barnabas, they sadly parted company.

And this was God's providence. Barnabas and Mark, they went out to Cyprus. But Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke, they traveled through the region of South Galatia, preaching the gospel in various towns and cities.

And they were encouraging believers in their faith in Jesus Christ. And they were persuading others to have faith in Jesus Christ. And there was great blessing in Paul's ministry.

But you know, it was a sad providence that there was a division. There was a division and yet there was still blessing. And you know, I want to say about this, God's blessing is not always an indicator of our obedience.

God's blessing is not always an indicator of our obedience. And I say that because Paul and Barnabas should never have parted company.

[10 : 43] There shouldn't have been a division among them. There shouldn't have been such hostility and animosity between two brothers in Christ and two servants of Jesus.

Their disagreement and you could say their divorce from one another, it was wrong. It was sinful. And it shouldn't have happened. But despite their disobedience and their sin, the Lord still blessed Paul's ministry.

We don't know what happened to Barnabas when he went to Cyprus. We aren't told. But despite their sin, the Lord brought blessing. And I highlight this point because sometimes we can excuse sin or we can overlook wrongdoing because we experience blessing.

Sometimes we can conclude that something is not that bad because God has provided help and blessing through it. Sometimes we can make the assumption that God is okay with what I'm doing because blessing has come out of it.

But you know, that's such a wrong way to look at things and it's such a wrong way to view God. That if we're going against Scripture, not living as we ought to be and yet God blesses us that we think that that's a sign that God approves our actions despite what the Word of God says.

[12 : 05] But that's not true at all. God cannot contradict Himself. He is truth. And His Word is truth.

Therefore, blessing is not always a sign of approval. Blessing is the providence of God despite our failures and despite our shortcomings.

My friend, it's not because we're faithful that the Lord blesses us. The Lord blesses us solely because He is faithful and He is merciful and He is gracious.

Because if the Lord's blessing depended upon our faithfulness and our obedience, then we would never experience blessing. And we would never know the Lord's favor.

And so the providence of God's blessing upon Paul's ministry, it doesn't mean that the division between Paul and Barnabas was right. It doesn't mean that it was okay.

[13 : 06] It doesn't mean that it was good. And it ought to remind us that we cannot continue in sin that grace may abound. Paul says, God forbid. Because we need to be faithful to God's Word and we need to be obedient to God's Word.

But you know, the providence of Paul going to Philippi was not only caused by division, it was also caused by a dream. We're told in verses 9 and 10 of chapter 16, a vision appeared or a dream appeared to Paul in the night and a man of Macedonia was standing there urging him and saying, come over to Macedonia and help us.

And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. So after the Holy Spirit had prevented them from moving north to preach in Asia and Bithynia, through a dream, Paul was called to go west.

To go over to Macedonia. And Paul had never been that far and he never even intended to go that far. But the Lord had other plans and the Lord had this wonderful providence for the people of Philippi.

And you know, I love the words of verse 10. When Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

[14 : 36] When Paul had grasped the vision, when Paul had been given clarity on what he was to do for the Lord, we're told that they immediately, immediately, without any delay, they sought to go to Macedonia.

There was an urgency with the gospel. There was a passion for the Lord. There was a desire to serve the Lord. There was a calling from the Lord. And that was the reason Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke all went to Macedonia.

It was for one purpose. The Lord had called them to preach the gospel. And in this, we have to see that when Paul was given the vision for Macedonia, he was attentive to the call.

And you know, we have to have our vision for our Macedonia. We have to have a vision for our congregation and our community.

Because without vision, without desire, without passion, without the leading and guiding of God's Spirit, without the providence of the Lord working in our lives and in our congregation, we're going nowhere.

[15 : 52] My friend, the providence of Philippi was that Paul received a vision and he concluded that the Lord had called them to preach the gospel. And as Christians, the Lord has given each and every one of us a calling.

We are called to preach the gospel. Not from the pulpit. We might, you might be called, I don't know, some of you might be called to preach the gospel. But we are to preach the gospel by our personal walk and our personal witness.

We're to preach the gospel by our character, our conduct and our conversation. We're to be living epistles. We're to be walking Bibles. Because we might be the only Bible that someone ever reads.

And you know, it always leaves me with the question, well, what will they read from my life? What will they read about your life? What kind of gospel do we proclaim?

You know, the apostle Peter, he put it so beautifully when he said that the Christian is to show forth the praises of him who hath called us from darkness unto his marvelous light.

[17 : 01] And so the providence of Philippi was a division and a dream. But secondly, I want us to consider the people of Philippi. The people of Philippi. Look at verse 11 in chapter 16.

It says there, So setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace and the following day to Neapolis and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.

We remained in this city some days. And so on receiving direction from the Lord, the missionary journey of Paul and his companions took them through the city of Neapolis and onto the city of Philippi.

And you know, it's remarkable to think that this missionary journey, it brought them over the water into Europe. Macedonia is modern day Greece. And so the church that they planted in Philippi, it was the first European church.

And the place they planted this church, it was quite astonishing because you could say that the church plant in Philippi was strategic. In fact, we're told that when they came to Philippi, they stayed some days, maybe for a few weeks.

[18 : 18] And they stayed there because we're told that it was, Philippi was a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And what it means when it says that Philippi was a leading city, it means that it was a wealthy city.

And Philippi was a wealthy city because it was built upon trade and commerce. Philippi was this key trade route between Europe and Asia.

And everyone traveling along this route through Greece, they would have to go through Greece into Asia, through Europe and into Asia. they'd have to pass through the city of Philippi in order to get to their destination and in order to trade all their produce.

And you know, that was the reason Paul and his companions came to Philippi. And we know that Philippi was full of wealthy business people because the first person we meet in Philippi is this seller of purple, Lydia.

And as we see and as we read in the passage, Lydia was a successful business woman from Thyatira who, while listening to Paul preach, the Lord opened her heart.

[19 : 29] And you know, what we have to see is that planting a church in a wealthy city with many people traveling to and from Philippi, it was a strategic move so that the gospel would spread further and further throughout Europe and indeed the world.

And that's what we see with Lydia. She wasn't from Philippi. She was from Thyatira. She was from a place where there was no church. But as a convert now to Christianity, she would have been, you could say, a missionary to her own people.

And as a wealthy business woman, she would have had plenty resources to plant a church in Thyatira. And you know, it's amazing how the Lord works and how the Lord has his plan and how the Lord has his people and he uses them all for the extension of his kingdom and all for his own glory.

But what we read here is that Philippi was not only a leading city that was wealthy, we also read it was a Roman colony. And as a Roman colony, Philippi enjoyed a different political status from the other cities in Greece like Corinth.

In fact, Philippi had such a close identification with Rome that they often referred to Philippi as the little Rome. It was Rome, you could say, in miniature.

[20 : 52] And as a little Rome, part of this Roman colony, the people of Philippi, they enjoyed full Roman citizenship with all these special privileges.

They had privileges like being exempt from paying heavy taxes to Caesar. They were exempt from military service. And what's interesting is that they actually had a lot of military protection because the city of Philippi was an outpost for many of the Roman soldiers.

But more than that, this little Rome, it was just like Rome itself. It had all the Roman architecture. The people of Philippi, they proudly wore the Roman style clothing.

They spoke in Latin, which was the language of Rome, the language of education, the common language in Greece. would have been Greek. And so because of its connection with Rome and the power of the Roman Empire, Philippi boasted of its status as a colony of the empire.

But you know, from a Christian perspective, being known as Little Rome, it wasn't something to be proud of. Because Rome was a godless place.

[22 : 11] In Rome, there was no god but Caesar. And so Philippi, it may have been a wealthy place, but Philippi was also a worldly place.

It was a godless city that enjoyed, they enjoyed godless activities, much like our godless nation today. But the Lord had a purpose for Philippi and his purpose was going to be fulfilled through the preaching of the gospel.

There was no other means and no other method by which the Lord was going to open hearts and change lives and transform homes and families. And that's what we see in this character, in this chapter, sorry.

Paul preached the gospel and the Lord opened Lydia's heart. Paul preached the gospel and had liberated this demon-possessed girl from her satanic bondage.

And even though Paul and Silas were then arrested and beaten and thrown into prison, what do we see? Paul kept preaching the gospel. That even behind bars, the Lord sent a powerful earthquake which led to the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his family.

[23 : 26] And you know, it was the preaching of the gospel that made the Philippian jailer ask one of the most beautiful questions in the Bible. What must I do to be saved? And the message of the gospel that came to the Philippian jailer with such power and persuasion, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, you and your household.

My friend, the Lord's providence for the people of Philippi, it was going to be fulfilled by the preaching of the gospel. And you know, the Lord's providence for the people of our community, it will also be fulfilled through the preaching of the gospel.

As we said earlier from verse 10, Paul and his companions, they went to Macedonia because God had called, it says, God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

And that's where we're at. We must conclude and only conclude that God's providence for us as a local church in our local community, God's providence is that we have been placed here to preach the gospel.

We've been placed here to live out the gospel. We've been placed here to go with the gospel to those who do not yet know this Jesus of the gospel.

[24 : 52] And you know, with Steve Lawson, he wrote the Bible study book that we're going to be using. He said about the people of Philippi and the conversions that took place through the preaching of the gospel.

He said, here we see the importance of the local church. If you are a believer in Jesus, you should be an active member in the local church where you live.

Christianity was never intended to be lived in isolation from other believers. God's design for healthy spiritual living is for us to be part of a church where the word of God is preached.

And so as we consider the context to Paul's letter to the Philippians, we've looked at the providence of Philippi, the people in Philippi, and lastly, the purpose for Philippi.

The purpose for Philippi. Look at the last verse in chapter 16, verse 40. This is after they came out of prison.

[25 : 56] It says in verse 40, So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed. As we said earlier, Philippi may have been a wealthy place, but it was also a worldly place.

And as you know, it's difficult for a young Christian to grow in a worldly environment. It's difficult for a disciple of Jesus to stand up against the tide of secularism and godlessness.

It's difficult to grow and develop in your faith if your faith has been questioned and challenged at every turn. And that's what the Philippians were faced with.

That's what they had to put up with. And because they were living in a wealthy city, there were all these temptations to try and find joy in these things. There were many temptations as Christians to find joy in worldliness and worldly activities.

But you know, sadly, as time went on, the dangers of the Christian church in Philippi, they not only came from outside the church, they also came from inside the church.

[27 : 06] Because as time went on, there were false teachers who influenced the church in Philippi and they tried to lead the people astray. And by the time the church in Philippi has been established, only ten years, the Christians in Philippi, they're running into problems.

And it's not surprising because the church in Philippi, they were a young church and they were very much still learning about the Christian faith and what it means to be a Christian. And because of this, they faced many dangers and they could easily be misguided and misled.

And that's what happened. Paul and his companions, they planted the church in Philippi around the year 52 AD. And by around 61 AD, less than ten years later, Paul is sending his letter to the Philippians.

And it was because Paul had planted the church in Philippi, as you would expect, he felt the spiritual responsibility for them. He had a concern for them.

But Paul also, he had a deep love and affection for the Philippians. And it was because of this that Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians in order to teach these young Christians and encourage these young Christians in their faith.

[28 : 27] And it was to tell them to avoid the worldliness that was surrounding them and that they were being bombarded with. And you know, that was the context to Paul writing his letter to the Philippians.

The purpose of Paul's letter to the Philippians was to emphasize to these young Philippian Christians that through, lasting Christian joy, it doesn't come from worldly entertainment or religious observance or even outward appearance.

Because Paul says these things sometimes rob us of our Christian joy. But Paul says that through, lasting Christian joy only comes from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

And Paul writes to the church in Philippi, he writes to them first of all as a friend. Then secondly, as a minister. A minister who loves them dearly and understands what they're going through.

But when Paul writes his letter, he doesn't just say to the Philippians, smile, Jesus loves you. Everything will be fine. No, Paul explains to them, he explains to them what it means to have true joy in Christ.

[29 : 41] And he teaches them how to have true joy in their Christian life. And what's remarkable is that Paul teaches the Philippians about Christian joy and he teaches them from a prison cell.

Because this is what's remarkable about the whole letter. By the time Paul writes his letter to the Philippians, Paul is in prison in Rome for preaching the gospel. He's being held in chains, chained to a Roman guard.

He's almost forgotten by the Roman legal system because it's so slow. And he's awaiting trial to determine whether he lives or dies. And looking at it from a human perspective, Paul had every reason to be downcast and discouraged.

He had every reason to write to the Philippians and say, what's wrong with you? You're not in prison. And yet Paul reminds the Philippians that his heart and his mind is full of rejoicing.

And it's that joy that you could say it spills over into his letter to the Philippians as Paul writes to encourage the Philippians to rejoice in their salvation and in all their circumstances.

[30 : 55] And as he says again and again throughout his letter, true joy comes from knowing Christ and being known by Christ. And that's why Paul could say to the Philippians with all these memorable verses that we know so well, he writes in his letter, he who began a good work in you will bring it on to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.

Paul writes, for to me to live is Christ, to die is gain. He talks about Jesus that he humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Paul says, it's God who works in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure. Paul's desire that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, I press on towards the mark of the high call of God in Christ Jesus.

Our citizenship, he says, it's in heaven and from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. All these verses Paul is presenting to the Philippians to remind them of their true Christian joy.

and the key version Paul's letter, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say, rejoice. My friend, are you a joyful Christian?

[32 : 15] Are you a joyful Christian? Do you have joy in your saviour and joy in your circumstances? It was John MacArthur, who is an American preacher in our generation, and with this I'll close.

He said about Paul's letter to the Philippians, he said, our daily lives are fast-paced, hectic, full of trouble and stress. Real joy is a rare commodity in a civilised Western culture.

Sadly, even most of the visible church is hardly a bastion of genuine joy. He says, we desperately need the message Paul gave to the church in Philippi. I am constantly drawn to this epistle because every time I read it, Paul's passionate sense of joy stirs my heart.

I love preaching from Philippians because its message is the perfect remedy for the sombre mood that often dominates these troubled times in which we live.

And so, my friend, what better reason to study Paul's letter to the Philippians than we might have true Christian joy?

[33 : 26] So, we've considered the context of Paul's letter. The providence of Philippi, the people in Philippi and the purpose for Philippi.

And God willing, next week, we will consider Paul's prayer for Philippi. So, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for Thy Word.

We thank Thee, Lord, for the privilege of studying it. And to know that it is Thy Spirit that leads us and guides us. He is the one who takes the things of Christ and makes them more and more precious to us.

And we pray that as we begin our study in Philippians, that we would know that through joy, the joy of knowing Jesus, that we would know the joy of the Lord being our strength.

May it be our portion, and may it be the joy that shapes our lives and infects and affects those around us. Bless us, Lord, we pray.

[34 : 28] Guide us, we ask, for we know that Thy Word it is the only rule to direct us, that we may glorify Thee and enjoy Thee forever. Watch over us, we pray.

Remember us, we ask, and go before us for Jesus' sake. Amen. So we'll bring our time to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 149.

Psalm 149 in the Scottish Psalter, page 450. Psalm 149.

Psalm 149. We're singing from the beginning down to the verse marked 5. Praise ye the Lord, and to him sing a new song and his praise in the assembly of his saints in sweet psalms do ye raise.

Let Israel in his maker joy and to him praises sing that all that Zion's children are be joyful in their king. Down to the verse marked 5.

[35 : 38] To God's praise. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

and with heart in songs his praise advance.

For God has treasure taken those that his own people be, and he with his salvation the meek will beautify, and in his glory excellent let all his saints rejoice.

Let them to him upon their beds aloud lift up their voice.

[38 : 44] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.