

**Discussion Notes**  
**Philippians 1.1-6**  
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Last week: who was Paul?

This week: what is Paul's relationship with the Philippians?

- How do Paul and the Philippians they know one another?
  - Paul is in Galatia on his second missionary journey and God tells him in a dream to go to Macedonia, an entirely new beachhead to share the gospel. Remember that Paul usually first shares the gospel with Jewish people and then Greek because the Jesus story comes out of Israel's narrative.
  - So Paul and his friends, Silas, Timothy and Dr. Luke (recording this first hand) end up in Philippi in Europe. In those days it took about ten Jewish men in order to establish a Synagogue, and there was no Synagogue in Philippi. A city with little Jewish influence.
  - They do find some who worship Israel's God down near the river. This might have been a place of prayer since there was no building of worship.
  - Paul shares with them and the first convert is a woman named Lydia. She's got some money and has done quite well in the textile industry, and insists that they stay with her. She's providing for and sponsoring God's work now.
    - The first Christian in Europe is a woman!
    - Lydia's response to the gospel is generosity and hospitality. She "prevailed upon us" says Luke. She insists they stay with her.
    - Lydia begins her Christian journey by serving, and therefore by leading.

- Galatians 3.28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”
  - When Lydia becomes a Christian she opens her home, gets involved in the work of God and is a blessing to others. She’s part of a new kingdom, a new empire.
  - Lydia leads by being hospitable, and it is more than likely the church continued to gather in her home, and given she was the first convert we have to wonder what her role of leadership might have been in the Philippian church.
  - The gospel changes things, it’s not just about what happens when we die, it affects how we live – which we see in Philippi next.
- Acts tells us that as Paul he gets followed around by a slave girl who is possessed by a demon. She’s perceived to have a gift by her owners, and so she is exploited, perhaps some kind of seer in that day.
  - She follows around shouting that Paul and the others are servants of God and know the way of salvation – which is true. The demons recognize Jesus in the gospels and they recognize his Spirit in Paul and the others in Acts. She shouts this for a number of days and it is truthful, but distracting.
    - Let’s notice something: It is possible to know, maybe even shout about the truth, but actually get in the way of God’s word. It’s not about what we know, even the demons know who Jesus is, it’s about who we serve.
  - So after a few days of this Paul’s had about enough, he frees the girl from the demon, and her owners get upset because now she’s of no use to them any more.
    - Remember what we said about the gospel doing more than simply spiritual things? Here, a girl is liberated from evil, but also, someone loses money. When God’s kingdom comes to

town things are going to change, wrong will be put right, and this might make the messengers unpopular.

- In a nutshell, Paul and Silas are imprisoned, dragged before the civic leaders, beaten harshly, thrown into the jail and bound with irons.
- That's a pretty bad day – but what do they do? They pray and sing...
- God frees them via an earthquake, and the jailer thinks all the prisoners have escaped so he's about to kill himself and Paul says, "stop!"
- Jailer becomes a Christian, so does his whole family, and the civic leaders tell Paul and the others to hit the road.
- That's the story in Philippi and then they move on to Thessalonica.
  - Can you see why Philippi stands out in Paul's mind.
  - So Paul's writing this letter to these people who have been through these dramatic events with him.
  - They have supported the work of sharing the gospel since he's gone, and they're experiencing hardship in their city as they live as a religious minority.
- Paul loves these people. He has fond thoughts about and memories of these people, and we're going to hear how he pleads with and challenges them to continue to grow in their faith and how thankful he is for them.

## Greeting and Opening

*1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,*

*To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:*

*2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

V1

- *Paul and Timothy.*
  - Paul and Timothy. Notice, AND. Right off the bat we notice the theme of partnership in the letter. This isn't the Paul show. He spent his life

loving, training, raising, releasing others around him because the good news had to spread, the kingdom of God is about family and togetherness, not about individual agenda.

- Full and good Christian life is defined by the ANDs.
- What does it mean to be a true Christian? Look beyond yourself and what you can accomplish on your own, love your neighbor as yourself, and encourage, support and champion others around you. Be about others. Live for the AND.
- If you want to be a *great leader* the first thing you have to do, ironically, is to stop trying to be one. Christian leadership is defined by being others-focused.
- Rikk was right in sharing about Paul's brilliance last week, but remember we're not reading Paul's textbooks or papers. We have his letters – letters to people he poured his life into, who passed this stuff onto others. All his brilliance and exertion was in service of living, breathing people.
- Who is Timothy? He's a younger Christian who shows promise and Paul has brought him along. Timothy has a Greek dad and a Jewish mom, so he's going to be good at this cross cultural stuff too. We'll learn more about him as the letter goes on.
- Paul elevates him in his greeting because he'll be visiting the church later on and wants to be clear on his authority.
- *Servants of Christ.*
  - This word means bond-servant. Someone who is set free but chooses to serve their master all the same
    - That's an important balance for us. Sometimes we're so caught up with asking the question: who is Jesus to me? Like God's got to fit into our lives. The more accurate, pivotal question really is who am I to God?
    - I am God's humble, devoted servant - that's the Christian posture. Amazingly, however, this God calls me daughter or

son, not slave, but partner, co-worker in seeing the kingdom unfold everywhere I go.

- On one hand there is humble reverence that we are servants, but we're servants of God who also calls us children, heirs – what an honour.
- *To all the saints...*
  - Saint meaning: Holy, separate, different.
  - We are not defined by our sin, or named by our past. We are called holy because of Jesus.
  - The Philippians weren't perfect, Paul's going to address some of his concerns about their church later in the letter, but he does so by reminding them of who they really are.
  - So we don't have to be labeled by and wallow in our sin, we can live like the saints we are. You're a child of the king, live like it.
- *Deacons and overseers...*
  - The church needs to be led, hopefully by Godly people. These people help make important decisions and serve the community.
  - Paul likely singles out the overseers and deacons because they were responsible for raising the money to send to those in need.
    - We should be thankful for leaders in our church who are generous and forward thinking.
    - We don't need to applaud them all the time, just be thankful for them. Encouragement goes a long way.

V2

*Grace and peace...*

- Rikk got into this last week, let me just quote him – “If my life doesn't bring grace and peace to you, I don't know Jesus...”
- So a good indicator that you know Jesus and are growing in your relationship with him is that you find yourself acting more like him, offering people lots of grace and mercy and peace.

- Again, Christianity isn't about what we know, it's about how we live and what we do.
- If you aren't finding that, get closer with Jesus.
  - "The really good news for humanity is that Jesus is now taking students in the master class of life. The eternal life that begins with confidence in Jesus is a life in his present kingdom, now on earth and available to all. So the message of and about him is specifically a gospel (good news) for our life now, not just for dying. It is about living now as his apprentice in kingdom living, not just as a consumer of his merits." (Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*)

*God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...*

- Notice Jesus and God the Father are on equal footing here. Absolutely no question in Paul's mind who Jesus is, what authority he holds and how this changes everything if God chose to die on a cross in service of humanity.
- Also notice that Jesus is Lord. This might be a problem in Philippi because Caesar is Lord in Philippi and Paul's going to assert throughout the letter that Jesus is actually Lord of not just of Philippi but everywhere and their allegiance is first to him.
- Augustus, the Emperor when Jesus was born, gave Philippi a lot. When he was trying to become Caesar he styled himself "divi filius", the son of a god because Julius Caesar (his adopted father) was deified post-mortem.
- Jesus has a similar title, son of God. Who will the Philippians serve in the end? We're going to explore this further in the letter and the implications for us in our context.

*3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from*

*the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

A few lessons from Paul's relationship with the Philippians in the first couple sentences of the letter:

- **Christians are prayerful people.**
  - We believe that it is God who does the work, God who does the transformation in us. Not our wit or strategy, not solely via our discipline or communal dependence, but we begin with prayer, and prayer is submission to God and openness to his purposes.
  - So if we care for someone we should begin with prayer for them. This centers the relationship (even if they don't pray for us) around God, and God is the one that gives things life and makes things grow.
  - If we want to see health in our friendships, families, marriages, workplace – we start with prayer. We look to God first, and fall in line with where he leads us, because he knows the way forward and he brings about the change.
- **Christians are partnering people.**
  - Great joy can be found when we do things together, when we participate together in accomplishing something, be that building a house, raising a child, winning a game, or doing the dishes.
  - When we partner together in God's onrushing kingdom, joining up with him, and one another. That's when it gets really fun – this is why Paul is full of joy.
  - Even though he is in prison, and the Philippians are getting picked on, they are doing something together that will last, and nothing can rob them of the joy of unity toward a good goal.
  - Maybe joy is not about everything going the way we might think it should all the time. Maybe there is more to it.

- If we want to find some joy in life we should serve with one another. Get involved in some way with other Christians friends and serve. Find the joy of giving together – great memories are made. We’re making them right now!
- **Christians are persevering people.**
  - What God started in us he will finish. The Christian life is not a big circle, constantly coming back to the same thing. We don’t worry that things will never change or that we’ll repeat the same mistakes over and over. We can be *confident* that God is up to something and is helping us move forward.
  - If we’re facing tough circumstances, or you feel stuck in a rut or a cycle you can’t get out of, don’t be discouraged. What God started in you, that good work, he will finish.
  - There was a good beginning and there will be a good end.

### **Discussion Questions**

- What stood out, encouraged or challenged you about Philippians 1.1-6?
- How do we get full of God’s grace and peace?
- What does it look like to see grace and peace leak out from our lives? Share an example of how you have experienced this in your life or seen it in the lives of others.
- “Christians pray” might sound elementary, but what impedes us from doing so? What does constant prayer look like?
- “Christians partner” is a way of life many Christians miss out on. What are ways we can partner together in God’s work? Make a list of all these partnerships – we may already be doing it and simply need to take notice and invite God’s Spirit into the work more fully!
- “Christians persevere”. Share stories of how you or others you know have persevered through trial, sickness, hardship and suffering. Take time to listen to one another and encourage and pray for one another in closing.



