

Philippians: An Introduction.

Ephesians 4:1-16

Colossians 3:1-17

Responsive Reading: Psalm 133 and 134.

So this morning I think we should just jump right into some controversy! This book of Philippians was written by Paul, to the Philippians church, I know I know, its hard to believe but that's exactly what it says right there in the first 2 verses. I joke because the last few books we went through there is controversy on who the Author is, as to which James wrote the book of James, or who The Elder is in 1st and 2nd John..but here, plainly it says Paul and Timothy to all the saints who are in Philippi.

So we don't need to spend much time in preliminary introduction here, it is pretty straight forward and clear. This was written by Paul probably sometime in AD 61 or 62, when he spent 2 years imprisoned in Rome. So while there is no real debate or anything to cover here, I would like to go to Acts this morning Chapter 16, This sets the back drop to this letter, for it details Paul's visit to Philippi and the events that went there during his ministry there. The account starts in verse 9, but lets go ahead and start at verse 1 and read the entire chapter to set the back drop to this letter to the Philippians.

So there are a few interesting things to note here in this chapter in Acts. The first thing that is apparent is the difference of Paul's ministry here in Philippi. It was common practice that Paul would go to the Jewish synagogues to preach and minister the gospel of Christ, but here in Philippi there is no mention of one. This area did not have the Jewish influence that we see in the likes of Galatians. From what I was reading the requirements for a Jewish synagogue was that there needed to be 10 or more Jews to form a synagogue. So what we see here is a fully gentile city, pretty much untouched by Jewish teaching.

Also, notice verse 13, there may not have been a Jewish synagogue or place of worship but there was a place just outside the city where women gathered to pray. And it is here that Luke records that they went and ministered to them. Among these woman was Lydia, the seller of Purple from Thyatira. Being a seller of purple, which was a color worn by the wealthy it is pretty safe to say that she was quite the well off successful business woman. Who was sitting here with other woman praying and worshipping God.

Blake White in his book on Philippians seems to hint that Lydia likely was not a believer at this time, but rather may have heard of God but did not know God, until Paul came and shared the gospel. We see here in verse 14, that God opened Lydia's heart to heed the things that were spoken by Paul. This is a prime example of Irresistible grace, we have a woman here, praying, who has heard of God but in God's good timing he opens he heart at this time to hear the word preached. We see the same thing in our own lives, and in our own witness. How many times have we heard of God, yet not truly believed. We just went through the book of James where he talks about many who deceive themselves into believing they are of God when in fact they are not. So many claim to know God, or at least admit to know of God, and some of these even pray when they are in times of hardship and struggle looking for relief and deliverance. Yet, it isn't until God opens the heart, in his time that it truly takes seed.

We see a perfect example of this here with Lydia, and we see the response of that conversion and new heart dedicated to Christ in the next verse. "And when she and her household were baptized,

she begged us, saying. If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay. So she persuaded us. Is this not exactly what we talked about last week? Christian Hospitality, a love for each other that is granted to us by God. The first thing Lydia does is open up her home, to provide for these apostles, offering them food and shelter while they continue their ministry there, using the resources that she had for the advancement of the Gospel.

Exactly the same thing that John was commending the Elect Lady, and Gaius for doing in his epistles. As he said in 2nd John “Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have born witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God you will do well. Because they went forth for his names sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore out to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth. “

Next in this account here in acts we see Paul and Silas further in their gospel witness here in this gentile city. Verse 16. “ Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out saying. “ These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” And this she did for many days, But Paul greatly annoyed turned and said to the spirit, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And it came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, “these men being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe. Then the multitude rose up together against them, and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep the securely.

I always found this to be quite humorous. Paul tolerated this girl following them announcing who the were for a few days but became annoyed and cast out the demon. While it is humorous, even this is all a part of God's plan. We have Paul who out of frustration casts out this demon to silence the girl which in turn angers her masters who had them beaten and thrown into Jail. Putting them right were God intended, so that in God's time, the Jailer would hear the gospel. Just as God calling Lydia to believe is a perfect example of God's irresistible grace, we see here a perfect example of God's sovereignty and how man's will falls into God's plan.

I doubt Paul knew the outcome of his action before he did it, he was acting out of frustration, and in fact let it go on for days. Yet, this action even though performed by Paul, was all orchestrated by God to put his men, where he wanted them so they would share the gospel with whom he predestined to be his child. This strikes me as an amazing example of God's sovereignty, and man's will.

Reading on, we see how God works in the heart of the Philippian Jailer, but not only that, we see God's protection of Paul and Silas and his provision to them. Verse 24. “ having received such a charge, from the magistrates to keep them secure, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice saying, Do yourself no harm, for we are all here. Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, “Sirs what must I do to be saved?”So they said,

believe on the lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.

Here we see Paul and Silas, beaten, and naked, singing, and praising God. They are not sulking in their own despair and grief, but they are praising God. Earlier in Acts, Chapter 5 when the disciples were persecuted by the Jews, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer on behalf of Jesus.

Let that just sink in a minute. How quickly we run, and we cry, and we complain that things are not how we desire them to be, and we have 2 accounts here of God's children who have been stripped, beaten, and imprisoned...and they rejoice, because they have been found worthy to suffer for Christ! If that doesn't challenge your faith, and your christian walk I don't know what will! Oh to be like Paul and Silas in our trials, to seek God over and above our own wants and desires!

And look, we see here God frees Paul and Silas, delivering them from their plight. But Paul and Silas were so concerned for the Jailer that they did not seize this opportunity for freedom for themselves but instead used this opportunity for the Jailer to find freedom in Christ. Just as we saw in Galatians, Just as we saw in James, and in John, we see here Paul and Silas putting to practice what it means to be a Christian. Giving of themselves for the good of others, and in this case they were willing to sacrifice their life for the good of this Jailer, knowing that if they had escaped the Jailer would have been put to death.

This jailer spent the night listening to Paul and Silas worshiping God despite their condition, and then he witnessed their God providing for them an escape, and yet they did not take it but instead remained out of concern for this jailer. God used this, to open his heart, in his time so that he too could be numbered among the saints.

Notice here the response of this Jailer, verse 30.. And he brought them out and said. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? So they said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household. Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes, And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them, and he rejoiced having believed in God with all his household.

Just like Lydia, his first response was compassion, and love toward his new bothers. He offers them hospitality, opening up his home to them, providing for them and rejoicing with them. Paul and Silas did not just leave though, they were not free and did not use this opportunity to escape. Notice in the following verses. "And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, Let those men go. So the keepers of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying the magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace.

Paul and Silas didn't leave, they didn't escape, their intention wasn't freedom but it was to be used by God. Still at this point, if they would have left the jailer would have been put to death. They knew this, and returned to prison, But God did not leave them there, what he had for them to do was done, so the next day the magistrates decided to let them go. Lets just stop a minute here, and think upon God's sovereignty, from the human stand point there are all these moving pieces, all this people acting out of their own free will, yet God had a purpose and a plan, and it put his men where they needed to be to be so that this Philippian Jailer would hear the word of God and believe, and not just him, but his household. Then, these magistrates, using their free will decided to let them go fulfilling God's perfect purpose and plan. We can not fully understand how God works, all we can do when we see it is give him the praise and glory!

Verse 36. “ So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying. “ The magistrates have sent to let you go, Now therefor depart, and go in peace. “ But Paul said to them, “ they have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison.

And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out. And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard what they were Romans. Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out and asked them to depart from the city. So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

So by this account it would seem that Paul and Silas were not there in Philippi long, but we see that God used them in a powerful way for out of the 2 families we see reported here, a church had sprung up to which Paul wrote this letter to. We see here a perfect example of why James instructed his readers that there should not be any partiality among the family of God. With Lydia, and the Jailer we see that both a well to do business owner, and a blue collar worker were both called to be a part of God's family. As Paul wrote in Galatians, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, there is neither male nor female for we are all 1 in Christ Jesus. And what we see here recorded in Acts is the perfect example of this.

As I was thinking on this, how God calls people into his family from all races and social status', it struck me. Throughout all of scripture the family structure is used as examples of God's family. God the Father, Jesus his son, and we his adopted children. The example of Jesus the groom, and the church his bride. This theme runs throughout the bible. As I thought of this, I started to think there is no such thing as a unified family here on this earth. There is dysfunction in one way or another. Families fighting, divorce, or it seems every family has at least 1 crazy family member, and if you don't think your family does.....it is probably because it is you :).

While this is an example of the family of God, it has been tainted by sin. Yet, think about it....God's perfect structure has been tainted, corrupted, twisted and ruined by our sin, yet out of this world of broken homes, God has made for himself the perfect family, he has taken us, this diverse, messed up group of broken sinners, and at the end of the age, in his time, he will be bringing his family home for one giant reunion. But instead of bickering, fighting, and dealing with the crazy uncles, in God's family reunion we will all be gathered around the throne singing Praises to our Father. It is around the throne that God's true children will unite in true unity praising their Father.

Just as Paul and Silas were God's people to bring the gospel to the Philippians we are also called to this ministry to bring the gospel to those that God sends to us. Blake White wrote, “The world is full of disobedient people who act just as the first humans, Adam and Eve, whose actions brought sin and death into this world. But throughout the old testament God promised to send a savior who would redeem sinners, that savior is Jesus. After his life, death, and resurrection, he ascended into Heaven. He told his disciples that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit to be his witness to all nations. That they would be his church on a mission to declare the good news of salvation and redemption. But really it isn't the church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission that has a church in the world. God's mission is the reason that the church exists.

One of the main focus' of Paul in his letter to the Philippians is unity in Christ. As we go through this book we will see Paul time and time again instructing the church and Philippi to be united, to stand true in Christ together. We all here share in a kind of close unity, brought together through

trials, and a love for each other, so instead of seeing this as an instruction as to how we should be for I think unity is something we have, we should see this as encouragement. That while it seems the world is going crazy and falling apart, we are united in Christ together. Looking at this account here in Acts, of the strife, and suffering that Paul and Silas had to endure, yet they remained unified, and faithful to God's mission, solely focused on ministering the gospel and out of that short mission trip a church grew.

This should encourage us, remain faithful, remain unified, and let God take care of the details.