

Route 66

Philippians: Again I Say, "Rejoice!"

Part 50 – February 6, 2011



Philippi was a Roman colony in Greece. Retiring soldiers were given free land to settle on. The Philippian church was the first to be founded in Europe. Paul had a vision of a man begging him to come there; so he went at once. (*Acts 16:9-10*)



These are the remains of the city Paul went to. The Philippians' familiarity of dual citizenship was probably in Paul's mind when he wrote: "But **our citizenship** is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there ..." – *Philippians 3:20a NIV*



On the sabbath, Paul went to a river to pray and spoke to the women gathered there. A wealthy dealer of purple cloth became the first baptized convert in Europe. (*Acts 16:11-15*) The steps (*on the left*) commemorate the baptism of Lydia.



And this (*on the right*) is the traditional site of the infamous Philippian jail. Paul and Silas were flogged and thrown in prison for casting a spirit out of a fortune telling slave girl. (*Acts 16:16-24*) That night while singing with bleeding backs, an earthquake shakes the prison doors open. But Paul and Silas stay put, because this miracle is for the *jailer*.

... he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" – *Acts 16:27b-30 NIV*

The miracle had no impact on him. It was the rejoicing in the midst of adversity, and integrity in the face of an easy out. When the magistrates realized they had beaten and imprisoned fellow Romans without a trial, they begged Paul to leave quietly. Ad he did ... *after* making the magistrates publically escort him out of jail (to protect the reputation of his new congregation).



The Via Egnatia was the main east-west road, covering 696 miles. This portion runs through Philippi. Just imagine Paul and Silas being escorted through the city!

[Paul and Silas] went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left. – *Acts 16:40b NIV*

Now ten years later, Paul is writing this letter of gratitude while under house arrest in Rome. Philippians is often referred to as Paul's love letter, because he displays such a close bond with these intensely loyal, supportive people.

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now ... - *Philippians 1:3-5 NIV*

This is the only church Paul would take financial support from. And the beloved Epaphroditus [ih-PAF-roh-DIGH-tuhs] risked life and limb to deliver a care package to Paul. (4:18) But he fell deathly ill while in Rome. So Paul sends him home with this letter.



I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier ... For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. ... Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that ... you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. - *Philippians 2:25-28 NIV condensed*

And Paul encourages them in the midst of their own persecution.

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. - *Philippians 1:29-30 NIV*

It's been "granted" to you "to suffer"? Like a gift? Yes! Suffering isn't a *discredit* to the power of the Gospel; it's an opportunity to partner with God and *display* it. *Nothing* has the impact of "singing praises" in the midst of our pain. And Paul urges them to take this partnership seriously.



... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. - *Philippians 2:12b-13 NIV*

We can't "work for" our salvation - Jesus did *that* - but we can "work out" our salvation.

Just like we *work out* at a gym in order to develop the body we've already been given. And we *work out* a puzzle by arranging the pieces we're supplied with.



The "fear and trembling" describes the gravity of this cooperation between me and God, to "work out" what He "works in" me, in order to align my "[desires]" and my "[behavior]" with "His good purpose".

- A. For instance: He *works in* me through His Word; but I *work out* how often I read, study, memorize, and reflect on it.

- B. He *works in* me through people; but I *work out* which influences I will choose to surround myself with.
- C. He *works in* me through circumstances; but I *work out* how I respond to the hardships and tragedies I encounter.

Seventeen times Paul uses the word “joy”, “rejoice”, or “glad” as he challenges his close friends to respond to *their* situation the way Paul is responding to a possible death sentence.

But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am **glad** and **rejoice** with all of you. So you too should be **glad** and **rejoice** with me. – *Philippians 2:14-18 NIV*

Paul is joyful in *prison* ... we can be miserable in a *hot tub*! We often make the mistake of assuming that the sorrows of this life (even the most severe), are incompatible with peace and joy. Paul isn't glad *about* his situation; he's glad *in spite of* it, because he's confident that God is at work *through* it.

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. – *Philippians 1:12-13 NIV*



Relief of the Roman Praetorian Guard, from 51-52 A.D.

For two years Paul was chained to a guard's wrist. (*Acts 28:16*) This was ancient Rome's equivalent to a modern-day ankle monitor. One by one, each guard on duty was exposed to the Gospel. So, *who* was chained to *whom*? Paul *rejoiced* over his “captive” audience. This was the “palace guard”; these are the guys who occupied *Caesar's* household! Paul turned his misery into a mission! At the end of *Philippians*, Paul writes:

All the saints send you greetings, especially **those who belong to Caesar's household**. – *Philippians 4:22 NIV*

This is how he can speak so boldly, in spite of his situation:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! – *Philippians 4:4 NIV*

Easy to say, tough to do; rejoicing in the midst of suffering requires some serious *working out* of what God is *working in* us.

The Lord wants to work **His intimate presence** in me. In the very next verse, Paul says: “The Lord is near.” (*Philippians 4:5b*) But I must affirm and embrace the *fact* of His constant, intimate presence in the midst of my turmoil; and remind myself that He's with me right here, right now, no matter the circumstances. And that He truly cares about me ...

The Lord wants to work **His care and comfort** in me. In the very next verse, Paul says: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (*Philippians 4:6*)

This isn't a shallow don't-worry-be-happy platitude; Paul is imparting a deep spiritual reality. The only way to be anxious about *nothing* is to be prayerful and thankful in *everything*. But, what can we be thankful for in the midst of our troubles? The care, concern, and compassion of our Heavenly Father!

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. - *1 Peter 5:7 NIV*

A grateful heart indicates a willingness to accept, trust, and submit to whatever course of action He chooses for us. So, we need to convert our worry list into a prayer list!

The Lord wants to work **His peace and assurance** in me. In the very next verse, Paul says: "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (*Philippians 4:7*) But I must surrender my impulse to control the situation. If a lifeguard swims to someone who is thrashing in a panic, the lifeguard has to hold back and calm them down before he can move in and rescue them. They must place their faith in *his* control. We receive God's peace and assurance by releasing the urge to thrash about in ways that dishonor Him.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. - *Philippians 1:27 NIV*

This isn't fatalism: "Well, I guess I'll just drown!" We can settle down and surrender because we know and trust our Savior. No matter how high the waves get, it is well with my soul.

The Lord wants to work **His Sovereign Plan** in me.

... He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. - *Philippians 1:6b NIV*

In Romans (8:28), Paul said: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose." We have to hang onto this promise when everything around us is trying to rip our attention from the cross to our crisis. Paul never took his eyes off of Jesus; and he knew there was a God-ordained purpose behind his pain; and it didn't matter if he discovered it here on earth or there in eternity.

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. **For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.** - *Philippians 1:20-21 NIV*

If we're going to know the profound joy of His presence and His peace in the midst of our pain, Jesus must be our highest goal, our deepest meaning, and our greatest joy.