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Bondservants of Jesus

Philippians 1:1

Intro: Today, we begin our study of Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. If you remember from our study of [Acts 16](#), Philippi was the first city on the European continent to have a Christian church established. Paul and his ministry team traveled to Macedonia after Paul received a vision of a man calling out to him for help. At that time, Philippi was a Roman colony, that didn't have a very large Jewish presence. There weren't enough Jews in the city to form a synagogue. Without that, Paul and his co-workers went to the river to meet with those Jews who worshipped the Lord there. They met Lydia, a dye merchant of Thyatira, and shared the gospel with her. The Holy Spirit opened her heart and she accepted the truth and was converted. She became the first European convert to Christianity.

As Paul and his team moved about the city, a young slave girl, who was demon possessed, followed them around and "announced" them every where they went. Paul eventually became weary of unceasing advertisement and cast the demon out of the girl. This didn't go over very well with her owners as they made a healthy income off of her unfortunate state. The evil spirit would perform divinations through the young girl that people would pay good money for. Now, all that income was lost but it's believed that the girl was saved through Paul's ministry.

Well, no good deed goes unpunished. Paul and Silas were subsequently arrested (illegally) then beaten (illegally) and then imprisoned (illegally). Later that night, instead of sleeping, Paul and Silas were singing and praising the Lord. That is, until the earthquake happened and opened all the cell doors. When the jailor realized all the prisoners were loose, he attempted to take his own life. Paul stopped him from doing that because none of the prisoners had escaped. The jailor then asked Paul how he could be saved and Paul shared the gospel with him; which he gladly accepted. Paul was then able to share the gospel with the rest of the jailor's family and they also accepted it. So, a little nucleus of a church was born in Philippi in a matter of days.

The letter to the Philippians is one of the most loved and most encouraging

of all the NT epistles. It's a rich book with a great wealth of themes. It only has 104 verses but in that short space, most of the major doctrines of the faith are addressed, and there are many profound statements of Christian love, hope, joy, and confidence. It's also a practical book that offers beneficial insight to Christians at every level of spiritual understanding, age and maturity.

Philippians is a book that's both simple and profound. It is cherished for its deep expressions of Christian sentiment that provide some of the most beloved verses of the Bible like: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (1:21). "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (4:13). "And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (4:19). The Book is also noted for its great doctrinal statements. It wasn't intended to be a doctrinal treatise, like Romans or Galatians, but it's still filled with doctrine. The entire argument of Romans is found in one verse in ch3 where Paul writes of his desire to be found in Christ, "not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness which is from God by faith" (3:9). The greatest doctrinal statement about Jesus in the entire Bible is found in 2:5-11, which describes how Jesus laid aside His divine glory to take the form of a man.

Most of all, Philippians is known as one of the most joyous books of the Bible. All throughout these 4 short chapters, Paul speaks of inner joy or inner happiness some 16 times. He does it in such a matter-of-fact way that you can tell he had found the true source of joy. He'd not only learned to be content in whatever state he was; he had learned to rejoice in whatever state he was. He overflowed with rejoicing. What makes this so remarkable is the circumstance in which the book was written. Paul was a prisoner! He'd been in prison some time and was still being held Caesar's jail. He'd survived a perilous storm at sea; was deserted by most of his friends and was facing possible execution for his faith! Yet no other epistle is so filled with joy as Philippians. What was Paul's secret? How could he be joyful in such circumstances? We find out by studying this letter.

In a very special way, Philippians reveals the mind of Paul. His mind was filled with peace, and he rejoiced in the preaching of the gospel. He's writing this letter in the last years of his life while facing the possibility of imminent execution. How could he have joy at a time like that? What was his secret?

What key had he found? The secret is simple: Paul had filled his mind with Christ. The human mind can't think of 2 things at once. You can't be thinking about the pain in your back and hot fudge sundaes at the same time. Thus, you can't be thinking about all your life's problems while thinking about Jesus. Paul knew this. So, he filled his mind with Jesus Christ.

We see this most clearly in the number of times Paul refers to Jesus. The name Christ or Jesus Christ occurs 17 times in ch1 alone, that's more than once every 2 verses? Paul speaks of joy many times but that theme is greatly overshadowed by the number of references to Jesus. Paul longed to know Jesus, and he longed to know Him well. He had achieved many things humanly speaking but he counted all these things as garbage compared to the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord (3:8).

How we need to learn this. Christians were meant to be filled with love, joy and peace—all the virtues that are the result of Christ living within the believer. Maybe you think this is only an ideal, something possible for Paul but not you. But, if we're able to fill our minds with material things; then we can also fill our minds with Christ. We should be so preoccupied with Christ that we see Him in everything—in nature, in our relationships, in our triumphs and in our sorrows. To be filled with Christ is the secret of real Christian living. It's the secret of true happiness.

Of course, while Philippians may reveal the mind of Paul; more importantly, it is an open door into the mind of Christ. It tells us what His thought processes were as He came to earth and it tells us why He came. Few passages in the Bible give us a comparable picture. There's nothing like this in the great doctrinal books. They teach the meaning of Jesus' coming and the significance of His life, ministry, death and resurrection. But they don't tell us much about the working of His mind. These insights aren't given in the Gospels either; they are a record of what Jesus said and did but almost never record His thoughts.

But, the account in Philippians is personal (2:6-8). It tells us that Christ's coming to earth involved 2 things: humility and obedience. Humility consists of 2 parts: 1) giving up what we have; and 2) receiving something inferior. Many of us only give up something if we think we'll get something better in return. Most of us don't give up anything at all. We hoard things and constantly try to add to what we have. Paul tells us that Jesus did neither.

Instead of hoarding what rightfully belonged to Him, Jesus laid it all aside—power, honor; even His omniscience—and took the form of a man.

Paul also says that Christ's emptying Himself also involved obedience. Christ died in obedience to the wishes of the Father. Did you ever consider that it was obedience that carried Jesus to the cross? It was love that did it, sure, but it was also obedience, an obedience that didn't always come easily, as His struggle in Gethsemane shows. Jesus was obedient even to the cross and for this God exalted Him to the highest place (2:9).

Since Philippians reveals the mind of Paul and gives insight into the mind of Christ, it'd be helpful if it would speak to the mind of the believer. Does it? It does; in 2:5. The mind of Christ and that of the Christian should be the same! Jesus is the pattern; we should be like Him. For Jesus, that meant emptying Himself in obedience to God the Father. For us it means centering our lives on Christ.

Let me illustrate this from astronomy. For thousands of years, people believed that the moon, sun, planets and all the stars revolved around the earth (geo-centric). This is known as the Ptolemaic system because it was codified by Ptolemy. It was a pretty good system. It could forecast the hours of sunrise and sunset; chart the movements of the planets. It was able to do a lot of things but it had some problems. The biggest problem it had was it was completely wrong. As we all know, the sun is the center of the solar system, not the earth. Thus, it's inevitable that this system would have some defects. First, it wasn't always accurate in charting the position of the planets. Under the strain of constant corrections for these movements, the system eventually broke down. Also, it didn't allow for progress. New discoveries always went against it. It was only under the Copernicus system that Newton's theories of gravity could be developed and the flight of spaceships beyond the earth is possible.

How does this apply to us? Each of us lives in a spiritual solar system that is as fixed as the one that fills our heavens. Jesus Christ is the center of this system; but many people believe that they are the center of the system. As far as they can tell, the system works pretty well. They serve themselves and generally get what they desire. If they work hard enough for a home, they'll get it, if circumstances are with them. If they work hard enough at their job and have ability, they can count on a certain measure of success.

But this human-centered system has defects, just as the Ptolemaic system of astronomy had. First, it's not quite accurate. It predicts a certain measure of success, but it doesn't account for failure or for the inevitable letdown when the person actually gets the thing for which he has been working. Also, the system of the natural man doesn't allow for progress. Human beings are severely limited and any system that makes us the center of life will also be limited.

It's not that way for Christians, for those who see things the way God wants everyone to see them. Before God, humanity is abased and Christ is exalted. Christ is the center of the system, the center of the spiritual universe. The Bible teaches us that in this system there is infinite progress, for it's based on reality and on the nature of an infinite God. Do you know where you stand before God? Will you accept Christ's rightful place within this system?

1 – Paul begins his letter as any ancient writer would. He identifies himself, and those who are with him, for the benefit of the reader. He then identifies those who are the intended recipients of the letter. But Paul is more than an ancient writer. He's also a Christian and a theologian. Thus, when he writes these things, he writes them not as mere civilities but to communicate Christian truth and to teach the deepest and most significant Christian relationships.

When Paul introduces himself and Timothy as servants of Christ Jesus, he uses a word that literally means a slave. Paul is saying that he was Christ's slave and that he wished to serve Jesus as any obedient servant serves his master. No doubt he was implying that what was true of himself should also be true for every Christian. He taught in **1 Cor 6:20** that we are not our own; we're bought at a price so; we're to glorify God in our body and in our spirit which belong to God.

It's a spiritual law that no one can become a servant of Jesus Christ until they first realize that by nature they are a slave to sin. In ancient times there were 3 ways a person could become a slave. 1) They could become a slave by conquest, by being on the losing side of a war. 2) They could become a slave by birth. Any child born of slaves automatically became a slave as well. 3) They could become a slave because of debt. Many poor people sold

their children into slavery in order to pay a debt. This was so common, in fact, that the Jewish people even had a law to lessen the forces of custom. Every fifty years, in the year of Jubilee, those who had become slaves because of debt were automatically set free ([Lev 25](#)).

Against this historical background, it's interesting that the Bible teaches that all men have become slaves to sin in the same ways. The Bible teaches that humans are born in sin. David writes, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" ([Ps 51:5](#)). This teaches that there was never a moment of his life when David was not a sinner, and there was never a part of him that was free from the contamination of sin. The Bible also says that we are slaves by conquest. Sin rules over us, so that we can't do the things we know we should. So, David prays for deliverance from willful sins, asking that they not "have dominion" (rule) over him ([Ps 19:13](#)). Solomon speaks of the sinner being bound by the cords of his sin ([Prov 5:22](#)). Then, too, we are sinners by debt. This is the reason Paul speaks of the wages of sin in [Rom 6:23](#); telling us that the account can only be paid by death.

Paul knew that he'd been a slave to sin in each of these 3 ways and every other person must also realize the same thing is true about them in some form before they can ever hope to experience God's deliverance. A person must know that he's sick before he'll go to the doctor. Similarly, a person must know that he's enslaved spiritually before he'll ever turn to the One who alone can set him free.

Just as there were several ways of becoming a slave in ancient times, so there were several ways of becoming free from slavery. A person could earn their freedom; they could buy it or freedom could be given to them by someone who was able to pay the price of their redemption. 3 ways! But although there were 3 ways of becoming free from slavery in ancient times, in spiritual terms there is only one way of deliverance—to be bought by the One who alone can pay sin's price. No one will ever buy their own salvation. There's not enough money in the world! No one will ever earn their salvation. We can do nothing to merit God's grace. But, what we can't earn and can't buy, God will freely give to us on the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The Bible does say that the wages of sin is death, but it also teaches that Jesus paid the required price for our sins on Calvary. It declares, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" ([Rom](#)

8:1). This is a great deliverance, and Paul knew it personally.

Someone who hasn't experienced this redemption from sin may argue that it's merely an exchange of slavery from one master to another. That's a gross misrepresentation. No Christian would ever compare the 2 except in terms of a total allegiance. It's true that we've been slaves to sin, as all are, and that we're now servants of Christ. But the new service isn't at all like the old. It's a bondage of love and gratitude, a relationship comparable to marriage. If you are married, you know you're not autonomous in marriage to do anything you want—to marry another, to leave the home, abandon the spouse. But you are free—free to serve, free to give, free to love your family. It's the same with Christ's rule over us; His rule over you. He's your Lord; you are His bride. He is the master; you are His to do His bidding. This will never be slavery. It's the only way to true joy, peace and genuine spiritual satisfaction.

Before a person can have the mind of Christ, before they can ever have Jesus as the rightful and only acceptable center of their life, they must first accept Him as their Savior. They must acknowledge their need of Him, recognize that they are spiritually bankrupt, lacking anything that would merit God's love and grace; possessing everything that would gender His judgment and wrath. Paul tells us in Ephesians that we are "by nature, children of wrath." There is no way to spin that in a positive way. We are naturally opposed to God so we should naturally expect to feel His wrath. That's what we have earned, that's what we are owed; that's what we have coming to us.

But that's not what God's wants for us. He desires to extend forgiveness for our sins; to exchange guilt for grace; judgment for love. And He is able to do this because of the price that was paid for our sins on the cross by His Son Jesus. Now, He offers us salvation; not because we earned it, not because we can afford to buy it – He offers it as a gift and the only way to appropriate a gift; the only way to make a gift your own is to reach out and take the gift that is offered from the hand of the One who is offering it. The only way to make God's forgiveness of sin effective in your own life is to recognize you need it and then invite Jesus into your life as your Savior and Lord. 😊