

# Contagious Joy

## **Part 1 – Looking in the Spiritual Mirror**

Philippians 1:1-2

March 1, 2009

*Today we embark on a journey for joy. It is a quest to see what the Bible has to say about genuine and contagious joy! These 104 verses offer authentic reasons to be joyful, thankful, and contented. We will explore the book of Philippians as our primary text for the next several weeks. Let's get acquainted with this wonderful book and at the same time take a quick look into the mirror of our own lives.*

### **I. The Background**

#### **A. Who... The author is Paul**

1. Singular pronouns in the remainder of the book indicate that Timothy was included in the salutation but not a co writer, though prominently mentioned in the letter. He may have served as his secretary as Paul wrote this letter (cf. 2 Thess. 3:17). The Philippians knew him since he had been with Paul when Paul had founded the church in Philippi (Acts 16:1-12) and on subsequent occasions (Acts 19:22; 20:3-6).
2. Paul claimed to have written it (Phil. 1:1), and the references to his acquaintances, events in his life, and his way of thinking all point to him as the writer.
3. Paul's personal references in 1:12, 2:19; 4:2 indicates that Paul was indeed the writer.
4. Paul's authorship of this letter is also supported by the testimony of early "church fathers" such as Polycarp and Irenaeus.

5. No serious question about the Pauline authorship of this epistle arose until the nineteenth century.

## B. **When... The date it was written**

1. 61-62 AD. It is one of his 4 prison epistles (**1:7, 13, 17**; cf. Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon).
2. This is approximately 20 years after the resurrection and 10 years after the founding of the church.

## C. **Where...it was written: In Rome**

1. References to the palace guard (1:13) and Caesar's household (4:22) have led most interpreters to conclude that Paul wrote from Rome rather than from Caesarea (cf. 1:19-24; 2:24).
2. He was in a Roman prison awaiting possible execution. He is in there for at least 2 years. He had been charged in Jerusalem and had appealed to Caesar as a Roman citizen. Note: Nero is the emperor of Rome at the time! What a potentially unhappy future awaits the Christians of that day!
3. He was under house arrest chained to a Roman soldier 24 hours a day, yet people could visit him freely. (Like Nelson Mandela)
4. He dreamed of preaching in Rome! **He came to Rome as a prisoner not a preacher.** Who do you think was the actual prisoner? (1:13)
5. **APP: Do you have a dream for your life? Did you wish a different circumstance?**

## D. **To Whom... The Church of Philippi**

1. He loved them deeply. One of only 2 churches (the other was Thessalonica) where he didn't say he was an apostle... didn't need to. He didn't have to declare "apostolic authority" to make his point!

2. Paul had founded the church around AD 52 during his second missionary journey. Paul's intention was to go to a place called Bithynia. But the Lord didn't want him to go there; in fact the Spirit of Jesus stopped Paul entering Bithynia and led him to go to a place called Troas. When he was in Troas, asleep one night, God gave to him a vision. He saw a Macedonian man standing before him, and that man was calling to Saul -Paul - 'Come over and help us, come over and help us'. In obedience that vision Paul and Silas, and Timothy and Luke, set sail to Macedonia, they travelled into Philippi. Philippi was the first town in which Paul preached after he crossed the Aegean Sea from Troas and entered Europe and subsequently started a church with his converts.
  - **Lydia** (Acts 16:13-15) a Gentile businesswoman from Thyatira in the province of Asia Minor. The church evidently met in Lydia's home at first (Acts 16:15).
  - **Philippian jailor** (Acts 16:25-34)
  - It was the first church in Europe, people converted from different backgrounds, different traditions, even different cultures.
3. The letter is primarily written to the Gentiles. Note:
  - There is no mention of a synagogue.
  - Not one quotation from the OT
4. As Paul left Macedonia, the church at Philippi became a significant source of support (4:15-16; 2 Cor. 11:9). Paul visited the church at Philippi again on his third missionary journey (Ac 20:3, 6) AD 57.
5. **The City:** Named (356 BC) after Philip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. It was a major city of Macedonia the road from Rome to Asia known as the Egnatian Way and brought much commerce and many travelers to Philippi.

6. It was the site of a famous battle in 42 B.C. in which Antony and Octavius defeated Brutus and Cassius. In 30 B.C., Octavian made the town a Roman colony where retired soldiers could live and enjoy the full privileges of Roman citizenship (to which Paul may have alluded in **3:20**).

## E. Why... The occasion of the writing

1. It is a **thank you letter** to the Philippian believers for sending Epaphroditus (who nearly lost his life!) to give this monetary gift to him while in jail in Rome (**4:10, 18**).
2. Paul uses this occasion not only to thank them, but to **comfort them** concerning his situation as a prisoner for Jesus Christ (**1:12-14**).
3. He also writes of **his plans** to send Timothy soon (**2:19-24**), and why he considered it necessary to send Epaphroditus back to them (**2:25-30**).
  - Paul built up Epaphroditus in the eyes of his readers (which suggests that they may not have appreciated him adequately for some reason)
4. There may have also been a **problem** at Philippi involving two women, for Paul has a few words to say concerning them (**4:2-3**).

## II. The Basics

### A. Is there a central message or theme?

1. Live life with Contagious Joy regardless of your present circumstances!
  - 7 times the word "joy" (chara) is found (**1:4, 25; 2:2, 17, 18, 29; 4:1**) ...59 times total in NT.
  - The verb "to rejoice" (chairein) occurs 9 times (twice in **1:18; 4:4**; once in **2:17, 18, 28; 3:1; 4:10**). ...96 times in NT!
  - Often been called Paul's "hymn of joy".

- Key Verse: "REJOICE IN THE LORD!" (4:4)
2. You can't control your circumstances. Is your "happiness" dependent on your circumstances? Are you joyful in spite of or because of?
  3. We can complain about our job, the economy, our president, our church, your marriage, your kids, your health. Where does it stop?
  4. Are you in a search for happiness? Solomon was! After he filled his life with all those pleasures, he wasn't satisfied. He wasn't happy. Why? His dependence was on external things that produce temporary happiness vs. an internal joy which can only be fueled by God!
  5. We choose joy!
- B. **The Structure: There is joy and contentment in...**
1. **Living for Christ** (1:21) He is my **Life**
    - He is not saying he is fed up with the circumstances of life.
    - Either is a good thing!
  2. **Learning from Christ** (2:5) He is my **Example**
    - Give up your rights...Become a servant!
    - Would some of your close friends, ministry associates, and church members recognize you as a servant? If they were asked to list your personality traits, would "servant-hood" be on the list?
  3. **Knowing Christ** (3:8) He is my **Goal**
    - He is my confidence and motivating power (3:10)
  4. **Peace in Christ** (4:7) He is my **Sufficiency**
    - Strength (4:13)

Summary: Out of 104 verses Jesus Christ is mentioned 51 times. This book exalts God first and foremost!

### C. How is it unique?

1. It is the most personal of all his letters. This may be his “favorite” church or most beloved. No rebuke or correction (compare I Cor.). His warnings are of a precautionary nature.
2. No other letter does he specifically address the overseers and deacons in the salutation. Perhaps it is because of the monetary gift he received from them via Epaphroditus and he is demonstrating organizational accountability accordingly.
3. This is the only place in the New Testament except 1 Timothy 3 where a New Testament writer mentioned both elders and deacons together as the leaders of the church.
4. There are no major “problem” passages. Very little “theology” compared to other epistles. He tends to use the word “for” when he is ready to argue theologically!
5. Words joy or rejoice are found in every chapter.
6. It is the most positive of all Paul’s letters, yet written when he was chained to a Roman guard.
7. From the conversion of Lydia and references in the epistle itself (4:2-3), it is evident that a number of women played a significant role in the growth of the church.

### III. Who are God’s Saints? v.1

- A. Is it someone who has been dead for years and we “glorify”?  
Used 229 times in NT.
- B. Lit: “Holy, set apart”.
- C. It is someone who is godly, selfless servant of God who is intimately acquainted with the savior Jesus Christ.

- D. *This title reflects the Christian's present justified standing before God though not necessarily his or her present sanctified standing in the sight of other people.* (Constable, p.3)

#### IV. The Salutation v.2

- A. **Grace** refers to God's unmerited favor and divine enablement. *Charis* (grace) is a variation on the word usually used in Greek salutations, namely, *chairein* meaning "greetings."
- B. **Peace** is the cessation of hostilities and the inner tranquility that are the result of God's grace. *Shalom* (peace) was the traditional Jewish greeting that meant the full measure of divine blessing (cf. Num. 6:24-26).

#### V. Looking in the Spiritual Mirror

Are you a...

A. **Slave (Bond servant)**

1. He says he is a bondservant (doulos) or slave. It was a favorite title for early Christian leaders. Stresses commitment to Lordship.
2. It's an allusion to Exodus 21 of the servant who's given his emancipation and is allowed to go free, but he loves his master so much that he knows that he's better off with his master. He stays with his master, and his master puts him up against a post and puts an awl through his ear and pierces him, and he becomes a devotee - not of duty, but of love toward his master.
3. APP: Who is the real master of your life?

B. **Saint**

1. Are you set apart? Is there a radical commitment to holiness in your life?

C. **Sightseer (Tourist)**

1. A sightseer, a vacationer, a pleasure seeker. He is on vacation...not at work. He casually looks on but is not really engaged!
2. Are you engaged? Are we sold out?

**Conclusion: As D. A. Carson writes:**

I would like to buy about three dollars worth of gospel, please. Not too much – just enough to make me happy, but not so much that I get addicted. I don't want so much gospel that I learn to really hate covetousness and lust. I certainly don't want so much that I start to love my enemies, cherish self-denial, and contemplate missionary service in some alien culture. I want ecstasy, not repentance; I want transcendence, not transformation. I would like to be cherished by some nice, forgiving, broad-minded people, but I myself don't want to love those from different races – especially if they smell. I would like enough gospel to make my family secure and my children well behaved, but not so much that I find my ambitions redirected or my giving too greatly enlarged. I would like about three dollars worth of gospel, please. D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians*; Baker Books, 1996, 2002; p. 12-13.

**Table Talk Questions:**

1. Why is it that most people are not experiencing real joy and contentment?
2. Read through Chapter 1 this week. Look for the big idea for chapter 1. What is it?
3. How is our church similar to the church in Philippi?
4. How have you demonstrated “servanthood” in your marriage, in your family, and in your church this week?
5. In what ways are you like a “saint”? Or not... 😊
6. As you looked in the spiritual mirror of your life, what did you find?