

Philippians Ch 1 Vs 1-2

(Introduction to Philippians)

(read the 1st 2 vs) We really won't get into the book today but we'll consider it in an overview.

Written around 62 A.D. Philippians along with Eph, Colossians, and Philemon, was written by Paul the apostle from prison, and so these are often referred to as "prison epistles". and What's staggering about that fact is that the overwhelming emphasis in the book of Phil is that of joy and Paul encouraging them concerning joy and peace from a position that would for all intents and purposes be void of both of those things. I mean he's at this point seemingly in the midst of his trial before Nero awaiting the verdict, not knowing at this point if because of the gospel he's going to live or die, his very life weighing in the balance and yet his encouragement to the Philippian church is joy and peace. How in the world could he maintain such serenity, such composure and peace in the light of such trying circumstances?

We'll talk a little bit about that in a minute; but if you'll notice when Paul starts out this epistle, he doesn't really begin it as he did the majority of his letters. Normally he would remind the readers of his apostolic authority prior to his engaging them concerning doctrinal issues because there were some things that were out of order and it was necessary that they be reminded that he wasn't coming to them as just some guy with an opinion that he thought was better than theirs therefore they needed to do things his way. But rather he was instructing them as an apostle (not from man, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father Who raised Him from the dead). and Therefore it was critical to their spiritual well being that they heed his instruction and correction as one who had been ordained and commissioned of God to help establish the foundation of the church Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. But with the letter to the Philippians there was really no doctrinal error to correct, there was apparently some minor division that he addresses, but this letter is more of the type that's from one dear friend to another. Really a thank you more or less for how they had and were continuing to support him both spiritually and financially partnering with him in the gospel and the propulsion of it, it would seem as though the Philippian church was probably one of the closest to Paul the apostle and you can read of the birth of it in the book of Acts ch 16.

It would seem as though Paul was wanting to widen his circle of missionary activity a bit in the area of Galatia and as you read the book of Acts you find that he attempted to go south into Asia but the Holy Spirit forbade them to go. and So he turned direction and decided to head north into Bithynia but once again the Spirit closed the door and we read in vs 7 of ch 16 that they were not permitted by the Spirit to head that direction. So he can't go south, he can't go north, he'd come from the east and so through the exercise of sharp discernment he headed west down to Troas which was as far as he could go with out getting into a boat and there he waited for the direction of the Spirit.

Paul was in that hurry up and wait predicament that I found to be so prevalent in Nigeria, everyone's in a hurry, but you always have to wait, Paul wanted to get somewhere but he had to wait. and I think there's a lesson even in that for us, so many times we feel as though God needs to give us immediate direction but God will often cause us to wait, so that He might lead us at exactly the right time to exactly the right place. Because God sees the big picture and He knows what's going on where He's sending you and He knows exactly the right time to plant you there so that His work might be the most effective it can be. and I've found that God's timing is always perfect (Tell Memphis airport story if you want concerning how God moved you through the line ahead of everyone about 5 min before flight time and got everyone seats) and so as Paul was waiting upon the Lord there in Troas and praying about what direction to take, it was there that he had the vision of a man in Macedonia who was pleading with him to come and help them. and So they hopped on a boat and sailed over to Europe and his 1st stop was in Philippi.

What Paul found when he got there was a small group of women that met there by the riverside every Saturday for prayer, we read in vs 13 of Acts 16 *“And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.”* and I would venture to say that it was that prayer meeting that was responsible for bringing Paul the apostle over to Europe. Now there were probably people in that city who considered that little prayer meeting down by the river a waste of time that brought very little if any profit and yet in reality it happened to be responsible for what would probably be the greatest crossing that ever took place. Never underestimate the power of prayer, these ladies prayed and prayed and prayed, and look how God honored their diligence and their commitment to seeking Him and His will for them and their community in prayer, He sent them Paul the apostle to minister to them and start a church right there that would become one of the dearest churches in the life of the apostle, through which God would do a great work.

Now, the very fact that they were meeting down by the river would indicate that there really wasn't a very prominent Jewish influence in the city (as a matter of fact it was a Roman colony, which means it was set up like a miniature Rome) but wherever in a community they had as little as 10 adult Jewish males they had the obligation to build a synagogue. But if there weren't 10 they generally would meet either out by a river or somewhere that was very scenic, and so there weren't many Jews in Philippi and so Paul went down by the river and met with the women and shared Christ with them and many responded, the 1st of which was a woman named Lydia. Next a woman who was demon possessed who made her masters a lot of money through fortune telling was delivered by Paul and then when they couldn't make anymore money off of her, they dragged Paul and Silas into the market place brought charges against them so that the multitudes rose up against them and read that the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded that they be beaten with rods.

We read again in ch 16 of the book of Acts vs 23-24, "*And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.*" Now how do you like that, here we are just trying to serve the Lord, we know we're in His will, we received a vision that we were to be here and now as a result of our obedience we've been beaten, thrown into the inner prison and placed in stocks, oh happy day. Now these aren't the ingredients that make for a happy camper, how would you respond to that, you're trying to serve the Lord, you're being obedient to what He's placed before you and seemingly instead of reaping some huge harvest things just went from bad (being beaten with rods) to worse (being thrown in prison and fastened in stocks.) Now if that happened today we might be prone to chastise that person, tell them that they must've somehow gotten out of God's will to wind up in such a predicament, and if we were in that predicament we just might be a bit frustrated, and be tempted to give up hope as we sat there in despair thinking ok God what now, I thought you said you'd never leave me nor forsake me, I really don't see how You're here in this. But once again that's not the way that Paul responded, because he may not have known what the future held, but he knew who held the future, and he didn't know it but God had a plan to bring salvation to a certain jailor that Paul otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity to share with if things hadn't gone just as they had. (Let's look at the book of Acts ch 16 Vs 25-27)

Vs 27

You see in that day if you were a Roman guard and you had had prisoners entrusted to you and they escaped, you were going to be killed. They considered it your life for theirs, and we see that in ch 12 of the book of Acts when Peter was freed by an angel from prison, in vs 19 we read, "*But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death.*" and You remember that that's why the soldiers that guarded Jesus' tomb were so freaked out when He wasn't there any longer, because they knew that they would be put to death if they couldn't produce a body. and So we read in Matt 28:11-14 that, "*behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, 'Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' 'And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure.'*" In other words we'll buy off the governor so that you won't be killed as long as you tell him what we say and lie about what happened and so that's exactly what they did.

So here in the book of Acts Paul and Silas are praising God, and there's this massive earthquake by which God sets them free, (and by the way I don't know what you feel bound by this morning, but I encourage you; don't focus on that but rather praise God, because He's worthy and He'll begin to shake things up and set you free). But here sets this guard, with all the doors open in the middle of the night and he knows that as soon as word gets back to the magistrates he's going to be executed and so rather than face the humiliation he just gets ready to kill himself.

Vs28-30

You've got to love the sovereignty of God, the events were orchestrated just so, so that this man might be ripened for the harvest and when he came to the end of himself, what do you know, there was a man of God that just happened to be there to share the hope of eternal life through Christ Jesus so that he and his whole house might be saved and that's exactly what happened. Now had Paul been all whining and griping and in the flesh rather than in the Spirit, who knows, he may've missed the whole divine appointment and when the doors flew open he may've just tucked tail and ran, or had he not been praising God, the doors may've remained shut and he would've missed the opportunity to lead that guard to Christ.

I wonder how many doors never open to us because we're too consumed and self-centered concerning circumstances rather than looking for how it is that God wants to utilize this opportunity to His glory. Man I tell you opportunities like this are rare, but they do happen, there was a time when I didn't think it could ever happen this easy until it happened to me. One time I was walking into the coffee house and about the time I reached for the door handle this lady came busting out and said the other day you were talking to me about being saved, how do I do that, what do I have to do to be saved. It blew my mind, now you don't have to wonder if you're in God's will at that point. I have no doubt that that was a divine appointment, and so we stepped off the porch over by the side of the coffee house and I led her right straight to Jesus, this man says "Sirs, what must I do to be saved"

Vs31-34

So through these various chaining of events the Philippian church was born and now Paul is writing to them, again to thank them for sending him a gift while once again he's currently in prison. and As I mentioned earlier the emphasis being that of joy, no less than 18 times in this small book does Paul mention words like joy, or gladness or rejoicing when all the while, circumstantially speaking Paul is in no position to rejoice. He doesn't know if he'll live or die, keep his head or lose it, he was chained to a Roman soldier, not permitted to preach in public, you see he had wanted to go to Rome as a preacher but instead he went as a prisoner. Yet in spite of his danger and discomfort Paul overflowed with Joy.

Jesus (the bible says) was a Man of sorrows that was acquainted with grief, and yet He possessed a deep inner joy that went beyond anything this world has to offer. I mean think about it, He was facing death by means of the cross, when He said to His disciples, "*These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.*" Fullness of joy, that's the privilege that Jesus offers to all who trust in Him, and yet so few believers actually take advantage of that privilege that's been extended to them. and As Warren Wiersbe so eloquently articulates it instead, "They live under a cloud of disappointment when they could be walking in the sunshine of joy."

Why, what is it that's robbed them of their joy? It's important that we examine this issue because according to Neh 8:10 the joy of the Lord is your strength. So if your joy is taken, the implication is that you'll be a weak and anemic sheep that becomes easy prey to the roaring lion who's roaming around seeking whom he may devour. and That's one of the things that's so powerful about the book of Philippians, it deals with the joy of the Lord and those things that can rob you of your joy.

In these 4 ch Paul deals with 4 separate things that have the propensity to rob you of your joy and how it is that we are to overcome these things that our joy in the Lord might remain and be full. and The secret of the joy of the Lord abiding in you is found in another word that is often repeated in this book, and it's one simple word, "mind". Paul makes reference to the mind in this short epistle through words like "mind" "minded" "think" or "remember" some 16 times. The bible says that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds Prov 23:7 says that as one "thinks" in his heart so he is. In other words you have the right to exercise your free will concerning the attitude that you're going to take concerning any given situation. The bible says that the "*The preparations of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.*"

You see, the preparations of heart belong to you, you can choose to have a poor attitude or a proper attitude, and so the secret to Christian joy is found in the way that the believer thinks, or his attitudes. and As long as you keep the eternal and divine perspective you'll have peace knowing that all things are working together for your eternal best interest because you love God and have been called according to His purposes for your life. But if you choose to view your circumstances through the eyes of the flesh, then your attitude will reflect that and your joy will evaporate. Now, don't get me wrong the book of Philippians is not some shallow self-help manual, but rather it's solid biblical counsel that explains the mind that the believer has to have if he's going to experience Christian joy in a world that's filled with trouble. Now, what are the 4 things that Paul addresses in these 4 chapters what are the "thieves" that seek to rob us of our joy.

#1 We've briefly mentioned- circumstances. I think that most of us would confess that as long as things are "going our way" we feel a lot happier and many of us are much easier to live with. Yet in reality there are very few (I emphasize *very few*) circumstances that transpire in our lives that we actually have any control over. You can't control the traffic, or the weather, you can't control the things that other people say to you or about you or the things that they do. One poet wrote "Men are the sport of circumstances" and if you allow your circumstances to dictate your attitude in life, odds are you'll be pretty miserable most of the time. and Yet we see an example here in Paul in what many of us would consider some of the worst of circumstances, writing a letter that's just saturated, and inundated with joy. What else can rob us of joy? People (that's #2) people have at one time or another in all of our lives stolen our joy, either through the things that maybe they've said, or have done. and No doubt each of us have had our part in contributing to robbing another at times, it goes both ways.

But there's no getting around people, we have to live with them, work with them and seek by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit to be a witness to them. Jesus said that you are the light of the world and no one having lit a lamp and puts it under a basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. and He said, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*" But how can your light shine before men if you're always avoiding people and isolating yourself from people because they're always getting on your nerves? You see it's important that we learn to interact with people in a way that glorifies the Lord and draws others to Himself through the work that He's doing in your life. (and We'll address how these things are remedied briefly in a minute)

What else can rob our joy (the things of this world) Jesus said that the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches entering into our hearts choke the word, and we become unfruitful. and Yet the fruit of the Spirit is Love, and what, **joy**, the story is told of Ab Lincoln walking down the street with his 2 sons, who were crying and whining and fighting. A friend asked, "what's the matter with the boys?" Lincoln replied, "the same thing that's wrong with the whole world, I have 3 walnuts and each of the boys wants 2!" Most people today think that joy comes from the things that they own, "boy if I just had *that* then I'd be happy," and so they work and strive to get it and they get it and it makes them happy for a short while then the novelty of it wears off. Then it's, "boy if I just had *that* then I'd be happy" in reality the things that we so often think will bring us true happiness are the very things that rob us of the only kind of joy that really lasts and has eternal value. What did Jesus say? Luke 12:15 "*Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.*"

In the sermon on the Mt Jesus warned against laying up for yourselves treasures on earth, why, because they're deceiving, they won't last and they never satisfy, and in Luke ch 12 He issued a stern warning and rebuke to the individual who lays up treasures for himself and isn't rich toward God. and Then finally, and probably the worst thief of them all #4; worry. Countless thousands have been robbed of peace and joy because of worry, and one of the tragedies concerning worry is that it can have physical ramifications as well, and even though you can buy medicine that removes the symptoms, it can't remove the cause. Again I quote from Wiersbe who said, "You can purchase "sleep" at the drug store, but you cannot purchase "rest"." That's why Jesus said, come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. He said, "*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*"

Paul (at the time he wrote this letter) had plenty of reasons to be worried, a political prisoner facing possible execution, no mission board supporting him, no legal aid, defending him, but Paul didn't worry about it, instead he wrote a letter that's full of joy and peace that instructs others on how to quit worrying. Jesus told us not to worry and so if you want to get blunt about it, worry is a sin, it's directly disobeying Jesus' command to not worry, what is worry, it's a display of a lack of trust in God, and His ability to take care of us.

Now many times we get ourselves in situations that we want to blame God for, but even still, God is bigger than our mistakes and we're to trust in Him. So, circumstances, people, things and worry, these are the things that Paul addresses in this letter that have the propensity to rob our joy. So how are we to deter or to take victory over these things and stand in the joy that is rightfully ours in Christ?

It goes back to that 1 word that we brought up a few minutes ago, by allowing the Holy Spirit to cultivate in us the right type or frame of mind, the mind of Christ. Regarding our circumstances the answer lies in singleness of mind, James tells us that the "double-minded" man is unstable in all his ways. He's tossed to and fro, and back and forth based upon the various circumstances that he's confronted with. When he's in this situation he responds this way, when he's in that situation he responds that way, there's no stability or consistency, and the reason so many Christians are upset by their circumstances is because they're not really single minded. In the 1st ch of this book Paul expresses his single attitude of heart and mind in regards to his devotion to Christ in the vs that's really the key vs of the 1st ch vs 21, look at what he says.

Vs21

In this 1st ch Paul speaks of the reality of his circumstances, life and death, but the reason that his circumstances don't dictate whether or not he has joy is because he's not living for his circumstances, he's living for Jesus Christ He has singleness of mind, what does he say in ch 3? He says, "*but **one** thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*" As he told the Ephesians he wasn't a prisoner of Rome he was a prisoner of Christ, in vs 17 of ch 1 in this book he realizes that in reality he's not facing a civil trial but rather he has an appointment to defend the gospel. You might say the key is not to look at Christ through your circumstances but rather to look at your circumstances through Christ, because that (my friends) will change everything. It's at that point that your circumstances stop working *against* you and start working *for* you. So #1 is dealt with in ch 1, circumstances necessitate singleness of mind, #2 is dealt with in ch 2, people necessitate a submissive mind, the key vs being vs 3 of ch 2 (read)

Vs3

The reason (often times) that people get on our nerves if you'll consider it honestly is usually because something isn't going the way we want it to go. We want quiet they're being noisy, we want to rest they won't stop talking, we want to drive faster, they want to go 20 mph under the speed limit. But we want what we want, we want our wants to go before others, but if you'll notice the way this is beginning to unfold in ch 1 Paul put Jesus 1st, in ch 2 he puts others 2nd, that leaves himself last. You see, placing others 1st isn't to say that they are somehow superior to you, but simply they have a need that takes priority over yours and you're willing to recognize that and submit yourself to the needs of others 1st.

If you're all the time placing yourself 1st and others are doing the same, there's going to be some pretty major locking of the horns. But if you desire to have joy, really we need to do as the old acronym states, J.O.Y. Jesus 1st, yourself last, and others in between.

The person with the submissive mind doesn't expect others to serve him, he serves others and in ch 2 Paul gives 4 examples of the submissive mind, Jesus Christ, himself, Timothy and Epaphroditus, each one proving out the spiritual truth of the fact that he who seeks to exalt himself will be abased and he who humbles himself will be exalted. So we need a single mind, and a submissive mind, and as it relates to the things of this world, we need a spiritual mind. At least 9 Times in the 3rd ch Paul uses the word "thing" or "things", and he points out that many people set their minds on earthly things, but as believers we're to have our minds on those heavenly things as we eagerly await the return of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ and So the person with the spiritual mind looks at the things of this world from heavens point of view. So many of us want to possess all kinds of "things" only to find in the end that those "things" possess us, we need a spiritual mind. and Finally, we need a Secure mind #4.

What is worry? It's wrong thinking and wrong feeling about circumstances, people and things and so if we possess the 1st 3 (the single mind, submissive mind, and spiritual mind) then worry shouldn't be too much of a problem because we'll have a secure mind. and In Ch 4 Paul reveals to us what it is that guards our hearts and minds keeping them secure and we find it in vs 7 and it's the peace of God. The peace of God is that which guards your heart and your mind and we'll see when we get to ch 4 how we obtain the peace of God as well. But the resources that we have in Christ as found in this epistle are revealed in ch 4 and they are God's peace (Vs1-9), God's power, (Vs 10-13) and God's provision (Vs 14-23). and When we realize our resources, we realize that we need not worry, because we have the peace of God to guard us, and the God of peace to guide us. So there's a lot packed in these 1st 4 ch and I pray that as we study this letter that your life becomes flooded with the the joy of the Lord and the peace of God, having your mind made single, submissive, spiritual and secure in Christ.