

Mount Pisgah A.M.E Church

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Bible Study, Wednesday, November 4, 2015

Survey of the Bible

Lesson 52: Philippians

The Book of Philippians

The book of Philippians is a letter that was written to a group of believers the city of Philippi in the eastern part of the district of the Roman Empire known as Macedonia (modern day northeastern Greece). The letter is basically a “thank you note” for a contribution that the author received from the church, and a message to encourage their joy, their spiritual growth, and their unity. It is clear that the author is incarcerated (Philippians 1:13) and thus it is known as one of the “prison epistles.”

Author

The traditional view is that Paul was the author of Philippians, as is indicated in the first verse. Unlike Ephesians, Philippians displays clearly Paul’s patterns of writing including his writing style, his themes (such as humility and emptying of self, rejoicing, etc.) and several personal references. Thus there is little questioning of Paul’s authorship.

The Times and context of Philippians

Philippi was a city originally known as Krenides (meaning “wells” or “springs.”) In 356 BC King Philip of Macedonia (father of Alexander the Great) took the city and expanded it, and named it after himself. The Romans captured the city in 168 BC, and in 42 BC it was made into a Roman colony. The citizens were regarded as citizens of Rome and given special privileges. Unlike Ephesus or Corinth, Philippi was more of a military city than a commercial one. There were not enough Jews there for a synagogue, as indicated by the fact that when Paul first came there, they celebrated the Sabbath by the river (Acts 16:13).

Paul visited Philippi during his 2nd Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36 - Acts 18:32). He was on his way to Asia Minor when The Holy Spirit hindered his passage and called him to go to Macedonia because there was significant need there, both spiritual and financial. When Paul and Silas came to Philippi in Macedonia, they began sharing the gospel with some women gathered by the river. Among them was Lydia (Acts 16:11-15), who responded in faith to the message and was converted, and her whole family was baptized. While in Philippi Paul and Silas were imprisoned for delivering a fortune telling slave girl from a demonic spirit (thereby taking away her “gift” and profitability). In response to their prison cell praise, God caused an earthquake that released them and eventually led to the conversion of the guard who had incarcerated them (Acts 16:25-33). These conversions were evidently the founding events for the church at Philippi. Paul left there and continued on through Greece (the known as Achaia). He returned to Philippi during his 3rd missionary journey (Acts 20:1; 20:6)

Later, when Paul was imprisoned in Rome the Philippian church heard about it and sent a messenger named Epaphroditus with financial assistance. Epaphroditus almost died of an illness, yet remained with Paul long enough for the Philippians to receive word that he was sick. When he got well, Paul sent him back with this letter.

Paul's first visit to Philippi (Acts 16:12) took place around 51 AD, eleven years before Paul wrote this letter in AD 62. Evidently Paul's life was hanging in the balance as he awaited the verdict of the Imperial Court at Rome.

Overview

Philippians is an epistle of joy and encouragement in the midst of adverse circumstances. Paul freely expresses his fond affection for the Philippians, appreciates their consistent testimony and support, and lovingly urges them to center their actions and thoughts on the pursuit of their relationships with Christ. Even adversity is part of the process of the pursuit of this relationship. Paul also frames the issues of disunity and rivalry as destructive to their testimony of Christ, and tries to instill in them the idea that humility leads to unity, unity leads to generosity, and generosity is an expression of spiritual maturity. Paul tries to frame his own circumstances as something that God is using to advance the gospel. He then points them to Christ and two other examples of the mindset of the believer: Timothy and Epaphroditus. Paul then appeals to the Philippians to KNOW Christ and avoid self-centeredness. Finally Paul appeals to them to walk in the peace of Christ and trust Him to provide for them.

Outline

- I. Paul's Interpretation of His Present Circumstances (1:1-1:30)**
 - A. Greeting (1:1-1:2)
 - B. Thanksgiving and Prayer of blessing (1:3-1:11)
 - C. Paul's Imprisonment (1:12- 1:30)
 1. I Can't Lose: Afflictions Have Promoted the Gospel (1:12-1:18a)
 2. I Can't Lose: Living for You or Dying for Christ (1:18b-1:26)
 3. Walk Worthy in Affliction (1:27-1:30)
- II. Paul's Encouragement to Have The Mind of Christ (2:1-2:18)**
 - A. Exhortation to Unity through Humility (2:1-2:4)
 - B. Christ's Example of Humility (2:5-2:11)
 - C. God is Working Through You (2:12-2:18)
- III. Paul's Examples of Humility (2:19-2:30)**
 - A. Timothy As An Example of Humility Through Faithfulness (2:19-2:24)
 - B. Epaphroditus as an Example of Humility In Spite of Affliction (2:25-2:30)
- IV. Paul's Encouragement Toward The Knowledge of Christ (3:1-3:21)**
 - A. Warning Against Pride and Legalism (3:1-3:6)
 - B. Emphasis on Relationship – Knowing Christ (3:7-3:16)
 - C. Don't be Ruled By Appetites (3:17-3:21)
- V. Paul's Emphasis on the Peace of Christ (4:1-4:9)**
 - A. Stand Firm (4:1)
 - B. Walk In Peace (4:2-4:3)
 - C. Maintain Peace With The Lord (4:4-4:9)
- VI. Giving and Character Development (4:10-4:20)**
 - A. Gifts Demonstrated Their Growth (4:10)
 - B. Paul's Focus Not On His Needs but Their Growth (4:1-4:17)
 - C. God Provides For The Faithful (4:18-4:20)
- VII. Final Greeting (4:21-4:23)**

Some Keys to understanding The Book of Philippians

- The character of Christ is depicted in each chapter of Philippians.
 - In chapter 1, Paul sees Christ as his life (1:21)
 - In chapter 2, Christ is the model of true humility

- In chapter 3, Christ is depicted as the transformer of those who draw near to Him
- In chapter 4, Christ is depicted as Paul's peace and provider
- Central to Philippians is the concept of "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Every chapter resounds with the centrality of the relationship with Jesus as the victory over adversity.
- Paul moves skillfully from the theme of suffering, to submission, to salvation, to sanctification (growth). The goal is to see life as a process of character development.

Some Lessons from Philippians

- God is doing a work in each one of us to develop our CHARACTER. God is able utilize whatever "tools" that God wants to in order to bring God's to completion.
- Even though some people *USE* the church or the ministry to attract attention to themselves, to promote their own agendas or meet their own needs, God is even able to use even this to bring glory and honor to Godself. *They* are the ones who miss out on the great things that God can do in one's life through a REAL, honest relationship with God.
- Humility is a basic prerequisite for unity. There can be no unity unless believers are willing to remove the focus off of their own needs and sacrificially follow the example of Christ.
- Legalism, credentials, or reputation are no substitute for a real, dynamic relationship with Christ – KNOWING Him through identifying with the living experience of Christ
- We must not let anything from our past, or even present needs or "appetites," keep us from pressing toward the goal of being more like Jesus. Don't let momentary frustrations sidetrack your destiny
- Giving and generosity are a means by which one's Christian maturity can be demonstrated.
- God's peace is available for us if we can FOCUS – focus our priorities on Christ and God's will for our lives. FOCUS our minds on what is positive. FOCUS our eyes on examples of godly living and not what's popular.
- All things are possible through the one who gives us strength – IF we are willing to lose ourselves in him.
- God will provide for OUR needs when we faithfully focus on the needs of the kingdom.