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SEARCHING FOR JOY?

Have circumstances robbed you of joy? Does a sense of gladness seem like a distant memory? Do you wonder what secret some people hold for remaining joyful even through difficulty, pain, or loss? Paul's letter to the Philippians contains a surprising answer...

PEOPLE OF JESUS ARE ONE IN JOY THROUGH JESUS

AUTHOR: WHO WROTE IT?

PAUL, THE CHURCH-PLANTER

Numerous tell-tale evidences within the book indicate Paul is the author. He refers to himself as the author, as their spiritual father, and as the one who deeply loves them (see 1:1-2, 12-24; 2:19-24; 3:4-14; 4:10-16).

Bits of narrative information also coincide with what we know about Paul's ministry from Acts and Galatians (e.g. 3:4-14). The vocabulary and writing style also mirror what we see from other Pauline epistles.

Other reputable sources outside of the Bible also cite Paul as the author of this short but poignant letter (e.g. Clement of Rome, ca AD 95; further citations are found in the Church Fathers at Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and across Asia Minor.¹ Therefore, most NT scholars hold to Pauline authorship without dispute.

DATE + ORIGIN

WHEN AND WHERE WAS IT WRITTEN?

Paul's letter to the Philippians was most likely written while he was under house-arrest in Rome. The world traveling church-planter was awaiting trial in "the Supreme City" (as it was known) in about AD 62. Chained to Roman guards in a single, private location does not sound like a pleasant experience (see Acts 28:30-31). The outcome of his trial might result in his release, further imprisonment, or death (1:19-20, 25; 2:17, 24).

Yet Paul is sharing the Gospel, leading members of Caesar's household (4:22) and the Praetorian guard (1:13) to faith in Christ, and *rejoicing in the Lord*. How is this possible? The secret is found in what Paul's *mind* (referred to 10X) is *thinking about* (referred to 5X). His focus is set on something and Someone who is the source of joy... no matter the circumstances.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

WHAT WAS THE OCCASION OF THE LETTER?

This ancient, beautiful letter was written by a church-planter to people near his heart. These believers lived in a small city called Philippi within the Roman province Macedonia. Paul brought the good news of Jesus to these families and the harvest was ripe. Souls were drawn to salvation in Christ.

But after Paul's departure, the fledging church faced death, disputes, and division. During the time of the Roman Empire some 40-45 percent of children aged 14-15 had lost their father.

Aristotle famously said that "most children die before the seventh day" (Historia animalium 588a8). According to one study of Roman life expectancy, it was 21 at birth but doubled to 42 by the age of 5.²

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PURPOSE: WHY WAS IT WRITTEN?

The Philippian believers were facing suffering and opposition from the outside culture and internal strife within the church, therefore, Paul guides them into the rich implications of the Gospel so that their **joy** is renewed and their **unity** restored.

KEY THEME AND PHRASES

Joy, rejoicing, or gladness are found 19 times. "In the Lord" = key phrase that points to the Source of unity and joy.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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Even harsher, the life-expectancy for Christians in the first-century may have been as low as 35 years due to persecution. Death was in their face every day. Multiple funerals may have been held each week of the year.

The Philippians were dealing with disputes by Judaizers from a neighboring village, who were seeking to place Jewish laws on Gentiles as a means of entrance into Christ (Phil. 3:1-3; cf. Acts 16:1-13). A serious division arose between two key leaders, Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2).⁴ Opposition against Christ-followers was on the rise, just as it is today.

However, Paul did not urge these young believers to battle against the culture, but instead to display the attitude of Christ as citizens of the eternal kingdom. Citizens of heaven display their union with Christ through a distinctive DNA of unity, humility, harmony, joy, and gentleness.

THE SAME RINGS TRUE TODAY:

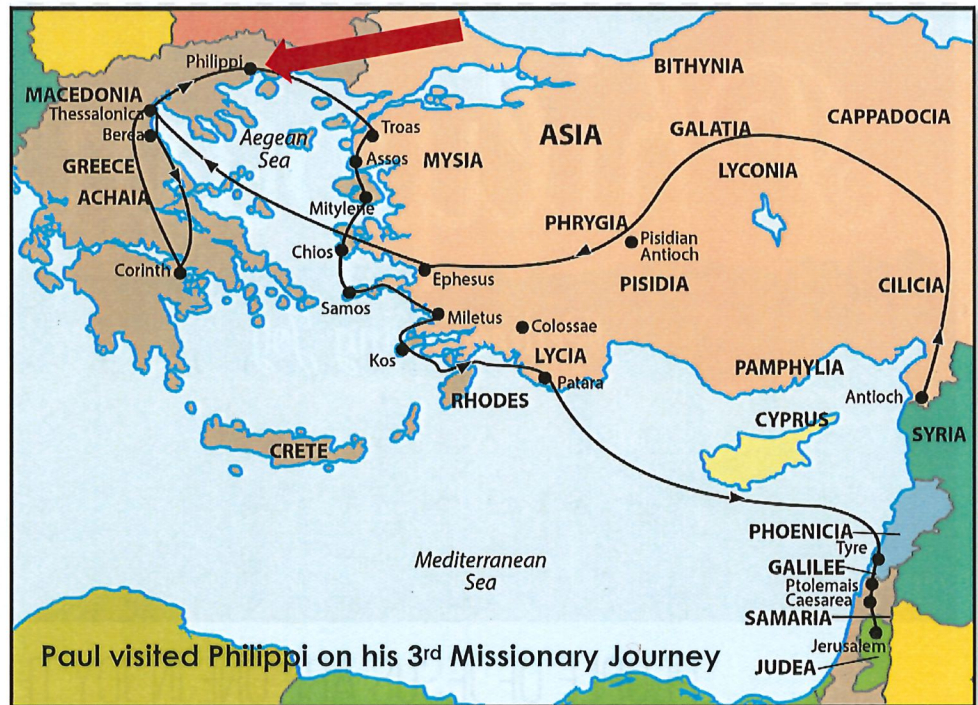
We can show gentleness and respect to everyone because no matter what they may say or do, our relationship and citizenship in Christ remains unchanged.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO SET OUR "MINDS ON EARTHLY THINGS"?

According to Phil. 3:18-29 and related passages, citizens of the earthly kingdom are:

- Driven by greed, gain, and grabbing for themselves
- Workaholic for the goal of gaining a life of ease and opulence
- Governed by sexual lust, sexual addiction, or alcohol and substance abuse
- Applauding indecency, profanity, lewdness, nudity, pornography ("glory in their shame"; Phil. 3:19)
- Angry, hateful, spiteful, and demanding of rights and privileges

The end result? Destruction.



Paul visited Philippi on his 3rd Missionary Journey

WHAT STEALS OUR JOY?³

- 1) Circumstances
- 2) People
- 3) Things
- 4) Worry

What specifics might you add?

A BRIEF BOOK OUTLINE:⁵

- I. **Christ is Life:** Paul's Joy, Mission, and Unity with the Philippians (1:1-30)
- II. **Christ, Humility and Glory:** How to Walk Worthy (2:1-30)
- III. **Christ Over Everything:** The Goal of Life (3:1-21)
- IV. **Christ, Our Peace and Provider** (4:1-23)

ON PRAYER:

"God will either gives us what we ask or give us what we would have asked for if we knew everything He knows."

-- Timothy Keller

"Philippians is a Christian psychology book, based solidly on Bible doctrine . . . the mind of the believer [can] experience Christian joy in a world filled with trouble."

– Warren W. Wiersbe

PERSONAL NOTE SPACE:

FOOTNOTES

¹ Grassmick, John D. *An Introduction to Philippians*, NT103 Unpublished Class Notes, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX, 2008.

² Fitzgerald, J.T. *Orphans in Mediterranean Antiquity and Early Christianity*, Acta Theologica. Vol. 36 suppl. 23 Bloemfontein, 2016.

³ Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Joyful: A New Testament Study – Philippians* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 2005), 15-18.

⁴ Cf. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 556-569.

⁵ Peterman, Gerald. "Philippians" in *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2014), Adapted from 1858.