



Joy

the Backbone of Christian Living

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Lesson No. 1

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Introduction

Beloved of God, let there be no misunderstanding! The book of Philippians, which we are about to embark upon, is one of the richest apostolic epistles. Why is it considered so? Because this book offers a wealth of instruction about so many areas of our spiritual life. It tells us how to tap into God's peace, joy and contentment and even tells the Christian how to enjoy his life during times of suffering. In light of this, I challenge you to stay the course with me and soon you will discover the wealth of riches in this powerful epistle. On one hand, as we dissect its content, it will become vividly clear to you why many Bible scholars generally refer to it as a book of joy. On the other hand, it is my heartfelt prayer that the Truth derived from our study of this book will not only enlarge the reservoir of God's Word in your soul. More importantly, my prayer is that it will impact your life in a way that the Apostle Paul could also say of you, as he said of the Philippians, "*My joy and crown!*" (Philippian 4:1).

With this in mind, we begin by briefly examining the historicity of Philippi. It was a very wealthy city, which assumed its name from *King Philip II of Macedon who seized the city in 358 B.C. from the Thracians. He was the father of Alexander the Great...Later Augustus Caesar made Philippi a Roman Colony.*¹ *The city was located at a gateway between Europe*

¹ New American Standard (1995: Editor's commentary)

*and Asia and was like a miniature Rome, with a large number of Roman citizens.*² In respect to commerce, it was a center for Eastern and Western traders. Additionally, it was located between lands enriched with vast deposits of silver and gold, its main source of prosperity and glamour. To top it off, because of its strategic position, it was a platform suitable for the penetration of the world we now call Europe.

God, being God in His infinite wisdom, chose this famous city as a cornerstone to launch out to the West with His message of hope, the gospel of Jesus Christ. My beloved, it's this message that changed the face of Europe for good! To accomplish the task of bringing Truth to Europe, God interrupted the Apostle Paul's missionary endeavor in Asia Minor and re-routed him to Macedonia by means of a vision. About this, Luke wrote:

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them (Acts 16:6-10 NIV).

Therefore, Paul's missionary journey to Asia Minor came temporarily to a screeching halt by the sovereign work of God the Holy Spirit. *"When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas."* Keep in mind that, the Apostle was a servant who was totally dedicated to God's agenda. He was open to God's leadership, with a heart willing to change course when prompted as noted in Luke's account. Once the Apostle Paul was certain that God needed him to minister at Macedonia, he changed his mission direction at once. Upon arrival at Philippi, as was his custom, he searched for a synagogue in the city with the hope of finding Jewish worshippers. But he was amazed there was no synagogue. However, the Apostle Paul was not discouraged! He knew that there was a reason why God brought him to that city. He also knew that God knew best how to use him to minister to the people. What did he do? Stay put until he had another vision? No! Rather he began moving about Philippi which led to his first convert.

Lydia

In their quest to find Jewish worshippers, the Apostle and his team met up with a group of women outside the city. The women were conducting a prayer meeting by the Riverside as we read in Acts 16:13-15:

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. *One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.* When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us (16:13-15 NIV italics added for emphasis).

² Archeological Study Bible (NIV 2005: Editor's note)

This is the account of how Lydia, a business woman, and a new convert to Judaism became the first European Christian along with her household who also responded to the Gospel—faith alone in Christ alone. The Apostle Paul then continued his evangelistic campaign and further had another convert, namely, a slave girl.

Conversion of a Slave Girl

Of this unique conversion, Luke continues his account:

Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a [demon possessed] slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” *She kept this up for many days.. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!”* At that moment the [demon] spirit left her (16:16-18 NIV italics added for emphasis).

That’s a miracle! Ironically you would think that the Apostle’s miraculous work as per the above verse would cause the master of the slave girl and perhaps a great number of the people to come to the saving knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But the real question is did this spectacular work of the Apostle cause many to turn to the Lord? No! Who said that signs and wonders are essential for evangelism? On the contrary God’s power resides in His Word (Romans 1:16)! The master of the slave girl witnessed the dynamic power of God, and yet was not moved toward God. Instead this orchestrated a riot against the Apostle Paul as Luke recounted:

When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.” The crowd [mobs] joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten (16:19-22).

Paul and Silas in Prison

After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks (16:23, 24 NIV).

Guess what? The Apostle Paul and Silas had just tasted a pinch of the salt of sharing in Christ’s suffering (Philippians 1:29). But their pain would soon burst into abounding joy. Before we get to that, we need to ask some questions. The answers are building blocks to lay a foundation for our study of the next and the last convert in Paul’s first missionary trip to Philippi.

Questions:

- Why do you think Philippi was such a viable city in the spread of the Gospel to the rest of the European world?
- Why did the Apostle Paul change the direction of his missionary journey from Asia Minor to Europe?
- What did the Apostle Paul do when he arrived at Philippi since he did not have specific instruction from God?
- Why did the owner of the slave girl conspired to get Paul and Silas in trouble?
- Did the miraculous incident with the slave girl win anyone over to Paul's message?
- What did you learn from the owner of the slave girl?
- What lesson did you learn from Paul's sudden change of direction in his missionary journey?
- What other lessons did you learn from our study?

Log in next month for a continuation of our introduction of this phenomenal book. Until then, beloved, may God richly bless you as you seek to deepen your relationship with Him through study and application of His Word.

To be continued next week (lesson 2) God willing!

Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Philippians Lesson 1: Questions & Answers

Q. Why do you think Philippi was such a viable city in the spread of the Gospel to the rest of the European world?

A. It was centrally located on a trade route. News came into and out of Philippi with the goods and services traded.

Q. Why did the Apostle Paul change the direction of his missionary journey from Asia Minor to Europe?

A. Paul and his companions had been kept from preaching the Gospel in Asia by the Holy Spirit. Then Paul received a vision where the man from Macedonia begged him to come help.

Questions & Answers Continued...

Q. What did the Apostle Paul do when he arrived at Philippi since he did not have specific instruction from God?

A. Paul looked for a synagogue in search of Jewish worshippers. When he found no synagogue he looked outside the city where they might have gathered to pray.

Q. Why did the owner of the slave girl conspired to get Paul and Silas in trouble?

A. Paul cast the demon out of their slave. The owners had used her demon to tell fortunes and make money for them. When the demon left their money making enterprise was gone.

Q. Did the miraculous incident with the slave girl win anyone over to Paul's message?

A. Only the slave girl.

Q. What did you learn from the owner of the slave girl?

A. They witnessed a great miracle yet refused to believe the message of salvation Paul gave. A person given the Truth of the Gospel makes up their mind to believe or not believe that Truth. The slave girl owners refused to believe even after witnessing a miracle. It is the mustard seed of faith, not the size of the miracle, that makes a difference in salvation!

Q. What lesson did you learn from Paul's sudden change of direction in his missionary journey?

A. A command from God demands complete and immediate obedience.

Q. What other lessons did you learn from our study?