

## The Big Picture of Philippians

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If you were not here last week, you want to get that message (The HS and Philippians-story)

Paul is writing this letter about 10 years after he started the church

That “letter” part needs a little explanation

- Epistle
- Supernaturally natural

The letter to the Philippians has been called the **most tender** of all of Paul's letters to the churches

- And it is a pleasure to read

Some of the most treasured verses in the Bible are in this book:

- |          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| • 1:6    | • 3:13-14 |
| • 1:21   | • 3:20    |
| • 2:3-5  | • 4:4-8   |
| • 3:7-10 | • 4:12-13 |

What Paul has to say is profound, for many reasons, not least of which is that fact that he is writing while **unjustly imprisoned** (for Gospel) and possibly facing death (Nero)

- Even though Paul is writing from prison, his letter is brimming with expressions of praise, confidence and joy

He is writing to both convey his difficulties and encourage them in theirs

- Both are experiencing conflict and difficulty from external and internal sources
- *Both* parties were suffering externally under Rome, and *both* were facing disunity on the inside.
- So Paul writes a letter that exhorts them to **stand firm** for the **gospel together**.
- And the centerpiece and heart of his argument is not an argument, but a story.
  - The story of the one who suffered externally from those who should have been on the inside

Paul repeatedly testifies of the **joy** he has even though he is suffering

- This biblical concept of **joy coming through pain and suffering** is what we will explore next week
- It is the **critical concept** in Philippians
  - The Greek words for **joy** or **rejoice** occur **19 times**
- The Epistle of Joy
  - Many say that the **key** verse is 4:4
    - **Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say rejoice.**

Joy is the critical concept—immediate issue

- But **the bedrock** on which this concept sits is Christ Himself
- Various names and titles for Jesus are found nearly **50 times** in this book – or about one occurrence for every two verses. (104 verses)
  - Every chapter begins with either of two phrases: “**in Christ**” (1:1; 2:1) or “**in the Lord**” (3:1; 4:1)

Though many would say that the key verse is 4:4

- I say that the key verse is 1:21  
For to me, to live is Christ, to die is gain

And then the critical concept (joy) is only a reality because of who Christ is

The big picture of Philippians is best understood as conveying **the ultimate value of Christ** (Christocentric)

Here is how this idea emerges in the letter:

#### Chapter 1

- Christ is the ultimate life (1:21)

#### Chapter 2

- Christ is the ultimate example (2:5)

#### Chapter 3

- Christ is the ultimate treasure (3:8)

#### Chapter 4

- Christ is the ultimate strength (4:13)

The big picture is that for Paul/us

- Life is all about Jesus—He is life
  - So, we model our life after his (Ch. 2)
  - We, value Him above everything else (Ch. 3)
  - And we lean on Him in every circumstance (Ch. 4)

#### Why does Paul say that Christ is the ultimate life (1:21)?

- **Relaying his difficulty**
  - Prison (house arrest)
  - 4 years
  - Chained to a guard
  - 1:12
- Philippians 1:20<sup>b</sup>-21  
Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.  
For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

#### Context: Roman Pluralism

- A culture that tolerates the Gospel—within limits
- Cf. Secularization: Refers to the process that squeezes religion to the periphery of life<sup>1</sup>
  - It is not that religion is abandoned or banished but just marginalized and privatized
  - Always pushes religion to be moderate/temperate
  - Refuses the extreme

<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 13.

- This was Rome in Paul's day
  - As they conquered lands and people god's were added on both sides
  - That way, no god was too mighty and in danger of challenging Rome
  - Like our culture, Rome was willing to use religion for political ends, but unwilling to be tamed by it
    - That was the problem between Christianity and Rome
- Stop searching for a physical possession, person, or experience to satisfy you.
  - Your heart won't be satisfied until it is satisfied in him.
- "Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee."  
~Augustine

#### Why does Paul say that Christ is the ultimate example (2:5)?

- **Rallying them to unity**
  - 2:1-2 (1:27)
- Being true to our new nature

#### Why does Paul say that Christ is the ultimate treasure (3:8)?

- **Relinquishing his identity**
- 3:2-8
- Philippians deals with idolatry

#### Why does Paul say that Christ is the ultimate strength (4:13)?

- **Relishing his adversity**
- "Ease and luxury, such as our affluence brings today, do not make for maturity; hardship and struggle however do." ~J.I. Packer
- Confronting the Roman ideal (and now our ideal) of **comfort at all costs**
- For many confessing Christians it has become more important to be comfortable and secure than to be self-sacrificing and giving.

Christ is the answer to all the great matters of life (ch.1), self (ch.2), ambition (ch.3), and circumstance (ch. 4)

- The Gospel