

Park Road Baptist Church service 18.07.2021

Call to worship Psalm 100
Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!
Serve the Lord with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing!
Know that the Lord, he is God!
It is he who made us, and we are his;
We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
And his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!
For the Lord is good;
His steadfast love endures forever,
And his faithfulness to all generations.

Song – God is good <https://youtu.be/ABWnXNurPx0>

Song – Goodness of God <https://youtu.be/-f4MUUMWMV4>

Intercessory Prayer

Countries where there is conflict.
We place into your hands.
Those persecuted for their faith.
We place into your hands.
Everything we've hoped for.
We place into your hands.
The thoughts that disturb us.
We place into your hands.
The situations that confuse us.
We place into your hands.
The elderly and vulnerable.
We place into your hands.
Families and communities.
We place into your hands.
Our government and all in authority.
We place into your hands.
All who serve in our NHS.
We place into your hands.
All who are anxious in hospital.
We place into your hands.
All who are grieving and bereft.
We place into your hands.

All who are alone and lonely.
We place into your hands.
All who are homeless without a friend.
We place into your hands.
All who are fearful and abused.
We place into your hands.
All who are in prison or feel imprisoned.
We place into your hands.
All whose future prospects look bleak.
We place into your hands.
All who are waiting and wondering.
We place into your hands.
All whom we know and love.
We place into your hands.

Song – Father I place into your hands <https://youtu.be/6T8759Wdg3U>

Bible reading: Philippians 1:1 – 2

Sermon

Introduction to Philippians

I wonder when you last received a hand-written letter from a friend or when you last wrote a hand-written letter to a friend.

It used to be a common experience but now we mostly communicate through emails which is not quite the same.

We have a friend who lives in Fort William who was part of our church in Lochgilphead and every now and again an envelope falls on our door mat and it's a letter from Margaret telling us all her family news which is really lovely.

But just knowing someone has taken the time to write to you makes it that bit more special. And today we are going to start a series of studies looking at a letter that was written by the apostle Paul to the church in Philippi.

Paul wrote this letter in AD 62 and he is writing it from a prison in Rome. He's not depressed or discouraged although maybe he should be, but as we will see he is joyful on the inside.

And joy is the main theme of this letter - joy on the inside.

We live in a world that is dark and broken and cruel, a world riddled with wars and disease and so this just seems like a wonderful opportunity to get another perspective.

I don't think there is any other book in the Bible that comes remotely close to Philippians when it comes to this theme of joy.

There are only 104 verses but don't be fooled – that doesn't mean we can get through it in a couple of weeks! In those 104 verses, the word 'rejoice' is used 9 times and the word 'joy' is used 5 times.

What I need to do now is give a little bit of background to this letter which will enable us to stand back and see the bigger picture.

About 20 years after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, Paul sets out on his second missionary journey where his purpose is to retrace his steps of his first missionary journey to encourage the churches where he preached the gospel and established churches.

And Paul is actually on his way to the church at Ephesus to see how they're getting on but on his way to Ephesus the Holy Spirit stops him in his tracks and Paul has this vision where he sees a man from Macedonia who says, **'come over here and help us.'**

And God tells Paul to go to Macedonia and preach the gospel there.

Philippi was one of 4 districts within Macedonia. And so, Paul and his companions arrive in Philippi. One of the first things Paul did when he entered a new town or city was to go to the synagogue because he was Jewish but there was no synagogue in Philippi – you needed at least 10 Jewish men to establish a synagogue and there are not 10 Jewish men in the whole of Philippi.

But Paul and his companions don't give up – they are sure that God has called them to this place, and they wander down to the river where they find a small group of women and God has been preparing their hearts.

And as Paul shares the gospel with them, one of the ladies in the group – a lady called Lydia – the Bible says, **'the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted the message.'**

The reason I'm telling you this is because we are stepping back from the letter to the Philippians and Lydia becomes the first member of the church at Philippi.

In every church there has to be a first member. I wonder who the first person was here at Park Road – the first person who was going to be the start of a congregation here that would continue to grow over the years.

So, Lydia was the first church member.

But of course, God wants to grow churches and I think God loves it when the church is full of diverse people.

So, we have Lydia who is a businesswoman.

Then as Paul and Silas are travelling around Philippi, they are constantly being followed by this slave girl who was a fortune teller and she's shouting and yelling and then Paul speaks into her life, and she is set free, and she is healed and comes to faith.

This caused a bit of a problem because she was owned by some men who made money out of her fortune telling and now that income stream has disappeared.

They beat Paul and Silas up and have them thrown into prison.

So, at this stage there are two new members at the church in Philippi – two very different women.

Anyway, while Paul and Silas are in prison they start praying and praising God at midnight and God sends an earthquake and their chains fall off and the doors open up.

The prison guard thinks that the prisoners have fled and so he pulls out his sword and he is ready to kill himself and Paul says to him, **'don't harm yourself, we're all here.'** And this prison officer just falls to his knees and asks what he must do to be saved.

And Paul says, **'believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.'**

These are the first members of the church at Philippi.

And some ten years later, Paul writes this joy filled letter from a prison in Rome.

Just for a moment, why don't you join me and let's use our imagination.

Picture this scene. It's Sunday morning at the church at Philippi. The pastor stands up and he's announces that he has a letter that he would like to read. He says it's from someone that you know who is very precious to you. In fact, this letter has come all the way from Rome, written by one of the prisoners.

The whole congregation would be waiting in suspense wondering who it's from. And then he starts to read the letter, **'From Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus.'**

Can you just picture this little congregation?

There's Lydia this seller of purple – and she's listening to every word.

And there's this woman who was miraculously healed from demon possession.

And the prison guard is there surrounded by his family - and as the letter is being read their mouths would be open, there would be a few tears, smiles would appear, and they would be hanging on every single word from their founder member and friend.

And that is the background to this lovely little letter that we call Philippians.

What I want to do now is to take a look at two of the titles that are found in verse 1.

Jesus Christ

The first one is Jesus Christ. In fact, this letter begins and ends with Jesus. We said that rejoice is used 14 times and joy is used 5 times but when you read through this little letter, the name of Jesus comes up 40 times. So, that tells us a lot about where Paul's source of joy comes from. It comes from Jesus.

Paul mentions Jesus 17 times in the first chapter alone.

What we must never forget when we think about Paul is that he was an Old Testament scholar. He was steeped in the Old Testament, and he knew all the promises about the Messiah coming into the world – and many of them said that Jesus would come as a humble servant. Perhaps we see this most clearly in the book of Isaiah in chapters 40 - 66 and that becomes a big theme in this little letter. We will see that especially in chapter 2, but it's picked up throughout the rest of the letter.

It's almost too hard to believe that Jesus would come in this way, as a humble servant.

Jesus didn't consider his life so precious in the sense that he poured his life out for others, to heal people and to love people.

In Matthew 20 verse 28 it says, **'the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.'**

And I think humility is strongly related to joy.

Joy is not to be found in being served but in serving.

Joy is not to be found in getting but in giving.

Joy is not to be found by putting our-selves before other people, but in putting other people before ourselves.

Servants

Again, that is in verse 1, **'Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus.'**

I think Paul and Timothy must have such a fabulous team. They were the best of friends.

They had their individual strengths and weaknesses and yet they seem to compliment each other quite beautifully.

Paul is the preacher, the writer, the church planter, the debater and the missionary who takes the gospel to new places and yet he never saw himself as some kind of celebrity that people should look up to.

In fact, in Ephesians 3 verse 8 he says he is ***'less than the least of all God's people.'***

One of the commentator's says, ***'you can be too big for God to use but never too small.'***

If we are too full of our own self-importance, then the chances are God will pass us by.

It's almost impossible to think about servanthood without thinking about the scene in John Chapter 12.

It's Passover time and the crowds are gathering in the city of Jerusalem, but Jesus wants to be alone with his disciples because he has an important lesson to teach them.

They are altogether in this upper room and Jesus takes off his outer garment, and he wraps a towel around his waist and pours water into a basin – and Jesus, the eternal Son of God gets down on his hands and knees to wash the feet of his disciples.

But what we learn from the parallel passages is that they had been arguing about who was the best and the most important.

And I love the fact that Jesus doesn't rebuke them or even get angry with them, instead, he teaches them.

He kind of redirects them. On bended knee with towel and basin he says, ***'this is the way to be great.'***

If you want to be great in the kingdom, if you want to be great in the church or the community, Jesus says be a servant.

And just when you think this scene couldn't get any more dramatic, we watch in utter astonishment as Jesus bows down at the feet of Judas and washes his feet.

And he does that knowing full well that Judas will excuse himself from the meal to go and betray Jesus for a handful of silver coins.

And yet, Jesus was willing to wash his feet.

Do you remember how Jesus finished that practical teaching lesson?

He said, ***'now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.'***

Sometimes I think as Christians we can hear so many words that we fail to put them into practice.

Jesus says the real blessing doesn't come from knowing these things – the real blessing comes from doing these things.

Song – The servant King (From heaven you came) <https://youtu.be/E4963QPHAIM>

Blessing

May you see opportunities to bring hope, healing and peace where others do not.

May you have the courage to speak up for those that get overlooked.

May you be aware of God's spirit at work in the words you speak, the safe spaces you create and the relationships you build.

You are loved by God, may those that you encounter know that they are loved too.

Amen.

(Words by Clare Hooper)