

THE CHURCH AT PHILIPPI

Philippians  
1:1-11

INTRODUCTION:

We are on historic ground at Philippi. The church here was one that Paul planted and led in the founding. He wrote this letter while he was in prison - probably in Rome, or possibly at Ephesus. He writes a letter of thanks, love, and gratitude to the Christians in Philippi.

They had sent him a gift by Epaphroditus, their messenger. And of course they will soon receive at their messenger's hand, this epistle, the Philippians - which are cheerful and filled with gratitude. The Philippians were Paul's favorite or sweetheart church. I think this makes sense - these believers were the first fruits of Paul in Europe. Bringing the Gospel to them had been a costly venture.

(Acts 16:12-40) tells the story. It was here at Philippi where the flag of the Roman government was held high as a free city. And yet Paul and Silas had been flogged half to death. Here they had been put in prison. But Verse 1 - Chapter 1 - gives you the feeling as he writes to all the saints who are in Christ Jesus as he writes to Philippi. With the bishops and the deacons.

Paul was always helping somebody. And this was a part of his missionary program here. I remember of reading of a missionary in India who needed physical assistance to get a critically sick man from his house to the hospital. The missionary needed help and requested help from two holy men, who were sitting not far away, chanting their devotions. The missionary said she would never forget the fire of resentment upon the faces of those two holy men - they said, "we are holy men - we never do anything for anybody." We shall see that the church at Philippi was a church that Paul founded and a church that was willing to

minister in the name of Christ.

Perhaps there are two or three things by way of an outline - it may be kind of sketchie but it will help us to study about this church.

1. First, the location of ~~the~~ church.
2. Second, the founding of the church.
3. Third, ~~some of~~ the fundamentals ~~found in this~~ church.

#### I. The Location

Philippi was place where Philip of Macedon, Alexander the Great, Aristotle - the philosopher, walked the streets.

It was here that a decisive battle was fought in 42BC. The assination of Julius Caesar in the Senate House, March 15, 44BC. At the age of 56, did not restore the old government of the Senate - as they hoped it would. Therefore, after several battles, which brought no real decision, the world was divided into three parts.

Octavius, Augustus, the grand nephew of Caesar was to govern the West. Mark Anthony, secretary of Caesar was to govern the East.

Lepidus, one of Caesar's old lieutenants was to govern Africa.

The states of the wealthy - 300 Senators, and 3000 Knights were murdered.

Cicero, at the age of 64, was among the victims. The friends of the old republic rallied in the East - led by Brutus - and Cassius. They met the forces of Octavius and Anthony on the field of Philippi. In two successive engagements -

the new leaders of the liberators were cut to pieces. The first battle, Cassius committed suicide. In the second battle, Brutus, did the same. And with them died the hope of a restoration of a republic.

Thus there was a proverb that developed out of these battles -- "I will meet you at Philippi". Means one will see and settle with another in a decisive contest.

Now the Romans had material power and it was founded upon two pillars. First, roads, and second, colonies. Philippi derived an importance from both. She was on the national highway - between the mountains and the sea. The armies and the trade went over that road. Philippi was also a colony - and knowledge of Roman law and government is essential to appreciate the status of a colony. The colony was a development. The Romans became fit to govern the world by giving way, when they had too, and by adapting themselves wisely and slowly to change conditions. Rome was never in a hurry to govern the country she conquered - and this made her the first successfull ruler of subjects of people.

Macedonia was made a Roman providence in 148 BC. Magistrates were sent annually by the Senate to govern the providences. The people were everywhere oppressed. The providences were looked upon as estates of the Roman nobles - with which they made as much money as they could. It remained for Augustus Octavius to re-arrange the scheme of government - and to elevate the providences with an equality of Italy. Then Rome was no longer the mistress of all the conquered people - she was only their capitol city. And men were not subject to the fule for selfish gain - but they became citizens ruled for their own good.

But Philippi was a colony - a settlement - made in a foreign country. It was a Roman colony. It was a miniature of Rome. And Augustus constituted Philippi colony.

As such, she enjoyed the protection of Roman law. The voting place was Rome. And of course, they could not go to the voting place often - if ever. Still, it was their right to vote at the one voting place for all citizens. I think that is why they could understand the metaphor, which Paul used - our citizenship is in Heaven. But our names are enrolled in Heaven. We are citizens of Heaven in the three ways by which the people were citizens of Rome. We were by birth, we are free born into second birth - it was by a gift, the gift of God. Or it was by purchase - redeemed not with corruptible things. And so these people enjoyed this sort of citizenship.

The two chief magistrates of the colony were appointed by the emperor or the Senate and were independent of the governors.

We remember that Philippi was the chief city of the district. That is, it was a most important city commercially, politically, historically - and you can see how Paul conducts his campaign by establishing Christian Churches in the city. Antioch, Philippi, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome - now that was wise strategy.

## II. The Foundation of the Church At Philippi

The church was founded through a story that is quite simple and yet gives us the very details of how Christianity and Europe - and how it went to Europe. The matter of evangelizing Europe is told by the writer - his pen moves very slowly - and there is no item of importance that went unmentioned. You remember the Holy Spirit, twice, forbids further preaching in Asia and Paul is following the Holy Spirit as the Israelites in the wilderness followed the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He is very sensitive to the Spirit's impressions. As he is following the compass - he uses it as a guide.

In Luke's narrative in the book of Acts 16 - Paul sees in a vision - a man in white on the Macedonian shore. Beseeking him to come over into Macedonia and help us. It is Europe's cry for the gospel.

Do you understand the importance of that vision. Athens, with God's innumerable - Philippi with crime license, Corinth with pleasure enthroned -- all of these three centers stand up like the figure of a man appealing for help.

I wonder if we really catch the plainness of this appeal. They are dissatisfied with the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. And all of this is a heart breaking thing. There is a woman who longs for the glory of God.

There is a wretched girl who is a victim of a system - who wishes to be free.

There are Jews who are looking for the consolation of Israel. With the God fearing Greeks and woman. All of these mingle their needs in sending out a heart breaking cry that sounds across the water.

Paul was always obedient to the Heavenly vision - straight way he sailed from Europe. Silas was with him from Antioch. Timothy joined them from Lystra. And Luke joined at Troy.

This is the first appearance of Luke in the record.

I might take just a moment to say just a word about Luke. Luke was first one of Paul's most scholarly converts. He was a highly educated man.

Second, he was a distinguished physician. He was a poet.

Third, he was renowned as a historian. And as a geographer.

Next, he was noted as the author of a Bible book - beloved Luke.

Now, he is concealed by his modesty from the pages of his Gospel and acts - is trusted and praised among all churches.

He was 20 years the personal physician of the afflicted Paul. He ministered to Paul during four of his imprisonments, and at other times of illness. He treated Paul as a personal physician.

He was one of Paul's friends who did not forsake him.

All in all, Paul's best friend and most useful friend - was Luke - his doctor.

Now this was a momentous event. In human history, as Paul crosses the water with the Gospel. Imagine the difference - had the vision called him Eastward. Suppose he had gone to India and China - and they would walk in the Gospel light. Which shines on England and America. And England and America would sit in the shadows in the night that hang over China and India.

In founding this church, we first mention the conversion of a woman. Paul and his group went up on Saturday morning - down near the river. Judism was too feeble to own a synagogue in Philippi. Perhaps the men had lost faith and had discontinued to worship. But the woman, always the last to forsake a cause or a friend, maintained their worship in a cheap prayer house out by the river. Paul sat down and preached to those women. In the group was Lydia.

Now this was a business woman from Thyatira. This lady, you remembered, we

mentioned when we studied that church, a few weeks ago in the book of Revelation. There was a splendid market here in Philippi - and this accounted for this business woman being here present. She and her servants had come to buy goods for her business in Thyatira. This woman was saved.

What is salvation. Well, it is that divine act which God through the merits of Christ's atoning death saves from guilt of the penalty and power of sin. It is the power of the plan of God to make right in a man - what is wrong in a man. Man has transgressed against God without cause. And this is to correct it.

Now she becomes a Christian - and a Christian is one who personally appropriated this salvation and is seeking to express in daily life all its principles and implications.

I think we might ask the question - who saved Lydia. Was it Paul. Luke does not say so. I remember reading about a preacher who told that he met a man on the street one day who was under the influence of liquor. And the man said, say, Preacher - don't you know me. I am one of your converts. The preacher said, you must be - for I am satisfied that the Lord never converted you.

Paul in his preaching were the instruments through which God saved Lydia.

The record removes all doubt - the preaching of Paul would have availed nothing - had not the Lord opened Lydia's heart. She was saved - not so much by embracing a new faith - as by experiencing a new creation. It is like photography, when you take a picture, the light makes it. And here is Paul bringing the truth upon the hearer and there is no conversion until the Holy Spirit acts upon that heart. And the light shines in. And God's word is first. And this is the first conversion in Europe.

What is the duty of a saved sinner. Lydia's next step answers that question. She was baptized and all of her believing servants - and then followed hospitality. This is the grace of Christianity. You remember the converts of Pentecost - partook of food with gladness and singleness of heart. Peter was shown hospitality by Cornelius. Lydia invited the missionaries to make her home their home - and she would take no excuse. She furnished shelter and food for God's four messengers.

Today we give little attention to the prophets chamber - but in those days there was a place for the preacher to stay. Now the churches send the visiting preacher to the hotel - or let him find his own entertainment. And domestic conditions have changed. Grant all of this, I think we are infinitely poorer in our fellowship and our grace when hospitality is dead. Do not forget hospitality - for whereby some entertain angels unaware.

The next thing about the foundation of this church is the rescue of a maiden. A girl who was a sorcerer - a fortune teller - was owned by a syndicate. A greedy group of men who profited on her spirit of divination. This girl followed after the missionaries. As they went to worship - and she annoyed. Paul was thoroughly worn out by her. He pitied her. And he had little regard for her owners who sought game was more important than the girl. And her soul was more valuable Paul thought, than the business she was in. Therefore, Paul evicted the evil spirit and her masters were left empty of her gain and they were angry. They laid violent hands on Paul and Silas. And they dragged them into the market place. And false charges were brought under the cloak of patriotism. Even the judges lost their dignity - forgot their duties. Their oath and broke their own law in snapping off the clothes of the preachers - and commanded that they be beaten. And they were condemned Roman citizens and cast into prison.

Now the demon possessed girl and her owners represented the power of Satan. Satan is jealous of God and always tries to destroy his work at the beginning.



In the morning of the race, Satan whispered distress into the ears of our very (first parents) and beguiled them into disobedience.

Do you remember when Jesus was born in Bethlehem - they attempted to kill Christianity in the grave by having all the babies put to death.

And so this (unreasoning mob) like the wild waves of the sea, uncontrollable - and Paul was in real danger of this mob. His constitutional rights were swept away. Justice was not vindicated. The innocent were not protected.

Paul had been beaten before. This time it is not from the Jews - but from the Roman rods. There he is pale and bleeding.

Silas is his fellow prisoner and sufferer. In a dark - unventilated prison, the two preachers with bleeding backs and feet in the stocks, waited for the dawn. They passed the heavy hours by singing. A religion worth while sings in the dark.

I think of the Baptist preachers, Waller, Craig, and Childs - who were led through the streets of Fredericksburg, Va. They were put in prison June, 1768. And they sang "Broad is the way that leads to death" - and thousands walked together there. But wisdom shows a better way - with here and there a traveler.

It was like John Weatherford in Chesterfield jail. The jailer, a kind hearted man, allowed the prisoner the privilege of the corridors. But the persecutors, complained to the judge, and so in the original court record there was another entry a few pages over after the committment - ordering the sherriff to confine said Weatherford, strictly to his cell. His spirit was not bound. He preached to the rebels through the outter bars. They cut his hands with whips and knives.

Old Dr. Hacker was gathering funds for the Richmond College. He visited a country church and he rehearsed the story of Virginia Baptists for religious freedom. He told the story of John Weatherford. And a rich man who listened to him said, Dr. Hacker when I was a small boy, my father took me to the funeral of parson Weatherford, in a country burial ground in Ph... He said it was customary in those days for people to pass by the open casket and view the remains. I was too small to look in the casket and my father lifted me up so I could see. Weatherford's hands were folded across his bosom. They were scarred with white marks. Those white marks were stamped upon my young mind - I have thought about them a thousand times and wondered what caused them. You have explained them tonight. I will give \$500 to endow the college, that produced men like parson Weatherford.

John Ireland when in jail at Culpepper court house - where they attempted his death with an explosion of gun powder, began his letters - from my palace in Culpepper.

At midnight the prisoners were singing and praying. The earth trembled. You remember it trembled in Jerusalem when the company of believers prayed. Acts 4:31. It was an earthquake and more. The doors were opened. The chains unfettered. How was it explained. Was it a co-incident. I think not.

Victor Hugo explained Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in one word - God. God who locked the jaws of lions and Daniel felt no harm. Who quenched the violent flames and three Hebrew children were unhurt. It is the same one who opened the jail.

Mercy accompanied judgement. The jailer was on the verge of committing suicide. It was Rome's philosophy. The religion and suicide to end trouble and

avoid disgrace.

95 years before - Cassius was slain at his own command by the hand of a comrade. Yonder on the slopes to the North, two days later Brutus died the same way. The jailer would do likewise. The sword point touched his breast - when mercy intervened - spared his life and saved his soul.

Human life is sacred. And suicide is not the answer. (Do thyself no harm)  
- you are a member of the family of the human society.

The frightened jailer was sin smitten, conscious stricken - and he entered the prison and led the preachers out - and asked the most momentous question ever presented to a preacher. What must I do to be saved.

It is the only place in the Scripture where that question is asked in so many words.

Paul and Silas did not say be baptized, partake of the Lord's supper, join the church, sell your property - keep the Golden Rule, confess to Peter, reform the prison, bind our wounds.

They did say, (believe on the Lord Jesus) - and thou shalt be saved.

The jailer addressed the preachers as (Lords.)

They answered, there is but one Lord and he is Jesus. Believe on him. Rely on him. We speak to you and all your house the word of the Lord. Believe understandingly. And you are saved. The man was saved that very hour and all his house. Salvation is not a process - it is an act. To those outstanding sinners

like the jailer, then this is a definite experience. And these were administered baptism - somewhere between the jail and the house.

The day dawns - the magistrates had enough of these prisoners. They heard the earthquake and were alarmed. They order them released and let go from the city.

Paul asserts his rights and his privileges as a Roman citizen - he will not leave under a pretext of slander that he broke jail. Neither will he neglect civil rights which he was entitled. He will stand on the guarantees of the free born Roman citizen.

By invoking the habeas corpus act - and this for the first time in history - he created an embarrassing situation for the magistrates. They assumed the attitude of suppliance before their prisoners. Paul had no vengeance - he'll bring no charges of false imprisonment, against them. He would not turn prosecutor. He had something more to do. He visited the home of Lydia. He exhorts the brethren. And he lays the foundation for this church.

### → III. The Fundamentals Of This Church

Now let us note some of the fundamental things or features found in the church at Philippi.

First, the pre-eminence of women. These women in Macadonia held an honored position. And great importance was given to women here. They tell us that in the cemetaries quite often the husband excelled in the endearment that they carved for their deceased wives.

This church began in a woman's prayer meeting. Each member was a business woman. She carried the gospel to her home in Thyatira. One of the seven churches of Asia.

Sisters Euodia, and Syntyche were influential members in this congregation. And they developed a considerable feeling over something and were exhorted to forget their differences and become reconciled to Christ.

Philippians 4:2-3.

Jesus was woman's best friend. Paul's attitude was friendly toward women. And yet I suppose he is misunderstood by some of the things which he writes. But wherever Christianity is - women have been elevated. We know that in this country. There was the long struggle for woman's suffrage - the right to vote. The battle has been long.

But Paul in dealing with these women to get them to straighten out their differences - women are prone to take differences of opinion, on public issues - as personal issues. They must learn that those who disagree with them are not their enemies. Sometimes Paul agreed with them and sometimes he did not.

Woman's usefulness in the homes and in the churches - her service there is indispensable.

*Girl used by men -*  
Much remains to be done for women - the sister of Philippian girls walked the streets of modern cities - as she did of old. And the problem is the open sore of the city life. The church must try to reach these. There are girls in our city that are going the wrong way. And Paul won some of these and they came into the church at Philippi.

✓ Second, there was abounding joy. Chapter 3:1. A note of joy rings throughout the letter to this church. Paul thanks God everytime he thinks of them. They were the dearest of his church. To what extent these women were responsible for this church was an interesting question. Their influence kept the fountains of joy flowing freely. Christianity should produce happiness. It sets the heart right and happiness is the state of the heart.

(Outward circumstances) can neither give nor destroy happiness. Happiness in life depends on character rather than circumstances. The bishops, deacons, and saints of the church at Philippi were in a hostile and depressing atmosphere. Yet they were joyful.

In much trials and affliction was the abundance of their joy. They learned their happiness from Paul and Silas. Men who could sin with bleeding backs. Rejoice in the Lord always - again I say, rejoice. Chapter 4:4. The happy church is the attractive church. We discredit our religion when we show a great deal of despondency, and gloom.

✓ Third, they were victorious over opposition. The missionaries ran counter to a wicked traffic. This church did not side-step. They faced the foe and defeated him. There was vice and white slavery. And yet they stood up against it. There was the civil government - the Roman power - and it was a mighty power. The conflict and the outcome in Philippi was indicative of the fortunes of Christianity.

Paul did not tamper with the system of government. He simply preached Christ and that was all. He put a (new spirit) in men. And that new spirit mastered the jailer. It frightened the magistrates. His work was distinguished from other reformers in that he was not seeking anything for himself. Whether position

of power, fame or fortune. But he was seeking to give to others, to share with others, to make Christ known to others.

The world never so much needed the same today. When the times are out of joint.

✓ Fourth, great liberality. Philippi is a shining example of a giving church. Chapter 4:15.

There was liberality, of the poor - their deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality. It is difficult for a rich man to sacrifice. A wealthy man can give \$10,000 and never eat a biscuit less for breakfast. But a poor man may give \$100 and have to sacrifice to pay it. These brethren would give beyond their ability.

They made contributions, of (their own accord.) They saw the opportunity. They ceased it. They anticipated the collection. And they were willing to give.

Third, There was insistent liberality. They were participating in the ministering of the saints. They (wanted to be identified) with the good work. They sought Paul to labor and to share in their labors wherever he went.

Fourth, there was (continuous giving.) They kept up their contributions. Their gifts were sent to support Paul in other towns. And even in distant Rome - money for charity in Jerusalem. Money for missions in Europe. In the beginning of the Gospel, Paul said when I went forth from Macadonia, no church communicated with me, in the way of giving and receiving - but ye only. 4:15. They practiced. Even in Chapter 4:16 - they sent to me once again my need. The Philippian spirit is to be cultivated by the modern church. We surpass them

in wealth. But I wonder if we do not equal them in achievement.

✓ The fifth thing that was fundamental here - they had a personal attachment to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Philippians gave themselves to the Lord, and to the missionaries. They had great love and loyalty, for the preachers - and they co-operated with them for the cause along the way.

The distance could not weaken the tie that bound them together. In adversity they could not dampen their spirit. They sent Epaphroditus (Chapter 2:25) all the way to Rome with help to minister to Paul.

They ministered to the sick - 2:27.

They had great fellowship in the Gospel. (1:5). They could sing with a spirit of understanding. "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love. The fellowship of kindred mind is like to that above. We share our mutual woes - our mutual burdens bear. And often for each other flows, a sympathizing tear."

Matthew Henry - died June 22, 1714

Distinguished Biblical commentator.

To his friend - "Take note of my saying - That a life spent in the service of God, and communion with Him, is the most comfortable and pleasant life that one can live in the present world."