

## Week Two/Day One Paul's Circumstances Part I

In last week's Scripture reading, Paul talks about the Philippian's partnership in his imprisonment. Today we will learn about Paul's circumstances while he is writing this letter to the church in Philippi. In Acts 21, Paul is arrested in Jerusalem. He appeals to the emperor, is sent before many different officials, and eventually he is sent to Rome and arrives there in Acts 28:14. It is interesting to read of all that happens to Paul between Jerusalem and Rome, but we will pick up in chapter 28 when he arrives in Rome.

Acts 28:16 - <sup>16</sup>When we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.

Acts 28:23-31 - <sup>23</sup>After they had set a day to meet with him, they came to him at his lodgings in great numbers. From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. <sup>24</sup>Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe. <sup>25</sup>So they disagreed with each other; and as they were leaving, Paul made one further statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah,

<sup>26</sup>'Go to this people and say,  
You will indeed listen, but never understand,  
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.

<sup>27</sup>For this people's heart has grown dull,  
and their ears are hard of hearing,  
and they have shut their eyes;  
so that they might not look with their eyes,  
and listen with their ears,  
and understand with their heart and turn—  
and I would heal them.'

<sup>28</sup>Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."

<sup>30</sup>He lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, <sup>31</sup>proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

## **Initial Takeaways**

1. While under imprisonment in Rome, was Paul in a jail? Where did he live?
2. How long was Paul in Rome, under imprisonment?

## **Into the Text**

I mentioned last week that Roman imprisonment is very different from what we think of imprisonment. There were no county jails or state penitentiaries where prisoners were held. Paul would have been responsible for his upkeep while awaiting trial. He is not in a cell, but he is chained (Acts 21:33; 26:29; 28:20) and possibly is chained to his guard. At the very least, his guard is with him at all times. The Philippians send him money to help with this and this is actually the second time the Philippians have sent Paul funding for his ministry.

When I think of being in jail, I think of how boring it would be!! But Paul is certainly not idle, is he? He continues his teaching, his ministry as if nothing has changed. Not at all like our concept of imprisonment. Paul is allowed to continue his vocation, his ministry. Through his imprisonment, he comes into contact with many different people and all of them were exposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the passage above, Paul is testifying to the Jewish leaders in Rome. Remember that Judaism was a sanctioned religion in the Roman Empire, but Christianity was not. Christianity was not yet criminal, but it was not recognized by the Empire as Judaism was.

Being in the capitol city of Rome, Paul would have also had occasion to preach to members of Caesar's household, as well as officers in the Roman army and the Praetorian Guard stationed in Rome. Acts 28:30 says that Paul "welcomed all who came to him.". Word would have spread about this prisoner who preaches the Good News of Jesus Christ, and Paul would have the opportunity to reach a great number of people in those two years.

## **Reflection Questions**

1. Think about Paul being under imprisonment, possibly chained to a guard, and still “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance”. And we hear in his writings that he was also joyful in his prayer. Would you be in this kind of spirit were you to be imprisoned?
2. What do you think causes this spirit of exuberance in Paul?
3. What do you think it would take for you to have this same spirit?

## **Week Two/Day Two**

### **Paul's Circumstances Part II**

Today we will continue in Philippians and hear what Paul says of his circumstances in Rome.

*Philippians 1:12-14 - <sup>12</sup>I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that my circumstance has resulted in an increased advancement of the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that my imprisonment for Christ has been made known to the whole Praetorian Guard and to everyone else; <sup>14</sup> and most of the brothers and sisters, have been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, so they more often speak the word boldly and without fear.*

#### **Initial Takeaways**

1. What does Paul want the brothers and sisters to know?
2. What has made the brothers and sisters more confident?

#### **Into the Text**

The Greek word that is translated as “brothers and sisters” is *adelphoi*. This word is the word for brother but can also mean brothers and sisters in Christ or fellow Christians. It is familial language and used often by Paul to mean his Christian family. Paul uses this term nine times in Philippians to speak of his fellow Christians. He addresses both men and women in the church and his relationship with them is such that he considers them family.

In verse 13, Paul explains that it has been made evident to others that his imprisonment is a result of his Christian witness. Paul is not on trial for being a Christian, but rather for his actions in the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 21). As a Roman citizen, he could easily get out of this “trouble” in which he finds himself. However, Paul does not consider his imprisonment to be trouble, but rather an opportunity to reach new people with the Gospel. Dr. Ben Witherington points out that, “The irony is that exactly while Paul is chained, the Gospel is set free, even among the Praetorian Guard and in the household of Caesar itself. Right under the nose of the emperor, the Good News has been unleashed.”(Witherington 79)



## **Week Two/Day Three**

### **Paul's Current Joy**

Yesterday we learned that Paul's fellow Christians were emboldened to share the Gospel because of his imprisonment. Today we will learn that not all of those emboldened by Paul's circumstances had pure motives. However, the Gospel is being shared either way and for that Paul rejoices.

Philippians 1:15-18a - <sup>15</sup> *While it is true*, some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. <sup>16</sup> These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; <sup>17</sup> the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. <sup>18</sup> What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.

### **Initial Takeaways**

1. What do you think could be the false motives driving "the others"?
  
2. Does Paul consider the Gospel spread by "the others" to be a good thing?

### **Into the Text**

Remember the formula for family letters from day four of last week. This section (verses 12-26) would be where Paul reassures the Philippians of his well-being. This section is divided into two distinct parts, 1. Paul's current rejoicing (12-18a), and 2. Paul's future rejoicing (18b-26). The Philippians, and certainly anyone reading a letter from someone in prison, would expect Paul to expound on his situation in prison; is he being well treated, does he have enough funds to support himself, etc. But what is interesting about this entire section is that Paul is not focusing on his situation or himself, but rather the proclamation of the Gospel becomes the focal point. At the same time, it actually is informing the Philippians of his well-being. Paul's life is all about spreading the Gospel. Sharing the Gospel







## Into the Text

Remember that the original text would not have had chapter and verse numbers; these were added much later. Verse 18b obviously begins a new paragraph. Notice the immediate shift in time within verse 18, Paul goes from current rejoicing/explaining his present circumstances (12-18a) to future rejoicing/reflections on his future (18b-26). “No matter what happens to him, no one will steal his joy in Christ from him. There is joy in the present and in the future not only because Christ is and will be in both, but because Christ is involved in making sure of the advancement of the Gospel.”(Witherington 83)

Verse 19 begins with “for”, which indicates that what follows is the reason for Paul’s future rejoicing. Paul will continue to rejoice because of his “deliverance” and “Christ being exalted”. “Deliverance”, or *soterian*, is usually used by Paul to mean eschatological salvation, or final salvation. But there is a sense here that Paul means his release from prison. First of all, remember that Paul was an Old Testament scholar, and he uses what literary critics call “intertextuality” in this situation. Intertextuality is the intentional embedding of fragments of an earlier text. Paul echoes the text of Job 13:16a and the context of Job 13:13-18.

- <sup>13</sup> “Let me have silence, and I will speak,  
and let come on me what may.  
<sup>14</sup> I will take my flesh in my teeth,  
and put my life in my hand.  
<sup>15</sup> See, he will kill me; I have no hope;  
but I will defend my ways to his face.  
<sup>16</sup> This will be my salvation,  
that the godless shall not come before him.  
<sup>17</sup> Listen carefully to my words,  
and let my declaration be in your ears.  
<sup>18</sup> I have indeed prepared my case;  
I know that I shall be vindicated.

“Paul thus compares his own situation to Job’s and perhaps takes solace from how the book turns out. This allusion also likely implies that Paul is looking for vindication in the present by means of a positive outcome from his legal proceedings.”(Witherington 83) While the Philippians would probably not have clued in to the allusion to Job, it was how Paul would have naturally thought of and explained his situation. God will bring about Paul’s deliverance from prison through the prayers of the Philippians which will call upon the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, Paul would not have expected or needed the Philippians prayer for his final salvation. Certainly, the Philippians would have been praying for Paul,

but most likely would have been praying for his release from prison. The issue here is Paul's proclamation of the Gospel, not his personal salvation.

Honor and shame played an important role in Greco-Roman society and we will talk more about this in the video. First of all, being imprisoned would be shameful, but even more so would to be found guilty and be executed. Of course, the Philippians would have known this and certainly would have thought this of Paul's meaning. And by saying "in any way", this quite possibly is partially what Paul means. But we know from the previous verses that Paul is certainly not ashamed of his imprisonment, but rather joyful that it has allowed the Gospel to be spread. We see later in the passage that he is not concerned about death either. Then he contradicts being "put to shame" with "that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted." This suggests that the shame he is really concerned with is shame before God. What matters is not whether Paul is to live or to die, but that through Paul, Christ is proclaimed.

Paul then goes into a sort of personal soliloquy in verses 21-24 about life and death and what that means for him. This portion of the letter is the most telling about the intimate relationship Paul has with his brothers and sisters in Philippi. Imagine a letter in which you were to write your feelings about death. To whom would this letter be written? It probably would not be your average co-worker, or a distant cousin. It is going to be somebody close, perhaps your spouse, your parent, or maybe a sibling.

He pulls himself out of this personal reflection on death by remembering the Philippians. "Paul realizes that he is first of all an apostle, a pastor, a preacher. Martyrdom is a luxury and will have to wait."(Craddock and Westminster John Knox Press 30) God has more fruitful labor for Paul so he most certainly will be delivered.

## **Reflection Questions**

1. What brings you joy? Have you ever thought of Christ bringing you joy, or the sharing of the Gospel bringing joy? Perhaps the joy of witnessing someone coming to believe in Christ and live in Christ?
2. List some things that would cause shame in our culture.
3. List some things that would cause shame in the current Christian or church culture.
4. Circle the things in #2 and #3 that would cause you shame. Are any of these similar to the shame with which Paul is concerned?

## Week Two/Day Five Kingdom Citizenship

Verses 27-30 are again, one long sentence. This section serves several purposes. According to Alexander, it is the beginning of the “Request for reassurance about the recipients” portion of a family letter.(Fee 3) According to Hellerman, it is the beginning of the body of the letter.(Hellerman et al. 76) I tend to think both are correct, but more than that, it introduces us to another major theme of the letter. As I mentioned before, unity is a major theme, but that unity is part of a larger theme of “Kingdom Citizenship”. This sentence is the introduction to the next large section of 1:27-2:18.

Philippians 1:27-30 - <sup>27</sup> Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, <sup>28</sup> and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God’s doing. <sup>29</sup> For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— <sup>30</sup> since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Philippians 1:27-30 - <sup>27</sup> *Only, live as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or not and hear about you, you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side for the belief of the gospel, <sup>28</sup> and are in no way intimidated by the opposition. For this is proof of their destruction, but of your salvation, and this is from God, <sup>29</sup> because this has been given to you, not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him <sup>30</sup> since you are having the same trials that you know I had before and hear that I have in the present.*

### **Initial Takeaways**

1. Copy here verse 27a in the two translations and underline the word(s) that are different.

2. Underline the words “standing firm”, “striving side by side”, “intimidated”, “opponents/opposition”, “struggle/trial” in the Scripture translations above.

### Into the Text

There are several allusions in this text that do not really translate well into English, but the Philippians would have easily picked up on them. The first is *polytuomai*, which is translated in the NRSV as “live your life”. While this translation is correct as a meaning, this word is most often used to mean “to be a citizen” or “citizenship”. Paul uses this same word in 3:20, and the NRSV translates it “citizenship in heaven”. “The political connotations of *polytuomai* cannot be denied, so a purely figurative meaning, ‘live’, ‘to lead one’s life’, with no political implications does not satisfy.”(Hellerman et al. 78) Remember that Roman citizenship would have been a source of pride. Even those in the Philippian church who were not Roman citizens would have been keenly aware of the importance of citizenship. Hellerman concludes that Paul used this “politically charged” term intentionally to begin the contrast between Roman citizenship and Kingdom citizenship.(Hellerman et al. 78) Hellerman is correct, because, as we will see, this contrast is developed intensively throughout the remainder of the letter.

Remember also that there was a Praetorian Guard stationed in Philippi and that many Roman veterans had settled there. It is possible that some members of the church had a military background. At the very least, all of the members would have been familiar with military actions and terminology and would have also experienced the gladiatorial games designed to keep these retired soldiers happy.

There are several terms that allude to a military action throughout Philippians, with two being found in verse 27. *Stekete*, translated as “standing firm”, can also mean “soldiers standing their ground in battle”. *Sunathleo*, translated as “striving side by side”, is a military term describing soldiers “fighting side by side” and has connotations of comradeship and loyalty. Paul uses this same term later in chapter 4 to talk about Euodia and Syntyche (4:2).

*Pturo*, translated as “intimidated” and *antikomai*, translated as “opposition” can also have military connotations, however Paul seems to shift from his military metaphors in verse 27 to athletic metaphors in the remainder of the chapter. Both of these words would also have meanings in the arena, as well. In verse 30, the word *agon*, translated as “trials” or “struggles”, literally means “an athletic competition”.(Danker et al. 17) “In a Roman colonial city like Philippi, which definitely had gladiatorial contests and games of various sorts, these metaphors were especially apt, not least because the games were widely seen as places where good Roman character and virtue would be manifested.”(Witherington 106)

Who are these opponents Paul refers to in verse 30? Witherington suggests that Paul is simply warning the Philippians of future opponents by reminding them of his former and current opponents.(Witherington 97–107) Paul will mention some opponents that he perceives will be heading to Philippi later in chapter 3. However, it is obvious that these are current opponents to the Philippians; “you are having the same trials”. Fee suggests Paul is referring to the Roman Empire.(Fee 172) This is plausible and possibly a portion of their opponents; however I agree with Hellerman in his analysis that the opponents were the pagans living alongside them in Philippi.(Hellerman et al. 81–82) “The adversaries likely consisted of Roman officials and the local populace, motivated by the Christians withdrawal from the traditional Greco-Roman cults, especially from the Imperial cult.”(Hellerman et al. 82)

The point Paul is trying to make with the military and athletic metaphors is one of unity in Christ. This unity in Christ is characteristic of citizens of the Kingdom of God/Heavenly Kingdom. “Paul does not believe the Christian is called to stand alone and face the world. Rather the community of faith stands firm together, strengthening one another and reinforcing one another’s resolve.”(Witherington 103) Whether Paul is able to visit Philippi again or not, the Philippians need to remain united to face both their current and future opposition. They are to be like the army who works together to win the battle and like the athletic team who works together to win the contest. Think of the cliché, “there’s no ‘I’ in team.” This is only the introduction to Paul’s exhortation about Kingdom Citizenship. Next week we will see him develop this further.

One more quick point here, notice that Paul claims it is a gift that has been given to the Philippians to “believe in Christ but also to suffer for him” (v. 29). The word translated as “given” is from the same Greek root word, *charis*, that means grace. Remember that for Paul his ministry is God’s grace; and here we see that Paul also considers suffering for Christ as God’s grace.

