

Place: Lurgan Baptist 5:10:2014

Reading: Acts 16:9-15 Philippians 1:1-2

## THE JOURNEY TO JOY

### 1. PAUL'S BELOVED CHURCH

During the Second World War Paul Schneider was a pastor of a church in Berlin. He was imprisoned by Hitler because of his preaching against Fascism. As a result he never saw his wife and two year boy again. Despite beatings and torture and finally execution the letters that he wrote from the Dachau concentration camp to his wife were full of joy. Again and again he wrote, "*I'm so happy*" and "*I'm so grateful to the Lord.*" He lived for Christ and therefore he had nothing to lose. Paul also was deprived of his freedom. He was under house arrest and chained to a Roman soldier 24/7. Times were tough. He was a prisoner facing possible execution. His back was to the wall. And yet when he picked up his quill and wrote on the parchment, he penned a letter that resonates with joy.

My .... from start to finish this personal letter exudes with joy. Indeed the words "*joy and rejoice,*" occur at least 16 times. The Lord Jesus said, "*These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you and **that** your joy might be full.*" (Jn 15:11) Paul tells us **that** "*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy .....*" (Gal 5:22 ) Are you a rejoicing Christian ? Is your ministry a joyful ministry ? **Is it a blessing or burden** ? You know, this little letter contains only

104 verses, at the most it's a twelve to thirteen minute read from start to finish. But it is like a breath of fresh air. It is like walking into a room that is filled with the fragrant scent of beautiful roses. You see, Paul did not write this letter to answer any profound questions or solve knotty problems or even to deal with a particular sin. Instead he wrote to express joy and encourage joy in dear friends, like Lydia, his first convert in Philippi, and the Roman jailor, who washed Paul's wounds and gave him food to eat. ( Acts 16:34 ) I mean here is Paul facing a lonely future and a trial which could lead to death, and people who are against him are preaching while he languishes in prison, and yet his favourite words in this latter are "*joy,*" and "*rejoice.*"

Bengel said, "*The main point of the letter is `I rejoice, you must rejoice.*" Von Hugel called the letter "*radiance amid the storm and stress of life.*" I love what the fellow who was saved from a life of sin said one evening when giving his testimony in the church. He said, "*I'm happier now when I am not happy than I was before when I was happy.*" To quote Billy Sunday "*If there is no joy in your religion, there is a leak in your Christianity somewhere.*" My .... this is joy. Pure, unalloyed, and magnetic. The kind you don't see very often nowadays, not even in churches. Have you noticed the looks on the average Sunday morning crowd ?

One word comes to mind .... **grim.** There they are, rows of overcast faces whose forecast is for dreary to mildly depressing days, with little or no chance of any laughter. I heard about a pastor who often says to his

congregation, " *Many of you are happy down deep .... but your face hasn't found it out yet.*" But then let's be fair, it's not just churchgoers. For ours is a world of long faces and aching hearts crying out for a morsel of joy, a crumb of encouragement. It's just that you would expect believers, of all people, to exhibit a contagious and enthusiastic joy. The kind that has little difficulty convincing unsaved folk that Christ **can** make a difference in life. How can we tap into that joy ? The kind that makes our Christianity contagious even during times of crisis ? Is it possible ? Well, let's look at this lovely letter which is a **journey into joy.** ( Acts 28:16) As you look at these opening verses notice,

### **(1) HOW THIS CHURCH WAS STARTED**

Can you picture the scene ? It was a Sunday morning in the church at Philippi, a church dubbed as Paul's " *sweetheart church.*" One of the elders stood before the assembled company to read to them a letter. He told them it was from a lost friend. The people were sitting on tenderhook's wondering. Who ? Then he dropped the name, Paul. What memories that name would evoke. Lydia and her dependants would think of that unusual prayer meeting by the river Gangites. The name of Paul would thrill the poor slave girl he set free.

My .... the Roman jailer would smile happily at his wife and children when he heard the name of Paul. Ten years ago this man was among them as an evangelist and church planter. And now a decade later

his name pops up again. Here was a priceless parchment, a letter from the great apostle himself. Why was Paul writing to them ? And how was this church started anyhow ? Well, let's backtrack for a moment and think of,

### **(a) THE MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD:**

For it was Spirit-guided ministers, with a vision of the glorious Christ and perishing humanity who invaded Europe with the Gospel. My .... God's dealings with Paul in sending him forth into Macedonia make an amazing chapter in the ministry of the Spirit in the lives of the servants of God. For only one High Command must be recognised in our invasion of the centre's of wickedness. The Supreme Commander of all strategy is the Spirit of God, who wants to set up His headquarters in the heart of the believer. He indwells every child of God, but He must *preside* as well as *reside*. Everything must be surrendered to His overruling will. You see at times,

#### **1. The Holy Spirit Says No:**

There were times when Paul must have wondered, " *Is this really happening to me ?*" He knocked on a number of doors, Asia and Bithynia but all stayed shut. It was a series of dead ends. What strange and startling words are these " *forbidden of the Holy Ghost,*" ( 16:6 ) " *but the Spirit suffered them not.*" ( 16:7 ) My .... Are you searching for God's will and finding nothing but closed doors ? Has the Holy Spirit been restraining you from going to places which from all

outward appearances seem desirable and proper ? My .... the Spirit is a **Hinderer** as well as **Helper**. He restrains as well as constrains. He gives the red signal as well as the green. When Charles Spurgeon was a young man he had a desire to go to college, so he made an appointment to talk to a man from a college about enrolling there. Spurgeon came and he sat in a room waiting for the man to come and the man never came. Well, Spurgeon took that to mean that the Lord didn't mean for him to go to college and so he became a very wonderfully self-taught man.

Of course he established a college in London that is still named after him. But what he didn't know until many years later was, that when he came and sat in one room of the house waiting for the man from the college the man from the college came and sat in another room in the house waiting for him and neither one of them ever knew that the other one was there. Outward circumstances beyond your control and yet somehow in the midst of it all the Lord leads. My .... are you discouraged because of seemingly closed doors ? Don't be for our disappointments are His appointments. Indeed if you look further you'll discover that,

## **2. The Holy Spirit Says Go:**

Do you recall that the vision of the Man of Macedonia is given to Paul ? " *Come over into Macedonia and help us.*" ( 16:9 ) Macedonia was across the Aegean Sea on the mainland of Greece ? How did Paul respond ? " *Immediately we endeavoured to go into*

*Macedonia assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel unto them.*" ( 16:10 ) Impelled by an inward urge and compelled by an outward appeal, Paul is driven to follow the God-revealed path. My .... we can be assured that if the Holy Spirit restrains us from one course, it is to constrain us to follow another. Has the Lord closed one door to you, then He will open another ? Is the red light flashing in this direction ? Then the green light will flash in another direction ? Just be sensitive to Him. This church was started because of (a) and because of,

### ***(b) THE MASTERY OF THE SON OF GOD:***

Do you see how Paul introduces himself ? "*Paul and Timothy the servants of Jesus Christ.*" (1:1 ) Now that sets the whole tone of this letter for this is essentially a letter from a friend to his friends. But will you notice that this apostle has been mastered and captivated by Jesus Christ. Four times in this first chapter he makes reference to his bonds ( 1:7, 13, 14, 16 ) but he clearly indicates that the literal chains of imprisonment were but a symbol of a spiritual relationship. He is in the bonds of Christ, not Caesar, he is imprisoned in the Lord not Rome.

For Timothy and himself are " *the servants of Jesus Christ.*" The Greek term Paul uses here is " *doulos*, " which means " *slave or bondservant.*" Paul has no delusions of grandeur. No airs or graces. He does not say, " *Hi, I am Paul the famous you must have heard of me apostle to the Gentiles.*" He does not say, "Hi, I

*am the author of most of the New Testament epistles." He does not say, " Hello, I am Paul the man with the sensational conversion experience." No, " I am Paul the bond-slave of Jesus Christ." David Jeremiah says, " we would all do well to remember that God did not save us to become sensations but rather to become servants." You see, a slave " one bound to another .... by the bands of a constraining love .... One who is in a relation to another which only death can break .... One whose will is swallowed up in the .... sweet will of God. One who serves another even to the disregard of his own interests." Not celebrities, not prima donnas to be handled with kid gloves .... slaves. My .... have we begun the slave life ? Has the love of Christ conquered and captivated you that you yield gladly to the chains of Christ ? Have we from our lips and heart confessed, "I love my Saviour, I will not go free ?" (1)*

## **(2) HOW THIS CHURCH WAS STRUCTURED**

For here is the distinctive nature of a local church. This is what constitutes a New Testament church. It is comprised of saints, ruled by godly elders and served by faithful deacons. As Sam Gordon in his little book on Philippians says, " *there is an organized structure, there has to be if things are going to run smoothly*" So Paul talks here about,

### **(a) THE PHILIPPIAN SAINTS:**

" *To all the saints in Christ Jesus,*" (1:1) That's WHAT they are: they were not special Christians, they were people like you and me. The word translated

" *saints,*" (*hagios*) literally means " *holy or separated ones.*" They have not been canonised by Rome, but they have been cleansed by blood. They are not super pious. They are not paid up members of a Christian country club. They are just ordinary folk like you and me. You see, this is one of those universal descriptive titles common in the New Testament for all those who belong to the family of God. The New Testament never refers to a special class set apart as holier than others. God divides the human race into two classes sinners and saints and saints are simply saved sinners. Do you see how Paul puts it ? " *Saints in Christ Jesus.*" That is by virtue of their union with Him they have become saints. My .... each chapter in this " *joy letter,*" begins with " *in Christ,*" or " *in the Lord.*" (1:1 2:1 3:1 4:1 ) Are you " *in Christ ?*" Have you been " *set apart,*" from Satan to God ? Are you " *a saint in Christ Jesus ?*"

During the early days of his ministry before there were many aeroplanes Dr. Harry Ironside used to travel many miles by train. On one of these trips, a four day trip from the west coast of America to his home in Chicago, the Bible teacher found himself in the company of a party of nuns. They liked him because of his kind manner and for his interesting reading and exposition of the Bible. One day Dr. Ironside began a discussion by asking the nuns if any of them had ever seen a saint. They all said they had never seen one. He then asked if they would like to see one. They all said yes, they would like to see one. Then he surprised them greatly by saying " *I am a saint. I am saint Harty.*" And he took them to verses of the Bible such as this

one to show that it was so. So it is with us. Your name may sound funny when you preface it with the title "saint." But you may rest assured that it does not sound funny to God. For it is He who calls us saints in Christ Jesus. That's WHAT they are: "to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi." That's WHERE they are! Philippi received its name in 356 BC from Philip of Macedonia the father of Alexander the Great. And Philippi was a Roman colony. ( Acts 16:12 ) That meant that it was "a Rome away from Rome." You see, the Emperor organized "colonies," by ordering Roman citizens especially retired military people to live in selected areas so there would be strong pro-Roman cities in these strategic areas. Though living on foreign soil, the citizens were expected to be loyal to Rome, to obey the laws of Rome, and to give honour to the Roman Emperor. In return they were given certain political privileges, one of which was exemption from taxes.

So Philippi was a little piece of Rome in the midst of Greek culture. My .... all the vice and sin that was found in Rome, was here in Philippi. This was a city that had opposed the gospel and persecuted the servants of Jesus Christ. Hardly a favourable atmosphere for saints to live for Christ, but here they were to live for separation is not segregation. A young man who was slipping badly in his spiritual life was approached by a minister about his need of restoration. After listening to the pastor he rather impatiently exploded, "No one can live a Christian life and work where I do. All the boys at the shop are godless, and the air is charged with the vilest of oaths. They laugh

at the things of God." My .... are you finding it hard **66 where you are ?**" Are you saying, "If only I had a different job, lived in a different place, was married to a different person, then I would be truer to the Lord." Are you not forgetting something ? You are "in Christ." And if we are "in Christ," then the surge of wickedness around us cannot affect us. It is not where we are living but in whom we are living that determines the victory. My .... are you "abiding in Him ?" (a)

### **(b) THE PHILIPPIAN SHEPHERDS:**

"With the bishops." (1:1) The word translated "bishops," here ( episkopos ) is translated "overseers," in ( Acts 20:28 ) where it has direct reference to shepherding. Paul is charging the elders of Ephesus and he says "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." Now since the same people addressed in ( Acts 20:28 ) are called elders in ( Acts 20:17 ) we conclude that elders and bishops and overseers are one and the same thing. You see, in apostolic times each local church in healthy condition had a number of bishops, that is, elders, responsible for the spiritual welfare of the group, as is evident in the plural "bishops," in ( Phil 1:1 )

My .... the only difference between the other elders and myself is a functional one. I happen to be the one "who labours in the Word and doctrine."

( 1 Tim 5:17 ) You say, what does that mean ? It means endless hours of studying the Word of God. That is why, if you have a problem you ought not to be bothering me with it, if one of the other elders can deal with it. And because I am the one who is "*labouring in the Word and doctrine,*" then the other elders should free me from these things, so that I can free for this thing. Now are you getting the picture of a New Testament church ? (a) (b)

**(c) THE PHILIPPIAN SERVANTS:**

" *And deacons.*" (1:1) Now the word translated "*deacons,*" ( diakonos ) occurs 22 times in Paul's epistles and refers to a servant, especially as seen in action. It is generally accepted that the office of deacon differed from the office of bishop or elders in that the deacons took care of the more *secular affairs* of the local church and the elders took care of the more *spiritual aspects*. The function of deacons probably grew out of that incident in ( Acts Ch 6 ) although the word diakonos is not used here. Do you recall that the apostles were being reduced more and more to administrative roles, "*serving tables ?*" So they came to the church at Jerusalem and said, "*Look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word.*" ( Acts 6:3-4 )

In other words "*deacons,*" are to set elders "*free,*" from the temporal aspect of church life, so that elders may give themselves to the spiritual aspect of church

life. My .... do you see what a properly constituted church consists of ? "*Saints .... bishops and deacons.*" (1:1) Saints worship as believer-priests, offering spiritual sacrifices. Bishops rule and teach. Deacons serve, and these all have their place in the local church for "*God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.*" ( 1 Cor 14:33 ) (1) (2)

**(3) HOW THIS CHURCH WAS STRENGTHENED**

For Paul breathed his blessing on this congregation. He said "*Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*" ( 1:2 ) You see, the Greeks greeted each other with cries of "*grace be unto you,*" and of course the Jews saluted one another with the words "*peace be unto you,*" you see, east and west meet in Christ, for "*ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*" ( Gal 3:28 ) Now did you notice,

**(a) WHO THE BLESSING IS FROM:**

) "*From God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*" ( 1:2 ) The Father and the Son are jointly the source of all grace and peace. My .... nothing so forcefully testifies to the deity of Christ and His oneness with the Father as this indirect witness. (a)

**(b) WHO THE BLESSING IS FOR:**

" *Grace be unto you and peace.*" ( 1:2 ) Now what is grace ? But the unmerited favour of God toward guilty

sinners. Grace is something that comes **to us**. Peace, on the other hand, is something that transpires **in us** as a result of receiving God's grace. *The order is of utmost importance.* We can never know peace in our hearts without first experiencing the grace of God. Grace stoops to where we are and lifts us to where we ought to be. Grace is everything for nothing to those who do not deserve anything. My ... have you experienced His saving grace ? Can you say,

***Tw'as grace that wrote my name  
In life's eternal book;  
Tw'as grace that gave me to the Lamb  
Who all my sorrows took***

Now when Paul wishes these blessings for these saints he's not desiring their salvation all over again. **He's simply saying that there is a sufficiency for Gods people, there are adequate resources for us when we need them.** " *Grace be unto you and peace,*" how significant that was because of the very public squabble between two sisters in the assembly. Their behaviour was upsetting the apple cart and it would take a lot of grace to restore the shattered peace. John Phillips says, " *Where there is grace there can be no commencement of hostilities. Where there is peace there can be no continuation of hostilities. Grace means that war is impossible, peace means that the war is over. Contention only flourishes in the absence of grace and peace.*"

Are you a " *saint in Christ Jesus at loggerheads with another saint ?*" Well, there is grace to help you ?

For what is grace ? It's God's provision for our every need when we need it. My ... are you a servant of Jesus Christ ? Are you an elder, a deacon in the fellowship ? Then, bless God, you are not left to walk the pathway of obedience alone, for God's commands are Gods enabling's ? " *Grace be unto and peace,*" and if we have received it, ought we not to reflect it ? **For we are nothing, and He is everything.** After conducting Beethoven's moving and magnificent Ninth Symphony Arturo Toscanini brought down his baton to rapturous applause. The audience roared in acclaim and approval. Toscanini and his orchestra took repeated bows.

When the cheering finally subsided, Toscanini turned back to the musicians and leaned over the podium. Voicing his words in whispers he said to the men. " *Gentlemen I am nothing. And you are nothing. Beethoven is everything, everything, everything.*" " **He is my everything, He is my all.**" Really, is He ? Have you **received** His grace and peace ? Are you " *saint in Christ Jesus ?*" Are you **relying** on His grace and peace ? Are you a serving " *saint in Christ Jesus,*" ? Are you **radiating** His grace and peace ? Are you a sweet " *saint in Christ Jesus ?*" Philippi was Paul's beloved church. Paul's sweetheart church. I wonder how he would describe Lurgan ?