

THE BIG READ (11)

Jesus in Philippians

A. Introduction

1. Every book of the Bible has one dominating theme – Jesus is the Christ.

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”
(Luke 24:45-47)

Jesus is the Christ who will suffer and die.

Jesus is the Christ who will rise from the dead on the third day.

Jesus is the Christ who will forgive the sins of all who repent.

Jesus is the Christ who will be preached to the nations.

2. After the four Gospels that tell the story of Jesus’ earthly life, and Acts which traces the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, the remainder of the New Testament is made up of epistles or letters that were sent to individual Christians or churches.

These letters address specific situations in the lives of believers and through them we are taught how to live as God’s people.

3. Philippians is another one of the so-called prison letters written by the apostle Paul.

Paul wrote it during his imprisonment in Rome in the early AD60s.

“It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me.”
(Philippians 1:7)

“As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.” (Philippians 1:13-14)

“The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.” (Philippians 1:17)

“All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.”
(Philippians 4:22)

4. Paul wrote this letter to the church in Philippi, a church he planted during his second missionary journey.

It was a church that included Lydia, a successful businesswoman (Acts 16:11-15); a formerly demon-possessed slave girl (Acts 16:16-18); and a jailer and his family (Acts 16:25-34).

5. Philippi was a Roman Colony.

A Roman Colony was like a miniature Rome – controlled by Roman law and its citizens were to copy the lifestyle of the Romans.

In Philippians, Paul uses this idea and applies it to the church saying that they are citizens of heaven and are to live accordingly.

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” (Philippians 1:27)

"But our citizenship is in heaven." (Philippians 3:20)

B. Why did Paul write this letter?

1. There are lots of reasons why Paul wrote this letter.

Five reasons at least are given within the letter.

2. Paul wrote to update the church on his circumstances.

Hearing that Paul was in prison would have concerned the Philippians, so he writes to let them know that he was okay.

"Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly." (Philippians 1:12-14)

3. He also wanted to thank them for their gift that Epaphroditus had brought to him.

"Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." (Philippians 4:14-18)

Epaphroditus had been taken ill and nearly died after his journey to Rome, and news of this illness would have concerned the Philippians, so Paul writes to reassure them about his situation.

"But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me." (Philippians 2:25-30)

4. Paul had heard from Epaphroditus news of false teachers within the church and also some tensions between members of the church, so he writes to address them.

It seems like there was two kinds of false teaching going around: legalism and licence.

"Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh." (Philippians 3:2-3)

"Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things." (Philippians 3:17-19)

There was also the problem of quarrelling members.

"I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life." (Philippians 4:2-3)

D. Jesus in Philippians

1. Jesus is the Humble Servant.

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:5-8)

Even though He was God, He became like us.

Even though He was God, He died for us.

This is why the Philippians should be united.

2. Jesus is the Sovereign Lord.

“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11)

He has been exalted to the highest place.

He has been given the name above every name.

He has been made ruler over all.

This is why the Philippians should not move from the gospel.

3. Jesus is the Complete Saviour.

“being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6)

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” (Philippians 2:12-13)

“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19)

This is why the Philippians can rejoice even through times of suffering.