

## **Thank God for the Church #1**

Series: J.O.Y. – Jesus, Others, and You

### **A Study of the Book of Philippians**

#### **Philippians 1:1-11**

**Introduction:** The first time a certain man ever walked into one place, he described it like this, **'It's a place where everybody regardless of race, creed, or color is welcomed. Its warm glow is a beacon of hope and salvation. Inviting the hungry, the lost, the seriously hammered all...to come inside. It is a place of safety and nourishment. It never closes. It is always there for you.'**

You're probably thinking that must describe a church and would love to know the name of that church, right?

I guess you could say for some it is a church. In fact, it is pretty packed out on Sunday mornings, but it wasn't a church that was being described. It's the reaction of the first time that the famous chef Anthony Bourdain walked into a Waffle House.

But there was a church like that over two thousand years ago in an ancient city in northern Greece called Philippi. The Apostle Paul visited there around 50 A.D. and founded it as the first church in Europe. Paul is now writing to this church from prison ten years later.

#### Philippians 1:1-11

***1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:***

***2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.***

***3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.***

***7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all***

*of you share in God's grace with me. 8God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

*9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. (NIV)*

### **Let's Pray**

I'm beginning a new series of messages TODAY from the book of Philippians, entitled, "**J.O.Y... Jesus...Others and You.**"

### **Today's Message is: "Thank God for the Church"**

Paul wrote thirteen books of the New Testament. All of them were letters. Of the thirteen letters, eleven of them were written to seven different churches. Philippians is the only letter that we have in the New Testament where Paul never corrects bad teaching, rebukes bad behavior, or handled a bad situation.

Not every church brought joy to Paul's heart: the church at Corinth was a divided church, a fractured fellowship of fighting factions that were feuding and fussing and suing one another.

The church in Galatia was a deceived church. They had forsaken God's grace for man's law as a way of salvation.

But the church at Philippi was a devoted church full of joy, happy in Jesus, winning souls, loving one another.

Corinth had discouraged Paul. Galatia had depressed Paul, but the Philippi church had delighted Paul. Corinth had hurt him. Galatia had hindered him, but the Philippians had heartened him.

This church was full of joy. It was a church that gave joy to the pastor that founded it and gave joy to the people who attended it. *Nineteen* times you will find the words '**rejoice, joy, and gladness,**' in this book.

When you read this letter, you realize this is what a church should look like on the inside to the people who attend it, but it is also what a church ought to look like from the outside to people who hear about it.

When you open this little book, which only takes about 17 minutes to read, it is like opening your window to a breeze of fresh air. This little book pulsates and radiates with joy.

I am excited about studying this book, because frankly we live in a world that has many pursuits of happiness, but very little joy. It doesn't matter whether you live in a relatively prosperous, peaceful country like ours or a war-torn country across the globe, or a poverty-stricken nation. Everywhere you look there is despair, depression, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and division.

**I don't think anybody would argue that either inside most churches or outside the church there is a need for more joy.**

**Before we get too far, let's define JOY.**

Merriam Webster defines happiness as **“a state of well-being and contentment; a pleasurable or satisfying experience.”** Whereas joy is specifically stated, as **“the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires; the expression or exhibition of such emotion.”**

People often assume that feelings of happiness, laughter and contentment in life is like the joy we experience in Jesus. There is a big difference between joy and happiness. Happiness is a reaction to something great. Joy is the product of someone great.

The key to the Christian's joy is its source, which is the Lord. Joy is rooted in who God is. If Christ is in me and I am in Him, that relationship is not a sometimes experience. In Philippians 4:4 Paul writes, **“Rejoice in the Lord always”** (Phil. 4:4a). This is one of those biblical imperatives, and it leaves no room for not rejoicing. He then adds, **“Again I will say, Rejoice”** (v. 4b). **“Be joyful always”** (1 Thes. 5:16).

How is it possible to remain joyful all the time? Paul gives us the key: **“Rejoice in the Lord always.”**

Even if we cannot rejoice in our circumstances, if we find ourselves experiencing pain, sorrow, or grief, we still can rejoice in Christ. We rejoice in the Lord, and since He never leaves us or forsakes us, we can rejoice always.

Joy in the NT is virtually always used to signify a feeling of "happiness" that is based on spiritual realities, and independent of **"what's happening"**.

**Literally, the "fruit of the Spirit"** is the product of the Holy Spirit's cultivation of character in a heart. Galatians 5:22-23 describes what that fruit looks like; the second characteristic listed is joy. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit.

The Greek word for joy is **chara**. Joy is the natural response to the work of God, whether promised or fulfilled. The Greek **chara** is closely related to charis, which means "grace" or "a gift." **Chara** is the normal response to **charis**—we have joy because of God's grace.

**The Spirit's production of joy can manifest in several different ways:**

The joy of deliverance: When God sets someone free, rejoicing is in order.

1 Samuel 2:1: Hannah was filled with joy at her deliverance from her enemies.

The joy of salvation: Our greatest reason to be joyful is that God wants to save us and spend eternity with us.

Acts 8:8: The people of Samaria were joyful as they heard the gospel and saw God's power in healing the sick.

The joy of spiritual maturity: As the Holy Spirit works in us to bear more fruit, we become confident in God's promises and rejoice in our walk with Him.

The joy of God's presence: The Holy Spirit draws us to God, in whose presence we can know true joy.

Psalm 16:11: "You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

Possessing joy is a choice.

**STORY:** There were two women who worked together. They were chatting in the office, and both were married to two men who also worked together in another office. Wife #1 was talking to wife #2 and she said, 'I had a fine

evening last night. How was yours?' wife #2 said, 'it was a disaster. My husband came home, ate his dinner in three minutes and fell asleep in his recliner. Tell me about your evening.'

Wife #1 said, 'it was amazing! My husband came home and took me out for a romantic dinner. After dinner we walked for an hour. When we came home, he lit candles around the house. It was like a fairy tale!'

It just so happened that at the same time the two husbands were having the same conversation. Husband #1 said, 'how was your evening last night?' husband #2 said, 'great...I came home, dinner was on the table, I ate and fell asleep. How about you?'

Husband #1 said, 'it was horrible. I came home. There was no dinner, because they had cut off the electricity, because I forgot to pay the bill, so I had to take my wife out for dinner, which was so expensive that I didn't have enough money left for an uber ride home. So, we walked home (which took an hour). When we got home, I remembered there was no electricity, so I had to light candles all over the house!'

Joy is not an experience that comes from favorable circumstances but is God's gift to believers. Joy is an inner gladness, a deep-seated pleasure. Joy is the deep-down sense of well-being that abides in the heart of the person who knows all is well between himself and the Lord.

Central to this encouraging book is the person of Jesus. He is the reason Paul is imprisoned. But He is also the source of Paul's contentment, strength, and joy.

20 times Paul uses the name Jesus. There is joy in Jesus. There is the joy of Jesus. There is joy with Jesus so the book is about the joy of Jesus--real joy, true joy, everlasting joy that cannot be found apart from Jesus. The joy of Jesus is a personal joy. It is a powerful joy. It is a permanent joy.

Jesus said to His disciples in John 15 and verse 11, "***These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full.***"

Here we see 'my joy is, a personal joy,' may remain in you speaks of, a permanent joy, that your joy maybe full tells us it's, a powerful joy."

If the Christian life is anything at all it is to be a life of joy--radiant resplendent, refreshing joy. It is a joy unspeakable to be a Christian. There is the joy of having God as your father, the joy of having Jesus as your savior, the joy of having the spirit as your friend, the joy of having the Bible as your guide, the joy of knowing heaven will be your eternal home.

It is not just a coincidence that this journal of joy was written to the people at Philippi. I can say with confidence that this was Paul's favorite church. Of all the churches that Paul founded if you had asked Paul, "Paul which of these churches would you like to pastor?" He would undoubtedly have said, the church at Philippi "it was the nearest and dearest to his heart."

Notice he says in verse 7, ***"I have you in my heart."*** He says in verse 6, ***"I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."***

Paul says in verse 3, ***"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you."*** Paul was saying every time I think of how this church even came into being, it causes me to rejoice. This beginning of this church is one of the most remarkable stories in the New Testament.

And for that we turn to Acts 16.

## **I. The Story of How this Church was Formed.**

### **A. The Leading of the Holy Spirit--Verse 6-10**

Acts 16:6-10, ***"Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."*** (NIV)

This is a strange thing indeed. Paul kept trying to go to Asia to preach the gospel and the Holy Spirit kept slamming the door in Paul's face.

If you're going to walk with God, you're going to have to learn how to listen to the "NO" and the "GO" of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible says, "The **steps** of a good man are ordered by the Lord." But the **stops** of a good man are also ordered by the Lord.

The Holy Spirit not only has a ministry of **steering** us, but he also has a ministry of **stopping** us. Too many times Christians get into trouble because they do not listen to the "no" of the Holy Spirit.

One old country preacher said, "**The problem in modern day Christianity and with so many preachers is they have went when they ain't been sent.**"

Paul was a man who walked close enough to the Lord that he could hear the spirit say no. And if the Holy Spirit shuts one door, He opens another.

God wants to teach us that the right place at the right time is always His place at His time.

Verse 12 says, "***From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony, and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.***" God wanted Paul at Philippi. Now there are several reasons why it was important for Paul to go to Philippi.

**First, it was SOVEREIGN city.**

In verse 12, it is called a leading city of the district of Macedonia, in other words, a Roman colony. Now that is very important. Unlike other cities, this city had all the rights, the privileges, and the protection of Rome. Now Paul being a Roman citizen would have all the rights and privileges of a Roman citizen. Therefore, Paul could preach the gospel in an unhindered fashion.

**Second, it was also a SENSITIVE city.**

It was hungry for the Good News and ready for revival. We will see in a moment everywhere that Paul turned people were saved.

**But most important, Philippi was a STRATEGIC city.**

Philippi was the doorway to all of Europe.

## **B. The Power of the Holy Spirit.**

We see the remarkable stories of 3 different people coming to know the Lord.

***First*** there was the traveling sales lady by the name of Lydia, a seller of purple fabric. It's beautiful to see how she came to know the Lord, on the riverside as Paul began to preach to a group of women. We read where the Lord opened her heart. And when the Lord opened her heart, she opened her house, and it became the headquarters for Paul and his ministry team in Philippi.

***Second***, we come to verse 16; ***“Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.”***

Now you would think that that would have been pleasing for Paul. But Paul immediately realizes that it was a demon that was controlling her, so he cast out this evil spirit.

The girl's owners are upset, because now she is saved and not making money telling fortunes. So, they have Paul & Silas thrown in prison.

***Thirdly***, we are told in verse 25 that Paul and Silas are singing praises in jail. God's sends an earthquake and shakes that prison until all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. You talk about jailhouse rock. God used an earthquake to save a Philippian jailer and his entire family.

Think about it, this great Philippian church's first three converts are made up of a traveling saleslady, a demon possessed girl, and a jailer. These three people couldn't have been more different.

## **C. The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit.**

Someone has said that fellowship is simply two fellows in the same ship. But the word fellowship has a much deeper meaning. It means to share. To have something in common. What does this church have in common. Well, they had a common Lord, Jesus Christ. And because of that, they had a common life in the Holy Spirit and because of that they had a common love for Jesus and for one another.

One of the beautiful things about being in the family of God is we not only share a human spirit, we also share the Holy Spirit. The Bible says in I Cor. 12:13, "***By one spirit have you all been baptized into one body.***"

Just look at us. Look at the people sitting around you, different levels of education, different levels on the social scale, we have different interests, different abilities, and yet our hearts are strangely knit together by some invisible bond. And what is that bond that knits our hearts together? It is the bond of the Holy Spirit.

Dwight L. Moody said, "There are two ways of being united, frozen together or melted together." We are not rusted together by ritualism, frozen together by formalism, linked together by like-mindedness or chained together by conservatism. We are melted together by the Holy Spirit; it is so beautiful when your spirit bears witness with my spirit that we are children of God.

Paul uses the phrases "in Christ," "in the Lord" "in Christ Jesus" 18 times in this letter. Jesus is the head of the church. Jesus is the heart of the church. Jesus is the hope of the church and real fellowship is found in Jesus Christ.

So here we see the amazing story of how this church began. Let's be clear, this church came about through the leading of the Holy Spirit, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

## **II. Three things about that Church I want to be True about OUR Church**

Here is how I want everyone whether inside our church or outside our church to see us.

***First***, I want them to be...

### **1. Grateful when they THINK about us.**

This is how Paul begins his letter.

***"Paul and timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all god's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons; grace and peace to you from God our father and the lord Jesus Christ. I thank my god every time I remember you."*** (Philippians 1:1-3, NIV)

Paul is talking to two groups of people Jews and Gentiles. I know there were Jews and Gentiles here, because of the greeting that Paul gives.

**Grace** was a greeting you would give to a Gentile. **Peace** (shalom) was a greeting you would give to a Jew. This was a very diverse church, and yet it had few problems and was full of joy.

The next statement that Paul makes tells volumes about Paul's love for this church. **"Every time I remember you, I thank God for you."**

That is what I want people to say about our church - those who attend our church and those who don't, those that know about our church and those who just hear about us. I want them to be grateful when they think about us.

**Second,** I want people to be...

## 2. Joyful when they TALK about us.

Paul says in verse 4, **"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy."**

Every time Paul prayed for this church, it was always with and joy in his heart. Keep in mind that Paul is writing from a prison.

What was it that brought such joy to his heart? **Their partnership.**

**"Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."**

(Philippians 1:5, NIV)

That word "partnership?" is translated "fellowship," but that word is one of the most misunderstood words in the New Testament. There is more to fellowship than just having a cup of coffee or going hunting, fishing, or playing golf together, or just hanging out.

In the first century that word was a financial term. It was related to commerce and business. Today, if two people decide to go into business together, it is called a partnership.

This church understood from its very beginning that they were entering into a partnership.

They understood that they were to give to the work of the gospel.

They understood they were to live for the spread of the gospel.

There would be so much that would radically change in our church if every one of you realized you are not just members. You are not just attenders. You to be partners and invested in ministry.

**It is what we mean with our core values of **Connect...Grow...Send.****

When you serve you serve as a means of spreading the gospel. We aren't partners just on Sunday, but on every day that end in "y."

- There were all kinds of barriers that would have kept people from ever getting together in this early church.
- There were racial barriers (Jews and Gentiles).
- There were social barriers - you had slave and free.
- There were financial barriers - you had rich and poor.
- There were cultural barriers - you had Greeks and romans.
- There were educational barriers - you had the schooled and the illiterate.

But there was one message that brought them together. There was one ministry that kept them together and that was the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**Whenever a church celebrates the gospel in their worship, elevates the gospel in their service, and communicates the gospel in their lives, people everywhere will be joyful when they talk about us.**

**Finally**, I want people to be...

### 3. Confident in what they TRUST in us.

There were a lot of things that Paul in this point in his life was not sure of. Would he ever get out of prison? Would he even get out alive? Would he be in another church? But there was one thing he was rock-solid about, ***"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, NIV)

Only God can finish what God starts and what God starts, God always finishes. The word there for ***'carry it on to completion'*** is a word that literally means "to fully complete."

Let me tell you something that is true about everyone hearing this message who are followers of Jesus. Do you know what God is doing in you right now? A good work. Do you know what God wants to do every day in our church through our church, with our church, for our church, and by our church?

**A good work.**

Do you know what I want people on the outside of our church saying about those of us on the inside of this church?

**1. God is doing a good work in us.**

**2. God is doing good works through us.**

Because that is what the gospel is all about.

The people who looked at this church in a little town called Philippi were confident about what they trusted about them. They knew that church could be counted on a lot more than waffle house to be a place of joy, ministry, service, worship, discipleship, and love.

It is being said today that there are a lot of people who find Jesus appealing, but the church appalling. It doesn't have to be that way, but it will take every one of us to be fully committed partners of the gospel.

**CLOSING:** By all accounts, the turning point of the revolutionary war came on Christmas day, in 1776, when George Washington crossed the Delaware, totally surprised the British in one of the greatest victories of the war and it turned the entire tide of that conflict.

What is little known is that Washington faced only a short window of opportunity, because the majority of his troop's enlistment was up and they were going to go home in despair that the war was already lost.

On December 23rd Washington had his officers up and down the Delaware read the words of a pamphlet entitled '***the crisis***' which was written by Thomas Payne.

This is what it said, **'These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.'**

**The men decided to stay and fight, and the rest is history.**

The church in America is at a crossroads. Our church is at a crossroads. We don't need summer saints or sunshine parishioners. We need fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ, full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit, being all-in as partners in the gospel, giving to the work of the gospel and living for the spread of the gospel.