

SUNDAY

May 29, 2011

READ: Philippians 1

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS: What are some of the themes that run through this first chapter of Paul's letter to the church in Philippi? How would you characterize Paul's state of mind? If you have a study Bible with introductory notes, where was Paul when he wrote this letter?

KEY CONCEPT: Paul's joy is communicated to the Philippians in this letter, as well as his encouragement for them to stand strong in their faith.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER: Paul's letter is full of words of thanksgiving, hope, joy and rejoicing... despite the circumstances of his imprisonment. What was it that gave him such joy and encouragement? What are the negative circumstances in your own life? Do you experience a sense of joy that overrides those concerns? Was there a time in your life when God blessed you with a new perspective on life that helped you to rise above your situation? What was it that brought about this changed perspective?

PRAY: Having "joy in the journey" is more than a self-help attitude adjustment. True joy comes from a relationship with our Savior...not just head knowledge of Him. Spend time in prayer today savoring your relationship...not asking for anything of God, but rather just spending time with Him. Allow Him to speak into your heart about His love for you...and let Him know your own love for Him.

MONDAY

May 30, 2011

READ: Philippians 1 (Focus: verses 1-2)

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS: How does Paul begin his letter to the Philippians? How does he characterize who he and Timothy are? What does he call those in the church at Philippi? What is his prayer-greeting to them? What is the significance of that greeting...is it more than just a "hello?"

KEY CONCEPT: Paul was mindful of his status as a servant of the Lord and his role in the care and nurturing of a fledgling body of believers. Each of us are able to play a similar role with those around us.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER: Do you see yourself as a servant of Jesus Christ as Paul did? How is that lived out in your life toward others? Do you understand that, biblically speaking, those who are followers of Jesus are saints...they are not perfect, but are working toward perfection through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? Are you submitting to the Spirit when He is nudging you in a certain direction? Paul prayed for grace and peace for the church...how important do you think peace was to those who were contending for the gospel in Philippi (see verse 29)? Do you ever offer a prayer of God's blessing for others as Paul did in verse 2?

PRAY: Paul exemplifies the concept of a servant-leader, planting churches throughout his journeys, but doing so as a servant of others and of God. Today pray that God will help you to receive a spirit of servanthood, desiring to honor Him by being a blessing to others whom you will meet this

TUESDAY

May 31, 2011

READ: Philippians 1 (Focus: verses 3-6)

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS: Notice the following phrases in this passage - "thank my God" and "pray with joy". Why do you suppose Paul is feeling this way toward the people in Philippi? How do you think it made the Philippians feel to know they were in partnership with Paul? What was the "good work" that Paul talks about as having begun and that was being carried toward completion?

KEY CONCEPT: The church had an important role (as do each of us) in partnering with Paul to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet put their faith in Jesus.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER: What do you think about your responsibility as a Christian to spread the gospel message? Do you think it is optional, or an expectation of all who claim the name of Christ (see Matthew 28:18-30 & John 14:15)? Paul is one who exhibits joy in serving Jesus. Do you experience joy in your Christian journey? What is it about being a follower of Jesus that brings you joy? Are you encouraged that Paul's expectation of what God started inside of you when you became a believer will continue to develop over time? What can you do to promote that development of Christ-likeness? Are you doing so now?

PRAY: Paul's confidence in God's work being carried toward completion rests in our putting ourselves in places where He can talk to us...and for us to be listening. If you are not already doing so, begin a Bible reading plan today so you can "hear" Him daily.

WEDNESDAY

June 1, 2011

READ: Philippians 1 (Focus: verses 9-11)

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS: What does Paul pray for in verse 9? What is the purpose for that prayer (verse 10-11)?

KEY CONCEPT: God desires our love for one another to be based on more than our emotions, but to also be informed by information (knowledge) and wisdom. It is then that our moral discernment can help us to judge good from bad so that we can make good decisions.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER: When you base your words and actions upon emotions alone, how does that normally work out? Have you regretted making decisions "in the heat of the moment" (usually times of high emotion)? Have you experienced the benefit of "sleeping on it" before acting or replying? How can you experience, as the passage states, the "fruit of righteousness" on a more consistent basis in your actions and words toward others?

PRAY: Ask God to help your relationships with others be based upon His love for you. Pray that He will help you to grant others "the benefit of the doubt" while gathering additional information upon which to decide what to say or do in any situation.

THURSDAY

June 2, 2011

READ: Philippians 1 (Focus: verses 12-14)

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS: What has happened to Paul that he is talking about in these verses? How does Paul look at his situation as it relates to the gospel message? For what reason does Paul say he is being imprisoned? What has been the impact on other Christians who know of Paul's predicament?

KEY CONCEPT: Paul sees lemonade where others would see only lemons. His difficult situation is serving the purpose of spreading the message of Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER: The repression of house churches in China is causing the underground church in that country to flourish. Do you see the parallel with what Paul says is occurring to him in this passage? Do the hardships in your life provide an opportunity for Christ to be seen in you? How can you "make lemonade" from the lemons (misfortunes) you may have so that the love and message of Jesus can spread?

PRAY: No person seeks adversity for themselves, but we know that God can use any circumstance to bring glory to himself (see Romans 8:28). Pray today that the Lord will use every part of your life for His purposes. Ask Him to help you see the challenges in your life through the lens of James 1:2-4.

FRIDAY

June 3, 2011

READ: Philippians 1 (Focus: verses 15-18)

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS: In vs. 15, what are the motivations for preaching Christ that Paul talks about? What are the underlying motives that he mentions in vs. 16-17? Does Paul get upset about dishonorable reasons for preaching about Jesus? Why or why not? What is of primary importance to Paul? What does the preaching cause Paul to do?

KEY CONCEPT: The importance of spreading the gospel message supersedes concerns over the motives of the speaker which lay beneath the surface.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER: What is a goal so important to you that you are excited by any help you can get to achieve the goal, regardless of who is also working to achieve that goal? If you are a very conservative Republican or liberal Democrat...with strong views about politics, do you welcome help from people of the opposite party who share a common goal (even though they are very much opposed to you in other ways)? How can we apply that concept to our personal faith journey?

PRAY: When you watch a televangelist that shares the gospel in a way that makes you uncomfortable (perhaps in a flamboyant or seemingly self-serving fashion), recall this passage and pray that God will use the message to bring Christ into the hearts of all who hear the good news.

SATURDAY

June 4, 2011

READ: Philippians 1 (Focus: verses 18-26)

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS: What does Paul say will cause his deliverance? What is he confident and hopeful for in verse 20? What does Paul mean by "to live is Christ and to die is gain"? Why would he want to die? Why does he eventually desire more to live?

KEY CONCEPT: When we have trusted in Christ, we have Him with us in this life, yet we long to come home to heaven where we will be in His presence forever. Knowing that we have eternity to be with Jesus, let us spend our present lives doing all we can to encourage others to come to Christ and grow in their faith.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER: Put yourself in Paul's place in this passage...how do you feel about verse 21? Are you living your life in such a way as to have maximum impact for the Kingdom? How do you think you might change things up to allow God to use you more effectively? Do you have a desire to do that? Do you care about what others will think about you when you make these changes? If so, read Romans 1:16

PRAY: Ask God to give you such a passion to live for Jesus that you are not ashamed of the gospel message in front of anyone. Pray that the Lord will use all of your spiritual gifts, natural talents, and life experiences - empowered by His Spirit - to accomplish those things He has planned for you to do (see Ephesians 2:10).

