

Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Session One March 25, 2020

Overview of the Letter to the Philippians

Of all the letters Paul penned in the New Testament, the letter to the Philippians reveals a deep emotion of joy – the hallmark of this NT writing.

The church at Philippi was one of Paul's favorite communities and is one of the reasons that he penned this letter. Paul was challenging this young church to start thinking "differently" – to start thinking "Messianically" – a whole new way of thinking!

How were they to do this? How were they to be the people of God in the public square? In the middle of the Roman Empire? In our world today?

That's why we are going to study Philippians!

Background on Philippi

The Christian Community at Philippi was founded by Paul around 50 CE. Philippi was a town in Northern Greece.

- Originally the town had flourished because of gold mines, but most of these had been run dry before the first century CE.
- Primarily during Paul's time it was an agricultural center situated on the edge of a fertile plain where grain and wine were produced.
- Original inhabitants of the land were Thracians, before it was overrun by the Roman rule in the 2nd century.
- Rome was overcrowded, and it established colonies outside its main capital. Philippi was one of these colonies, with many former Roman soldiers and dignitaries landing here in the city.
- Philippi also had many lower class, poor in the midst, including slaves.
- A very diverse population, but primarily Gentile in nature, very diverse in religious practices, and Hellenistic in their culture.

Why is this important in understanding the letter? Paul emphasizes the importance of learning to live together as a family. We can assume the makeup of the Christian community was diverse and as the church grew, it would become increasingly diverse based on the diversity in the larger community. *What does this say about the church today? About FBC Elon today?*

Where is Paul when he is writing this letter?

The simple answer that most all scholars agree with is that Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter to the Philippians. This also gives partial reason for the writing of this letter, to give thanks for a gift that he has received from this congregation. However, where Paul is in prison is where the debate starts. Here are a few possibilities...

1. Rome - about to face Nero; rising objections to this theory; if written here, dating would be early 60's CE
2. Caesarea - imprisoned here for two years; no fear of execution here; if written here, dating would be around 60 CE
3. Ephesus - more likely; never told in scripture that he was imprisoned in Ephesus; however, we are told his life was in danger and that he had been imprisoned many times; if so the dating for the letter would be around 52 to 54 CE

One thing to understand about prison in Paul's time, you were not provided the basics of life - food, water, and clothing. These items had to be provided by your friends and relatives. This is what the Philippian church had provided for Paul - a monetary gift to meet the basic needs of life for Paul while he was in prison.

What are the main themes of the Letter to the Philippians?

- Thank You Letter for the Monetary Gift (Beginning and the End)
 - Updates the Philippian Church on how Paul is doing
- How to Live in a Difficult Situation
- Celebrating Truth in Christ, Despite Losing One's Status
- Standing Firm in Times of Trial
- Koinonia → Community → Family → Sharing the Gospel → Messianic Mindset!

Questions to Think About...

1. Why is it difficult to hold unity and holiness together? Where have you experienced this tension before?
2. If Paul encouraged the Philippians to be united within a diverse congregation, how do we face this challenge in a diverse church? A diverse world?
3. Paul challenged the Philippians to reorder the way they think - to think like Jesus the Messiah. These past few weeks have challenged us to think

differently and reshape our lives. How would thinking like Christ the Messiah force you to reshape your life?