

Philippians 1A

A family had twin boys whose only resemblance to each other was their looks. If one felt it was too hot, the other thought it was too cold. If one said the TV was too loud, the other claimed the volume needed to be turned up. Opposite in every way, one was an eternal optimist, the other a doom and gloom pessimist.

So to teach them a lesson, for Christmas their father loaded the pessimist son's room with every imaginable toy and game, while the optimist son's room he loaded with a pile of horse manure.

That night the father passed by the pessimist's room and found him sitting amid his new gifts crying bitterly.

"Why are you crying?" the father asked.

"Because my friends will be jealous, I'll have to read all these instructions before I can do anything with this stuff, I'll constantly need batteries, and my toys will eventually get broken." answered the pessimist twin.

Passing the optimist twin's room, the father found him dancing for joy in the pile of manure. "What are you so happy about?" he asked.

To which his optimist twin replied, "There's got to be a pony in here somewhere!"

- Our perspective on life can be at odds with our reality
 - At times we may be sad or depressed when everything is going well, and other times when our world is falling apart, we look for the pony

- Christians, in particular, experience paradoxical responses to life's trials, because Jesus told us it would be so

[Luke 6:22](#) “Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man.

[Luke 6:23](#) “Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.

[Luke 6:26](#) “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.

- Jesus said we should be glad when the world attacks us because of our faith in Jesus
- Conversely, Jesus said woe to us when we are loved by the world
- It's paradoxical, and yet it's easily explainable when you see things from Jesus' perspective
- What is His perspective? It's neatly summed up with a simple phrase I like to use: living with eyes for eternity
 - It means adopting an eternal perspective, recognizing we're just passing through this life...it's our next one that truly counts
 - So we want to put everything in this world to work for the sake of the next, including our trials
 - Everything that happens to us and around us can be useful to God and to us for the sake of the Kingdom program
 - Therefore, our mission is to respond to life's twists and turns in ways that maximize our obedience and God's glory
 - And as we begin a verse-by-verse study of Philippians today, you're going to hear me using that phrase from time to time
 - Having eyes for eternity is at the heart of Paul's letter to Philippi
 - So that's the perspective we need to gain if we want to understand it
 - As we begin today today, we need to do a little homework

- Studying an epistle is like reading someone else's mail, so we need to gain some context and background on the letter
- We need to understand a little about the author and his readers
- And we find that introduction in the first verse

[Phil. 1:1](#) Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:

- The author of this letter is, of course, the Apostle Paul
 - We all know that name, and I assume many of us know Paul's history
 - Paul, otherwise known as Saul, began his ministry career as a zealous, law-keeping Pharisee
 - In Acts 7 Luke tells us that while the first Christian martyr, Stephen, was dying for his faith, Paul watched and approved
 - Watching Stephen dying for his faith triggered something inside self-righteous Paul and he became obsessed with wiping out Christianity
 - So for the next several years, Paul embarked on a ruthless campaign to hunt down and eliminate believers in Jesus
 - He traveled far and wide arresting professing Christians, resulting in many being stoned to death
 - His name was feared among Christians throughout the empire, but Jewish leaders heartily approved his efforts
 - Then during one such journey to arrest Christians in Damascus, Jesus Himself appeared to Paul on the road and arrested him, so to speak
 - From that day onward, Jesus insisted Paul serve a different cause
 - Paul flipped from seeking to wipe out Christianity to working tirelessly to advance the movement of the Gospel into the world
 - Paul's transition was such an abrupt change that many in the Church debated whether Paul could truly be trusted
 - Years later, Paul was still defending his apostleship to believers in the face of false accusations and unfounded suspicions

- But in time, Paul proved himself to be, without question, the single most important and effective ambassador for Christ the world has ever known
 - Paul wrote most of the New Testament epistles, founded most of the key first century churches and personally disciplined many of its early leaders
 - Paul traveled tirelessly during four missionary journeys crossing most of the Roman Empire to preach the Gospel to Gentiles
 - Paul set the standard for service, so that perhaps more than anyone else, he could rightly say, “imitate me as I imitate Christ”
 - But Paul didn’t do these great things in his own power, of course, nor did he do them alone
 - In fact, Paul was anything but a loner in ministry
 - He thrived on companionship in ministry and fellowship among the saints, and his letters reflect that
 - Notice at the outset of this letter Paul mentions his traveling partner at the time, a young man named Timothy
 - Timothy is one of several men who accompanied Paul during his four journeys, along with Luke, Barnabas, John Mark and Silas
 - Paul valued their company and support as he ministered from town to town
 - And Paul also thrived on the fellowship of believers in each city he visited, and he often mentions longing to return to them
 - Paul was a man who made friends easily, valued friendships for life, and encouraged the church to do the same
- Next, Paul refers to himself and Timothy using a favorite term: bondservant
 - A bondservant was a particular form of slavery and the dominant form of Paul’s day
 - Most slavery in the Roman Empire was self-imposed: people made themselves slaves to work off a debt owed to a master
 - In time, a slave could pay off his debt through labor, and then the slave was free to leave service and regain his liberty
 - But in the course of that service, a slave might decide that a life serving a kind master was preferable to a life of freedom toiling in hardship

- If so, then when his debt was paid, that slave might volunteer to continue in service to the master as a slave for life
- The slave would renounce his freedom forever in exchange for the care and protection of the master
- No longer was the slave working to pay off a debt; instead the slave was now serving out of devotion to the master
- In this new relationship, the slave was called a bondsman, signifying he served his master out of a bond of love rather than obligation
 - Paul frequently referred to himself as a bond servant because the term aptly described his approach to serving Christ
 - All Christians are called slaves of Christ, because we have all been bought with a price of His blood
 - We all owe Him a debt of sin which He has paid on our behalf with His life
- But as we mature in our faith, we come to appreciate that Christ is a loving Master, One worthy of our devotion and sacrificial service
 - And as we come to that understanding, we become a bond servant, a slave serving his Master not out of compulsion but devotion
 - This is the way Paul described his service to Jesus, which was appropriate because of the way Paul entered that service
- As Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, Jesus blinded Paul and led him into the city to wait
 - Then Jesus sent another disciple, Ananias, to Paul to explain that Paul had been chosen by Jesus to preach to the Gentiles
 - And Ananias also explained that Paul would suffer many things in the course of that service

[Acts 9:15](#) But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

[Acts 9:16](#) for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

- Paul began his service to Jesus as a slave...Jesus made him an offer he couldn't refuse, literally
 - Paul was given no choice in the matter...he was made an apostle by the will of God and conscripted into service like any slave
 - But in time, Paul came to know his new Master as a loving, merciful Savior, and then Paul's heart to serve changed
 - What had begun as a ministry of compulsion soon became a life of devotion, and Paul wanted all believers to see Christ the same
- Our entry into the faith comes like Paul's, theologically speaking...God finds us, we don't find Him
 - And in our initial period as a Christ-follower, Jesus is akin to slavery in that we are bound to Christ even before we know Him well
 - We are compelled by the Holy Spirit into a new walk of life by God's grace through our faith
- But in time, as we learn more about the God we serve, we come to know Jesus to be good, kind, generous and merciful
 - His yoke is easy, His burden is light, so our service to Christ moves from compulsion to devotion
 - As we serve Jesus daily out of love for Him, we are bondservants of Jesus
- If serving Jesus in that way isn't familiar to you, then maybe it's a sign you haven't pursued your relationship with Him deeply enough
 - Maybe you're trying to fit your service to Jesus into your otherwise typical worldly life rather than the other way around
 - After all, it's not our service to Jesus that He desires as much as it is our devotion to Him
 - Slaves don't have typical lives...our life is serving our Master, and when your Master is as good as Jesus, it's the best life possible
- So that's a little about the author. Next, Paul identifies his audience as the saints in Philippi, an important town in the Roman empire

1A-1

1A-2

1A-3

1A-4

- Philippi was a very prosperous city in the province of Macedonia named after the father of Alexander the Great
 - The citizens of Philippi enjoyed a number of privileges in Roman society including immunity from taxes and self-government
 - And because it sat on a major Roman road, it was also a center of commerce, and as a result, quite wealthy
- Because of its strategic location on a major road connecting east and west, Paul traveled through Philippi multiple times during his journeys
 - Paul first visited the city in AD 50, and at that time he founded the church
 - Traveling with Paul at the time were Luke, Timothy and Silas
- In Acts 16, Luke tells the story of how at one point Paul and Silas were thrown into prison in Philippi
 - Later that night God brings a great earthquake to open the jail and unlock their shackles
 - The jailer wakes up to discover the jail open, so he prepares to kill himself knowing he would be executed for the breach
 - But Paul calls out to save the man telling him all the prisoners have remained, probably because Paul persuaded them to do so
- Paul's willingness to forgo his freedom so that he might have opportunity to preach the Gospel to that jailer bore great fruit
 - Saved from certain death by Paul's kindness, the jailer was eager to receive the word Paul was preaching
 - As a result, that man believed as did the man's entire household
 - From that moment, Paul started the church, teaching and ministering for a period of time before moving on
- Paul later returned to the city again during his third missionary journey in AD 57, and then three years later while in Rome Paul wrote this letter to the church
 - In AD 60, Paul was under house arrest in Rome awaiting an audience before Caesar
 - His house arrest lasted two years, during which time Paul wrote a number of letters in the New Testament, including this one

- And while Paul was under house arrest in Rome, the leaders of the Church sent a man, Epaphroditus, to visit him
- Epaphroditus brought Paul a gift of money, which must have been a great encouragement and relief to Paul
- So as Paul writes this letter from house arrest in Rome, he does so from an unique perspective
 - Paul's first experience in Philippi taught him how to see his present circumstances in Rome from a better perspective
 - God made Paul and Silas to suffer for a time in the Philippian jail so they could be in a position to reach the jailer with the Gospel
 - And because Paul was able to convert the jailer and his family, Paul was able to found the Philippian church
 - And because Paul began the church, these saints were now in a position to provide support and encouragement to Paul in Rome
- God used trial and suffering in Paul's life to further the Kingdom mission, and no where was that better illustrated than in Philippi
 - Understanding that connection between Paul's confinement in Philippi with his arrest in Rome is key to following this letter
 - Which leads us into Paul's supplication for the church...

1A-5

[Phil. 1:2](#) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Virtually, all of Paul's letters open with a prayer for his readers, as we see here in v.2 with Paul extending grace and peace to the church
 - Coming from Paul, those words had real power, because his words were inspired, meaning they came from God
 - Anytime a church received a letter from Paul, it was cause for great celebration, because they knew his letters were Scripture
 - In fact, at about the same time Paul was writing this letter, Peter, a fellow apostle, wrote this about Paul's writing

[2Pet. 3:14](#) Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,

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[2Pet. 3:15](#) and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you,

[2Pet. 3:16](#) as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

- o Peter says that some in that day were trying to distort Paul's writing, just as they do to "the rest of the Scriptures"
 - Peter referred to Paul's writing as Scripture even as both men were still alive and writing letters
 - This confirms that Paul's letters were seen as Scripture by the early Church from the very moment Paul authored them

- o And therefore, when Paul told a church that God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ were sending them grace and peace, it's a real thing

1A-5

- So Paul's promise of grace or peace in his letters were not merely kind words intended to ingratiate himself to his readers
- Paul was promising his readers that at the arrival of his letter, God Himself was at work granting them grace and peace
- o As that church attended to Paul's letter, reading it and heeding it, they would see more of God's favor and experience greater peace
 - That promise continues today...as we study the word of God, Paul's letters in particular, we are gaining more than knowledge
 - We are receiving more of God's grace, His favor, and it will manifest in a variety of ways, including knowing greater peace
- Then, beginning in v.3, Paul starts letter proper, and as we move ahead with him, I want to offer you a roadmap for how his letter is organized
 - o There are four chapters to this letter, as we divide it today, and each has a main point or theme
 - These four points come together in support of a central idea summing up the whole letter

1A-6

- The central idea of the letter is simply “Christ is everything”
- Every reason we have to live, to strive, to suffer and to excel, is for the purpose of Jesus Christ and His Gospel...Christ is everything in life
 - Apart from our Kingdom mission, our lives have no meaning and no purpose
 - Without Christ at the center of our life, nothing we achieve or become will last or mean anything in the end
 - When we make our life a tool in God’s hands to bring many sons and daughters to glory, then we find meaning, joy & peace
- So the letter’s main idea is that Christ is everything in life, and Paul breaks this truth down into four parts:
 - Chapter 1: our purpose is living for Christ
 - Chapter 2: our attitude is thinking like Christ
 - Chapter 3: our rewards are coming from Christ
 - Chapter 4: our satisfaction is in serving Christ
- For what remains of today’s lesson, let’s take a few steps toward understanding every Christian’s goal: living for Christ, which Paul begins very simply

[Phil. 1:3](#) I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,
[Phil. 1:4](#) always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all,
[Phil. 1:5](#) in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

- Paul told the church that he was always thanking the Lord for this church and praying joyful for them at every opportunity
 - Some scholars have suggested that the church in Philippi was Paul’s favorite, and certainly this letter leaves that impression
 - But Paul’s praise for this church was not based in favoritism but rather was grounded in something very specific
 - Paul says in v.5 that his joy was in view of their participating in the gospel from the very first day until now

- That is high praise indeed, but it's important to understand what Paul was saying about this church
 - In basic terms, to participate in the Gospel is to join in the work of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ and Him crucified
 - As we learned in our lesson on the Great Commission, there are many ways we can participate in that mission
 - And certainly, this church must have been active in evangelism and support Paul and others who led the way
- But many churches did similar things, so that fact alone doesn't explain why Paul singled out this church for praise in this area
 - The difference seems to be that this church made participation in the Gospel a way of life
 - The Greek word translated "participation" is *koinonia*, which is usually translated fellowship, meaning a shared experience
- Paul was saying he joyfully thanked God that this church shared his same outlook when it came to the needs of the Gospel
 - Like Paul, they had made the Gospel a lifestyle choice
 - What's more, they made that choice on the first day, from the very beginning of their walk, and they still lived that way now
- Now when you hear that someone has made the Gospel a lifestyle, we tend to think of vocational ministry
 - For example, a pastor in full-time ministry has made the Gospel a lifestyle or a missionary on the field is living the Gospel lifestyle
 - Those examples are true, but here's the problem: they are just the tip of an iceberg
 - Full-time pastors and missionaries are just two examples of how to make the gospel a lifestyle, but there are many, many more
 - In fact, there are an infinite number of ways to make the Gospel a lifestyle, as many ways as there are believers in the Church
 - Remember, Paul said the entire Church in Philippi had fellowshiped in the Gospel with Paul from the beginning

- Certainly not all believers in Philippi were full-time pastors or full-time missionaries
- So what were the rest of those believers doing to make the Gospel a lifestyle?
- They were going to work in the marketplace or fields, keeping the house, raising kids, attending school, serving in the military
- They were ordinary people living normal lives, except that their lives were directed at the cause of the Gospel
 - When the blacksmith woke up each morning, he didn't think to himself, "My job is to be the best blacksmith today"
 - Instead, he said, "How can I serve the Gospel today in my blacksmithing?"
 - When the mother began her day, she didn't think "it's just another day of keeping house and raising kids..."
 - She said "today I will advance the Kingdom by keeping the house and raising the kids"
- The Philippian church understood that their very lives were about the Gospel... it's the only reason Jesus hasn't come back yet
 - Consider that for a moment...what's Jesus waiting for? In fact, ask yourself this...
 - Why don't Christians die and go to Heaven the instant we are saved? Escape pain and suffering and tears and sickness, etc.?
 - Wouldn't that make more sense? That's where we are all going eventually...why doesn't Jesus take us home immediately?
 - The obvious answer is that this life on earth serves some purpose in God's plan, and that purpose is the Gospel
 - And therefore, every believer from the moment we come to faith should make every day we live about serving the Gospel
 - Serving the Gospel is the only reason we're still alive today...and Paul was so thankful that the Church in Philippi understood that
 - That's where we are going in this study, in particular in this first chapter...learning how we adopt a lifestyle of the Gospel

- And not all of us need to enter full-time ministry...but we all need to live with eyes for eternity
- An in-depth study of this letter has the potential to transform your walk with Jesus
- To give new meaning and purpose to your life, and with it, more peace and joy than you may have ever known