

Philippians #1
Philippians 1:1-2
“Joy despite...”

In this lesson, Tom sets the stage for why Paul’s short letter to the Philippian church is so needed for our day. Philippians is a book written to followers of Christ living amidst a heavy Roman influence and under attack for their faith. It is a letter to a young and probably poor church in danger of division from two opposing factions. The theme of joy permeates every chapter of this practical book. As you analyze the current climate and headlines of our nation as well as your individual circumstances, what similarities do you see to what Paul and the Philippians were experiencing?

Tom quoted different authors to introduce Philippians’ significance.

- Ray Steadman – “Philippians is the tenderest and most delightful of Paul’s letters...it brims over with expressions of joy, despite being written during Paul’s imprisonment. This epistle glows with radiance and joy, confidence and strength and is a great encouragement to any downcast or discouraged heart.”
- Chuck Swindoll – “There is no greater need today than joy – unexplainable, contagious joy.”
- James Montgomery Boyce – “Any Christian who is feeling down or discouraged about anything should study Paul’s great letter to the Philippians.”

As you think about these summaries – what do you anticipate that God can do to your heart through a greater understanding of Philippians?

Tom made sure that we recognize the difference between joy and happiness. Mankind searches for happiness through favorable circumstances. Such a quest, though, is cyclical, temporary and illusive. How susceptible have you been to circumstantial happiness? If you had to summarize your hunt for happiness how would you describe it?

Tom quoted John MacArthur’s definition of joy as “the settled conviction that God sovereignly controls all circumstances for His glory and our good.” Tom later defined joy as “a supernatural by-product of a personal relationship with Christ.” What aspect of these definitions are most meaningful to you? Why?

Examine Paul's history and it's clear to see that "Paul knows suffering." (like the advertisement slogan "Bo knows..."). For review, read about Paul's first encounter with the Philippians in Acts 16:11-30. If you were one of those early followers of Christ in Philippi, what would be your first impressions about Paul?

Tom highlighted four key passages from Philippians. Read each verse and provide a short phrase to describe what each passage promises.

- 1:21
- 2:5
- 3:10
- 4:13

Paul (and Timothy) describe themselves as bondservants. Why is this identity so important for followers of Christ? (See Mark 10: 35-45)

Tom explained that a "saint" is not a spiritual superhero, but is someone who has been set apart by God. Have you ever considered yourself to be a "saint?" Why or why not?

Consider the contrast between servants and saints. Servants stoop down and are held in low esteem while saints are elevated and honored. Why is it important for you to realize you are both servant and saint?

Paul's opening contains a customary wish for grace and peace and Tom pointed out that these two aspects of joy always come in this order. First, we receive grace (God's unmerited favor) and then we experience peace (with God). How does a recognition of these two God-initiated attributes contribute to your joy?

"Joy despite..." might be an appropriate theme for this letter. Right now, how would you express a prayer to God with this theme in mind.

"God, considering my life's present circumstances, I need your joy despite....."