

Philippians-by Nathan White

Chapter 1

Paul opens his letter to the Philippians with a greeting that is typical of his works. He then transitions into a prayer of thanksgiving for the church to whom he is writing. Again, this is a common feature of Paul's letters. However, normally, the tone of Paul's letters shifts to something more somber – usually due to his need to correct an error. Sometimes this shift occurs quickly, and other times it is more gradual, but it almost always happens. Philippians is a notable exception to this pattern. Paul will keep this same tone of thanksgiving and joy not only through chapter one, but also throughout the remainder of the book. Given his imprisonment, one might assume Paul's writing would take a dark tone. Instead, Paul consistently reminds the Philippians of his love for them, his gratefulness for their support, and the hope, humility, and courage that can be found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2

The second chapter of Philippians is united around a call to humble service rooted in the humility of Christ. Paul reminds them that the humility of Jesus in subjecting himself to the indignities of taking on human flesh for their sakes is infinitely greater than any service they could do for one another. It calls to mind the words of Jesus in Matthew 20:25-28: "But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'" Rather than considering self-sacrificial service a burden, the love and humility of Christ in his service for his people should make us *desire* to serve each other.

Chapter 3

Paul exhorts the Philippian believers to watch out for the Judaizers – people who said that Christians had to follow the ceremonial laws of Judaism in order to be made right with God. In other words, they preached that our standing before God depends on our performance rather than on the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to us. To make his point, Paul points to his own résumé. If anyone should have had the credentials to make it on their own, it was Paul. He came from the "right" people, he knew and kept the law, and he was so zealous for the laws and traditions of his people that he persecuted Christians for not following them. But even Paul counts his own, impressive record of self-righteousness worthless next to Christ. Paul says he desires to be "found in [Christ], not having a righteousness of my own...but that which comes through faith in Christ." (vs. 9). Let us, like Paul, recognize our need for the righteousness of Christ.

Chapter 4

Paul's letter to the Philippian church ends as it began: with encouragement. He reminds them of the depths of God's goodness and the sufficiency of Christ in any circumstance. He thanks them once again for their concern for him, but he also reminds them that in Christ, he has all that he needs. He can be content in any circumstance, even as he is imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. Still, he is moved by and appreciative of their support, if only because it displays the work of God in them. The final encouraging note of this book could easily be lost to a twenty-first century reader. Paul tells the Philippians that the saints greet them, especially those of Caesar's household. Men and women connected to the government that has imprisoned Paul have

converted to Christianity. This would have been a triumphant finale to Paul's letter. In the midst of their concern for Paul in his persecution, they are reminded that Jesus is Lord. Caesar is not.

-Reflecting on Philippians-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Philippians. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Philippians before we move forward?

"In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?" Psalm 56.4