

# REJOICE

IN THE LORD ALWAYS

## A 6 Week Sermon Series on Philippians

### Week One: Hope in Hope-Less Places OR Paul and Timothy Are Not Buddhists

#### Philippians 1:1-14

**Prologue.** It may be helpful before you read the passage to answer some basic questions. What's going on? Who are Paul and Timothy, the people who wrote this letter? Where is Paul (the main writer) when he writes this letter and why is he under arrest?

If getting oriented would help you or your group, please read on.

**First, who are Paul and Timothy?** Paul was a rising star in the Jewish community of Israel. He belonged to an elite group of religious leaders called the Pharisees. He was one of their key leaders. Following Jesus' ascension into heaven after the resurrection, Paul was a major antagonist of the church. He hunted down Christians and did whatever he could to stop them from spreading their message. Paul was not a good guy.

One day, Paul left for another trip to hunt down and round up more Christians. But that day, everything changed. (You can read about this in Acts 9)

Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision (at that point Paul's name was Saul). Jesus blinded Saul and stopped him in his tracks. Jesus had a frank conversation with Saul about his life. A few days later, during this dramatic conversion, Saul's sight was miraculously healed. He was renamed Paul and from that point on had a new mission. He ceased attacking the church and did everything he could to spread the message of Jesus far and wide.

Timothy was one of Paul's close co-workers, a young apprentice that Paul gave great responsibility to.

## **Second, who are the Philippians?**

Philippi was a roman colony in modern day Greece. It was a city on an important east-west roadway. Paul had visited Philippi years ago and helped found the church there with one of his companions, Silas. (See Acts 16)

## **So where are Paul and Timothy now, when they write this letter?**

After Paul first met the Philippians, he traveled up and down the Mediterranean seaboard, spreading the news about Jesus. During these travels, Paul was often targeted by his enemies both Jewish and those who worshipped Greek gods. He was eventually cornered, beaten, and arrested in Jerusalem. From there he made a slow journey through the Roman justice system that took years. He finally landed in Rome and was under house arrest, awaiting trial, when he most likely wrote this letter.

Though under arrest, he rented an apartment or house in Rome (see Acts 28). While this was more comfortable than being in a jail, he was bound by a chain and guarded by a soldier. This capped off a number of years of being under arrest. You can read of all the events that transpired between Paul's first visit to Philippi and his current state by reading Acts 16-28. It's a wild story. While he was under house arrest, many visitors came to see him, especially from the local Jewish community.

Paul was eventually released and then later, arrested again. This time he was placed in a dungeon in Rome and executed. Paul writes about that period in a letter to Timothy shortly before he is executed. This letter is called Second Timothy. While he wrote the Philippians though, Timothy is with him - both of them writing this letter to the church in Philippi.

That is a quick primer that will hopefully help you visualize what's going on in Paul's life, Timothy's life, and the life of the Philippian church.

## **Let's turn to the passage . . .**

**1) Read verse 1.**

**Almost every letter Paul writes to a specific church, he addresses, “to the saints” in Philippi/Corinth/Colossae/Ephesus/ or whatever city he is writing to.**

**When you hear the word saint, what do you think of?**

**When Paul and Timothy use the word saint, what do you think they think of?**

**2) Read Philippians 1:1-14. What strikes you about this passage?**

**What adjectives would you use to describe Paul's situation?**

**What adjectives would you use to describe his disposition?**

- 3) This week, Steve Jobs passed away. Now that Apple's amazing leader is no longer at the helm, many people wonder what will happen to Apple's story. Will Apple be able to be the same amazing company or will it falter?

Paul was the church's major leader. We would not write Paul's imprisonment into a strategic plan for the church. But how does Paul view this development in God's story? How concerned or not concerned is he about what this less than ideal event will mean for the church's story?

- 4) Let's compare and contrast how we deal with suffering and how Paul and Timothy deal with suffering.

Let's start with me. I (Josh Miller) often deal with suffering like a Buddhist.

There are two ways I do this. One, I often treat suffering like it is the worst thing in the world. This is the bedrock principle of Buddhism. The Buddhist goal of life is to escape suffering - suffering is the problem of the world. For Christians the worst problem in the world is not suffering but sin. But I often think that suffering is the problem and it's to be avoided at all costs - rather than seeing the way that God may use it to transform me and bring his Kingdom more into this world.

(The New Testament repeats again and again that God uses suffering in our lives to transform us and make us more like His Son.)

Then, as a good Buddhist, when I encounter suffering I often think it's up to me to deal with. Sometimes I get trapped into thinking that I have to deal with it myself and there is no one who can help me. This is another basic tenet of Buddhism - it's up to you. There is a popular Buddhist lesson about what to do when you meet Buddha on the road - you're supposed to kill him. The moral of the story is - there is no one who can help you. It's only an illusion and you must rid your mind of the illusion that there is someone who can help. You're on your own.

**How would you contrast the way I sometimes deal with hard situations and the way Paul and Timothy dealt with hard situations? What can you deduce from the first 14 verses, even if it isn't explicit?**

**What about you? How do you respond to suffering? On a good day? On a bad day? (It's okay you can be honest, you're among friends)**

## **Final Word**

**If you believe in Jesus and follow Him, you are a saint. As a saint, pay attention this week to any challenging circumstance you face. Pay attention to how you respond. Was it a Buddhist response? A Christian response? Some other kind of response? And, with God's help, make a course correction if you need to.**