

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-2

JESUS WAS, ... IS, ... AND ALWAYS WILL BE ... THE ANSWER TO FINDING LOVE, JOY, PEACE, SATISFACTION, AND MEANING IN LIFE. THERE IS NO OTHER WAY.

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JESUS IS THE ANSWER PHILIPPIANS 1:1-2

This morning, we are going to start a study through the book of Philippians. One of the things we need to remember as we study through the book is that it is a personal letter. As such, it pretty much follows the same structure that was common to all personal letters in the first century. Further, it seems to be a letter of friendship. As we read through all of the Apostle Paul's letters, it seems as if the Philippian church is his favorite.

As a matter of practice, Paul refused to accept money from churches he was planting. He usually worked as a tentmaker to support himself while he preached and ministered. That way no one could question his motives. However, in the case of the Philippian church, he made an exception. He accepted their financial and spiritual support. He was truly in a ministry partnership with this church.

You can feel Paul's love for the people in Philippi ooze out all throughout this letter. In fact it sounds as if Paul's primary reason for writing the letter is to encourage this church to keep on pursuing their relationship with Jesus Christ.

As we read the first two verses, we can easily see that Paul's encouragement centers around keeping connected with their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Any other form of encouragement has potential to go badly.

For example, a new prison chaplain was assigned an inmate on death row. Over the year, he was able to establish a good rapport with the criminal. When it came time for the inmate to be executed in the electric chair, he requested that the chaplain be there to console him.

As they arrived at the room where the electric chair was, the chaplain became very anxious about what to say. "Good-bye," seemed trite, "See you later," seemed inappropriate, and he started to become desperate as they entered the room. As they were strapping the inmate into the chair, he just blurted out, "More power to you!"

I'm not sure how encouraging that was to the inmate, but Paul certainly has some real words of encouragement to speak to the church in Philippi because they are all based on Jesus. Jesus really is the answer to all of life's problems.

There were some interesting ideas that were floating around during the early stages of the Christian church. There were groups of people saying that there were other christs. There were some schools that said that Jesus really didn't die on the cross. The word *Christ* in Greek is equivalent to the Hebrew word *Messiah*. The word *Christ* means the *Anointed One*. Jesus was the Hebrew Messiah, the One that was promised from long ago. Paul starts off this letter by mentioning Jesus three times. *We are slaves of Christ Jesus. We are saints in Christ Jesus. We have received grace and peace from Jesus Christ our Lord.* The Apostle Paul wants to make sure we know Who we are worshiping. We worship the incarnate Jesus, the son of Mary. We worship Jesus, the Savior, the same One Who came to earth to die for our sins. We worship Jesus the One and Only Christ. Jesus is the Lord and Savior. There is only One Christ. He doesn't take different forms throughout the ages. Jesus of Nazareth is the only Christ. Jesus of Nazareth has now risen from the dead and sits at the right hand of God the Father. Jesus is God, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Please understand what Paul is doing here. He is saying that there is only one Messiah, there is only one Christ. For us that means that **JESUS WAS, ... IS, ... AND ALWAYS WILL BE ... THE ANSWER TO FINDING LOVE, JOY, PEACE, SATISFACTION, AND MEANING IN LIFE. THERE IS NO OTHER WAY.**

In Paul's day, and even throughout the Old Testament history of the Jews, people tried to mix Egyptian and Babylonian mystery religions with Judaism and Christianity. However, let us be clear. The only Christ we worship is Jesus of Nazareth. There is no other. Paul's life was all about living and dying for Jesus. Paul wants to make it clear to the Philippians that Jesus is the answer to all of the challenges they face as individuals and as a church. What is the answer to Paul's being imprisoned in Rome, soon to be executed? Jesus is the answer. What

is the solution to unity in the Philippian church? Jesus is the answer. Who can bring peace, joy, and contentment to life, even in the most trying circumstances? Jesus is the answer. Who can help us overcome low self-esteem and our fears? Jesus is the answer. To find victory in life and victory in death, we must first find Jesus.

I.

SLAVES OF JESUS CHRIST (VS 1a)

We Were Bought With A Price. We Are Not Our Own. We Are God's.

In the first half of verse one, Paul refers to us as slaves of Jesus Christ. The truth of this assertion is built on this. **WE WERE BOUGHT WITH A PRICE. WE ARE NOT OUR OWN. WE ARE GOD'S.** In other words, if we are Christians, then we have been bought out of slavery to sin, Satan, and death. We have been purchased by the shed blood of Jesus.

A. PAUL AND TIMOTHY

Look how seriously Paul takes this concept when talking about himself and Timothy. Paul came from an upper class family. He was given the name Saul at birth. He was named after King Saul, the first king of Israel. Saul in fact came from the same tribe as King Saul did. They were from the tribe of Benjamin. Saul's parents were wealthy Jews. They could afford to send Saul to the best Hebrew schools in Jerusalem. In fact Saul was educated by one of the most famous rabbis, Gamaliel. Saul also enjoyed all the benefits of Roman citizenship. His parents were Roman citizens so he received citizenship by birth. Saul had the best of the religious world and the secular world. Saul was on the fast track to become an influential Jewish leader. He led the persecution against the Christians, until one day the risen Lord Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. That meeting changed the course of Saul's life. In fact, from that day on, he was called Paul. The one time persecutor of the followers of Jesus, now himself became a servant of the gospel message. The Apostle Paul dedicated his life to bringing the message of freedom to all people. It's interesting that even though Paul would be a natural to minister to Jews, God sent him to the Gentiles, the rest of the people in the world. For the sake of the gospel, Paul was beaten within an inch of his life, faced wild animals, starvation, and even survived shipwrecks. People had contracts out on his life, but he managed to dodge all the assassination attempts. Ultimately, Paul was imprisoned in Rome twice, the last time resulting in his execution in 67 AD.

Timothy was born into a mixed family. His mother and grandmother were godly Jewish women. Timothy's father was a Gentile. While Paul was preaching in Lystra, during his second missionary journey, he met Timothy and became his spiritual mentor. Timothy grew in the faith and became a very important person in the early church. In fact, Paul sends Timothy to the Philippians to minister to them. Timothy was there with Paul when he founded and established the church at Philippi.

Next, the NIV is much too soft on the translation of the word *servant*. The word in Greek is *douloi*, which literally means slaves. Slaves had no status and no rights. They belonged to someone. Someone owned them. They could have no will of their own. They were required to serve and obey their masters. Paul is saying that he and Timothy belong to Jesus. Jesus is their Lord. They live only to serve Him. In other words, Jesus bought them and now owns them. The funny thing about being a slave to Jesus is that He sets you free.

B. SLAVES

And that brings us to Hebrew connotation of the word *slave*. Famous prophets and kings such as Moses and David were referred to as servants of God.

We are all slaves. None of us are here because of our own making. We were born into the slavery of sin, Satan, this world, and death. If you are not a believer, then you may think you are free, but actually you are a slave to Satan. When we surrender our lives to God through Jesus we become free. So it really does matter who we choose to serve.

C. OF CHRIST JESUS

Paul makes it clear that he is a slave of Jesus Christ. There is only One God. He does not manifest as Buddha or some other Egyptian, African, or Asian deity. God is One and He exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christ Jesus, not some impersonal force, is the King of the Universe. Paul and Timothy have decided to become slaves in the Kingdom of God. The interesting thing is that they came in as slaves. Immediately God made them children, Ambassadors, and made Paul an Apostle.

I know that people think that becoming a Christian will make their lives boring and unfulfilled. They think that being sexually pure is not for them. They think that following a bunch of rules is enslaving. But the truth is that people who are not Christians are really slaves to their own lusts, they are slaves to the world's ways and ideas, and they ultimately are slaves to Satan who will claim their souls at death. They are slaves for eternity.

Jesus is the One Who came to set us free. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus paid the price for our bondage to sin, Satan, and death. When we place our faith and trust in Jesus and when we pledge our allegiance to Him as our Lord, He sets us free and gives us new life, eternal life. God's original intent for us was that we belong to Him as part of His family. But because we were born into sin and because we willfully sinned, that relationship was severed. We became property of Satan. God bought us out of slavery with the precious blood of His Son Jesus. So Paul and Timothy are proud to be called slaves of Christ Jesus. It is good for us to remember that **WE WERE BOUGHT WITH A PRICE. WE ARE NOT OUR OWN. WE ARE GOD'S.** Jesus is the answer to finding freedom, meaning, and purpose in life.

II.

SAINTS IN JESUS CHRIST (VS 1b)

We Are Holy Ones, Set Apart By God And For God.

A. SAINTS

In the second half of verse one, Paul reminds the believers in Philippi that they are saints in Jesus Christ. We must never forget this point as well. **WE ARE HOLY ONES, SET APART BY GOD AND FOR GOD.** I think the reason we have lost the truth of this concept is because over the centuries, the church has set apart certain believers who have accomplished a great deal and given them the title of "Saint," so the church today refers to the Apostle Paul as Saint Paul. Paul would have been appalled at this distinction.

The word *saints* in Greek literally means *holy ones*. The concept in Hebrew means those set apart for a particular purpose. These concepts are central to Paul's theology. First of all, if you are a believer, then you are a saint. It has nothing at all to do with your goodness. It has everything to do with the blood of Jesus. Notice that he addresses us as saints in Christ Jesus. We are saints because God looks at us through Jesus. We are holy because Jesus makes us holy. We belong to Jesus. He is holy so we are holy. I know that we find this hard to swallow because we are always so self-focused. You are a saint. I am a saint. Anyone who places their faith in Jesus is a saint. To say, "I'm no saint," is really false pride because you are focused on your own works. It sounds humble, but it is really the false pride that says, I have to earn the title saint. When someone addresses you as a saint, the response should be, "Only by the grace of God."

We are holy ones. That takes care of the Greek concept of holy. But the Hebrew sense of holy means that we have been set apart for one purpose, to love and serve God. The concept of holy worked like this for the Hebrew. They would take something such as an ordinary cup. If that cup were then to be used in the temple to hold and pour out wine on the altar, then they would dedicate it to the Lord and His service. From that point on, the cup was consecrated, made holy, and set apart for only that function. It was never again to be used for common purposes. When Paul addresses us as saints, he is saying that we have been set apart for one purpose. The rest of our lives are to be dedicated to loving and serving God. We are not to go back and be used for the world's purposes. We are holy.

What's the upshot of being addressed as saints? For one, it states the truth. That describes who we are. But more importantly, if we would address one another as saints and remind ourselves that we are saints, it would change our outlook on life and our behavior. For example, if we continue to look at ourselves as sinners we will continue to live up to that title. If, however we look at ourselves as saints who sometimes fall into sin, we will start to live up to the title of saints. We are holy from God's perspective because He looks at us through the blood of Jesus. We are saints from an earthly perspective because we have been set apart to love and serve God. That is quite a status and quite a calling.

B. OVERSEERS AND DEACONS

This church seems to be growing and maturing very quickly. They have established overseers and deacons. Paul founded the church in the year 49 AD. It seems as if he is writing this letter during his first imprisonment in Rome during the year 62 AD. The church is only 13 years old, yet they are moving along nicely. It is hard to define the terms precisely, but the word for overseers is the same word we get Episcopal from in English. It seems to refer to a group of mature believers who were teachers and spiritual leaders in the church. They kind of looked after the spiritual health of the church.

The deacons seem to be in charge of the physical well being of the church. In other words, they were to ensure people were fed, clothed and cared for. In reality, the physical and spiritual well being of the members overlap. The leaders of the church, whether they were elders, overseers, or deacons were to care for, mentor, and minister to the emotional, physical, and spiritual needs of the congregation.

C. PHILIPPI

This letter is addressed to the church in Philippi. This was a very interesting city and a very interesting church. In fact, they had a lot in common with our church. Philippi was a Roman Colony. That meant it enjoyed a very special status among the other cities in Rome. It was located in a very strategic place. It was in a place where the Egnatian Way passed through. The Egnatian way was a road that connected Europe with Asia. If you were to look at a map and find Macedonia, you will notice that it touches both modern day Turkey and Greece. It was a very prosperous and influential city. Since it was a Roman Colony, Philippi had several retired military families living there. Part of their reward for serving with distinction in the military was to receive land in these influential cities. There were several hundred retired military families living in Philippi. Think about it. This was very good strategy on the part of Rome. This was a key city. Having all these retired military soldiers there was like having a standing reserve army in place. They could certainly hold off any enemy threats until the active duty army arrived with reinforcements. This was a very prosperous and secure city. And access to the sea was only 10 miles south in the seaport city of Neapolis. The city was a lot like Chicago in the early days before airline transportation. It was a city that connected the east with the west. It was a hustling trade center and a hub for commerce.

In addition to all this, Philippi was very diverse ethnically, socially, and financially. If you want to go back and read about the founding of the Philippian church, study through Acts chapter 16. Three incidents described in that chapter will help us understand how the Philippian church defined itself.

When Paul arrived in Philippi, he went to look for the Jewish population. Since there was no synagogue, he went out to the nearest river with running water. That is where the Jews would gather. He met a rich Jewish businesswoman named Lydia. She and her family believed Paul's message, became Christians and were baptized. The Philippian Christians started to meet at Lydia's house for church regularly.

The second incident involved a demonized slave girl who was a fortune-teller. Her masters would force her to make money for them by telling the future. When Paul started preaching in town, the demons inside the girl went nuts. They forced the girl to keep following Paul yelling out, "These men are servants of the most High God." This happened for several days. Then Paul got annoyed and cast the demon out of the girl. She was free at last. Her owners realized they could no longer make any money off her because since the demons were gone, she could no longer tell the future. Let me just make an aside comment here. Just because you witness supernatural power or obtain supernatural knowledge, don't assume it's from God. Be sure to test the message and the spirits.

The owners got so infuriated at Paul, they dragged Paul before the magistrates and started uproar with trumped up charges. The magistrates had Paul and Silas stripped, beaten, and thrown in jail. About midnight, there was an earthquake, and all the chains fell off the prisoners and the doors opened up. The jailer was about to kill himself because he couldn't stand to face the humiliation and punishment for allowing prisoners to escape. Paul stopped him and reassured them that he had no intention of escaping. The jailer took Paul home. Paul preached to him, he and his family believed and were baptized.

So the early church now has a wealthy Jewish woman, the poorest of the poor, a slave girl, and a middle class Roman government worker. This church starts out and remains rich in diversity. I think if you were to look around our church, you would observe just as much diversity, socially, economically, and ethnically as well.

There is one footnote to this imprisonment in Philippi. When the magistrates found out that Paul was a Roman citizen, they became very fearful because they publicly beat him and jailed him without the due process of law. They ordered Paul's immediate release but Paul said he wasn't leaving prison until the magistrates personally came, apologized to him, and released him themselves. They obliged Paul.

So this church is exciting and bold from its very beginnings. This church was special to Paul. He allowed them to help him financially and if you notice, not once does Paul mention that he is an apostle in this letter. It seems as if he had to often pull rank and remind other churches of his authority, but not with the Philippians. This is a friendly, intimate letter. These are words spoken among friends. I feel that way here at Devon. I have never felt in 15 years that I have had to remind anyone that I am a pastor. I have viewed these last 15 years as a partnership in ministry with all of you. That's why I prefer to be called John. No titles are necessary. After all, we are all saints. In other words **WE ARE HOLY ONES, SET APART BY GOD AND FOR GOD.** Jesus is the answer to our meaning, purpose, and identity in life.

III.

BLESSINGS FROM JESUS CHRIST (VS 2)

All That We Have And All That We Are Comes As A Direct Blessing From God.

And as saints, as children of God, as Ambassadors of God's kingdom, we receive many blessings from Jesus Christ. Surely by now we have come to realize **ALL THAT WE HAVE AND ALL THAT WE ARE COMES AS A DIRECT BLESSING FROM GOD.** Paul knew that he deserved nothing but death and condemnation from God. After all, he was personally responsible for the imprisonment and death of many Christians. Yet, God forgave him and redeemed him. Paul was given new life in Jesus by Grace.

A. GRACE AND PEACE

Grace and Peace is what God offers us. Most letters in Paul's day began with a form of the word *grace*, which meant, "Greetings." But Paul uses the word *grace*. Grace to the Christians means all the undeserved blessings and mercies God bestows on us every day. In other words every breath I take is a gift from God.

And one of those graces is peace. Now the word *grace* has a very Greek flavor to it. But peace has a strong Jewish flavor. Even though it is written in Greek, I'm sure Paul has the Jewish concept of *Shalom* in mind. For the Romans and Greeks, and for most modern cultures, peace simply means the absence of conflict. But for the Hebrew *Shalom* referred to my relationship with God no matter what circumstances I find myself in. It is the confidence to know that I am in a good relationship with God and He will never leave me nor forsake me ... not in this life or the next. Even as I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will not be afraid because God is with me. Paul was writing this letter from prison. He didn't know if he would be released or executed, yet he had peace, joy, and contentment. The Philippians would have to face their trials and you and I will have to face our trials in life. But we can have peace and joy through it all. We can learn to be content. The answer of course is Jesus.

B. GOD THE FATHER

These blessings come from God our Father. I think we have to say this. God is not everybody's Father. Every human being is not a child of God. Every human being is born in God's image, but remember, we were born into this world spiritually dead. Through willful disobedience, we solidified our status as enemies of God. Each one of us was born hopelessly lost to sin, death, and hell. It was God Who loved us so much that He sent God the Son, Jesus to die for our sins. This plan of love and redemption came from the mind and heart of God. We worship a God Who loves us enough to sacrifice His own Son. But we also worship a God of justice Who will not call anyone His child who rejects His Son.

C. JESUS THE LORD

And the grace and peace of God the Father come also from God the Son, Jesus the Lord. If Jesus the Son refused to take on human flesh, submit Himself to torture and death, and if He did not rise from the dead, the plan would have gone nowhere and we would have no chance at being reconciled with God. If we could not be reconciled with God, we would have no experience of peace, and we would receive no grace, no mercy, and no blessings. We would have no opportunity to experience what it means to be called God's children.

Here is the plain truth. None of us are good. None of us deserve anything from God. We only deserve death and an eternity in hell. **ALL THAT WE HAVE AND ALL THAT WE ARE COMES AS A DIRECT BLESSING FROM GOD.**

IV.

EPILOGUE

There are many difficult situations we are going to have to face in life. Paul wants the Philippians to know that Jesus is the answer to all of life's problems. Loving, submitting to, and following Jesus will bring unity and power to the church. Jesus indeed was the answer to the challenges of the church in Philippi. Jesus is the answer to whatever we will face in our church. **JESUS WAS, ... IS, ... AND ALWAYS WILL BE ... THE ANSWER TO FINDING LOVE, JOY, PEACE, SATISFACTION, AND MEANING IN LIFE. THERE IS NO OTHER WAY.** I don't know where this story came from, but I think it really does explain to us how Jesus becomes the answer to all of our questions about living.

"A woman was asked by a coworker, 'What is it like to be a Christian?' The coworker replied, 'It is like being a pumpkin. God picks you from the patch, brings you in, and washes all the dirt off of you. The he cuts off the top and scoops out all the yucky stuff. He removes the seeds of doubt, hate, greed, etc., and then He carves you a new smiling face and puts His light inside of you to shine for all the world to see.'"

As we study through Paul's letter to his friends in the church at Philippi, let's remember that Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. Jesus was the answer then. Jesus is the answer today.