

## Live as Citizens of Heaven

Sunday, October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024

By Ryan Perry

### Scripture

#### Philippians 1:1-2

*[1] Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,*

*To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:*

*[2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

### Pray

#### Introduction

I want to start by saying that it is truly humbling and at the same time a joy to be up here, bringing you God's Word, as your Senior Pastor. I wasn't sure if this was God's will for myself, my family, and the church as a whole, but in God's goodness, he made his will known in a way that made it clear that this was what he wanted for LEFC.

And as I look back on the process as a whole, I think it was during my second or third interview where I was asked about what my first sermon series would be if I were voted in as Senior Pastor. As this was something that I had already been thinking about I said that I thought it would be from the book of Philippians.

My reasoning was that this transition process was and has been very hard on the church. Disagreements about the leadership structure, the job description, and the search process surfaced. Old wounds and hurt from past years were exposed, and some long-standing members, as a result, decided that it would be best for them and their families to move on to different churches.

On top of that, we were in the process of a long goodbye where we had to come to grips with the fact that Pastor Dan, after 20 years of faithful service at LEFC, was finally retiring and would no longer be leading this flock from this pulpit.

**All of these circumstances, when taken together, have left many of us with feelings of anger, frustration, hurt, and also fear over the future of our little church.**

And I really felt like Paul's letter to the Philippians with its focus on Christ, our heavenly citizenship, unity, faith, and joy would be good for us to explore as we seek to heal and refocus our hearts and minds on the goal of our faith which is fellowship with Christ as we look toward and wait for our eternal and forever home with God.

#### **But then I went on Sabbatical.**

Now the goal of this sabbatical was partially to give me time to begin working through my first sermon series and to pray about the future of the church, which I did. But it was mostly about giving me time to reconnect with Jesus. To make sure that I was loving, trusting, and walking

closely with Christ so that I could lead the church to do the same. But as I spent time in prayer, as I worked through this book, and as I spent time with my family in the everyday situations of life, God really showed me how much I personally need the truths of this book.

He showed me how much fear exists in my heart, how much I love ease and comfort, and how circumstantial my faith and joy can be because my focus so often is on earthly things instead of my heavenly citizenship with Christ.

So as much as I picked this book because I believe the church needs these truths in order to heal and refocus our attention on Christ, God showed me that I am just as needy, if not more, of the same refocusing and healing.

With that said, as I have been preparing this sermon and this series my prayer has been that God would use it to encourage, challenge, strengthen, and grow me, personally, just as much as I hope he does each of you.

So today marks the first sermon in a book that I believe will take us about four and a half months to walk through.

And what I want to do in the time that we have this morning is to first walk you through how this church came into existence. Then I will talk through the circumstances that led Paul to write this letter, and finally, we will look at Paul's goals in writing this letter, which will ultimately reveal the major themes that we will see throughout the book of Philippians.

But before we talk about how this church came into being I want to give you some very brief background information on the city of Philippi.

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## **Background of Philippi**

First, the city of Philippi was located in the Northeastern part of Macedonia which today is now the country of Greece. It was originally named Krenides (Krihnihdees) and was founded by some Greek colonists from the island of Thasos in 360 BC, but was then taken over and renamed Philippi after the Father of Alexander the Great in 356 BC.

It eventually came under Roman control in 168 BC, and then in 42 BC after Octavion (also known as Augustus) defeated Cassius and Brutus (who tried to assassinate Julius Ceaser) and Mark Antony in 30 BC he resettled Philippi as a Roman military colony where veterans could live and enjoy all the perks of Roman citizenship.

This information is important to us because it means that this town and eventually the church that was founded there was predominantly made up of Gentiles or non-Jews.

This is why when you read the book of Philippians you will not see a lot of references to the law or overt references to the Old Testament.

Also, as we talk through the circumstances that led Paul to write this letter, the Roman/Gentile makeup is an important part of that discussion as we will see in a bit.

Now that we have established at least a little bit of the background of this town, let's look at how this church came to exist in the first place.

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## **Beginning of The Church at Philippi**

If you would please turn with me to Acts 16 and we are going to read a pretty big chunk from verse 6 all the way through verse 40.

### **Acts 16:6-40:**

*[6] And they (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. [7] And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. [8] So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. [9] And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." [10] And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

*[11] So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, [12] and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. [13] And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. [14] One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. [15] And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.*

Let's stop right there for a minute. In roughly 50 A.D Paul, Silas, and Timothy go to Philippi because of a vision from God. And then on the Sabbath Day they go to a place of prayer because there wasn't a synagogue in this town, and they find a group of women gathered for prayer.

Now these women are not Jews, but as it says of Lydia, they were worshipers of God or God-fearers. These names are usually applied to non-Jews or Gentiles who believe in God and follow various Jewish customs without fully converting to Judaism.

So Paul, Silas, and Timothy sit with them and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then in the course of their conversation, God opens Lydia's heart to believe the gospel and she becomes a Christian along with her whole household.

**And right then and there, the church of Philippi was born.** Now let's go on to Acts 16:16.

*[16] As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. [17] She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." [18] And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly*

*annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.*

Now, we have a slave girl, freed of this spirit of divination, who also is more than likely added to this new church.

*[19] But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. [20] And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. [21] They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." [22] The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. [23] And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. [24] Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

So the slave girls' owners are upset because they lost their source of money and so they drag Paul and Silas before the magistrates who are like the town judges, and accused Paul and Silas of disturbing the town with customs that are not lawful for Romans to practice or accept. As a result, Paul and Silas are beaten with rods and imprisoned.

This section is important because it also has a bearing on the situation that this new church will be facing about 12 years later when Paul writes his letter to them. Then it says in Acts 16:25:

*[25] About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, [26] and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. [27] When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. [28] But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." [29] And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. [30] Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" [31] And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." [32] And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. [33] And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. [34] Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.*

*[35] But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." [36] And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." [37] But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." [38] The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. [39] So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. [40] So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.*

While Paul and Silas were in prison they were singing and praying and an earthquake from God came that opened the doors and unfastened everyone's shackles. Once the jailor realized this he was so distraught that he was about to kill himself because he thought they had all escaped.

But Paul stops him, informs him that they are all there. And so God opens his heart so that Paul can preach the good news of Christ to him and his household. So now, the Jailor and his family are also added to the church.

Then, once Paul and Silas are let out of prison they visit Lydia, gather this group of probably 10-15 believers together, encourage them, and then depart to proclaim Christ in other cities.

That is how we got the formation of this new church at Philippi in roughly 50AD, which by the way is considered the first church to ever be planted in Europe.

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Now we will fast forward 12 years to around 62 A.D, and will look at what has been happening in the Philippian church so that we can better understand why Paul wrote this letter and the goal and purposes he had in mind when he wrote it.

So, why did Paul write his letter to the Philippians?

### **Why Did Paul write this Letter?**

The first thing that we need to know is that in 62 A.D. Paul was in prison in Rome where most scholars believe he lived out the rest of his life and was more than likely executed sometime between 64-67 A.D.

And because he was in prison, the believers in the Philippian church were not only worried about Paul but began to doubt the effectiveness of the gospel.

So Paul writes to assure them that he is doing okay, and to encourage them in their faith that the gospel and the cause of Christ are actually advancing because he is in prison. As Paul writes in Philippians 1:12-14:

***[12] I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, [13] so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. [14] And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.***

Don't worry brothers and sisters. I am okay and in fact, I am more than okay because my imprisonment is actually spreading the name and fame of Christ.

Secondly, the Philippian church had sent a monetary gift of support to Paul by the hands of a man named Epaphroditus. So he writes this letter to thank them for their gift and for their partnership with him in the ministry of Christ. As it says in Philippians 1:3-5:

***[3] I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, [4] always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, [5] because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.***

## Philippians 4:18

*[18] I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.*

However, when Epaphroditus comes to give Paul this gift of support, he informs him this church is dealing with a little bit more than just doubt and discouragement over his imprisonment.

The Philippian church is actually dealing with **persecution** and the **presence of false teachers**. And this was causing these believers to live in fear and fight with one another.

So who are the people that are persecuting this church?

And we can find that answer in Philippians 1:27-30. Paul writes:

*[27] Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, [28] and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. [29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, [30] engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

It is clear from Paul's words that these opponents who are persecuting the church are similar to the ones that he faced when he was with them 12 years earlier because he says that they saw it with their own eyes, and they are similar to the opponents he is still facing.

If you remember what we read in Acts 16, Paul and Silas were being persecuted by the citizens of Philippi because they freed the slave girl of the spirit of divination, and were said to be advocating for customs and practices that Romans were not allowed to follow.

Again, Philippi is a Roman colony predominantly made up of war veterans who were loyal to the empire. In fact, according to the commentator Gordon Fee, they were so loyal to the emperor, that they used the titles *Kyrios* and *Soter* (lord and savior) to talk about him, and they would have practically honored him as a god.

So the same people that didn't like Paul proclaiming another Lord and Savior 12 years earlier, are more than likely the same people who are persecuting this church for doing the same thing.

But it doesn't stop at Roman persecution, because there are also false teachers that are gaining influence in this church. And when we look at this book, we can see that there are two groups of false teachers present in Philippi.

The first group is known as Judaizers. If you have been at LEFC for a few years, Pastor Dan talked about this group when he went through the book of Romans. They are a group of supposed Jewish Christians who were trying to convince Gentile Christians that they needed to follow Christ and the Jewish ceremonial laws (like circumcision) to be saved.

In very simple terms it is a group trying to teach people that they need Christ and works to be saved.

Therefore, Paul writes a very harsh rebuke of these people in Philippians 3:2-3 when he says:

***[2] Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. [3] For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—***

But if these Judaizers are a Christ-plus works form of Christianity, then the next group of false teachers is the complete opposite. It is a group commonly referred to as *Antinomians*. An Antinomian would be a person who believes that their faith in Christ has set them free from having to live a moral and good life that honors God. So instead of following God's commands they were **assimilating to the Roman culture and living for the pleasures of this world.**

Therefore, the apostle Paul has another harsh response in Philippians 3:17-19 when he writes:

***[17] Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. [18] For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. [19] Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.***

So we have a church that is faithfully supporting Paul in his work of the gospel while also trying to come to grips with Paul's imprisonment and suffering, as they deal with their own suffering and persecution at the hands of the Romans. This then opens the door for false teachers to both infiltrate the church and attempt to lead these believers away from Christ.

And as we will see throughout this letter these mounting pressures led to division, grumbling, infighting, selfishness, pride, and fear within this body.

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Now, if you were sitting there and asking yourself, how does the Philippian church's situation relate to my life? I think we just found it. We have all experienced selfishness, pride, and fear in our lives. And for many of us, we have been in churches or are a part of families where we've dealt with grumbling, infighting, and division.

In fact, I will go so far as to say that this is exactly what we have dealt with in this church over the past year. And this is why I believe we need this book at the beginning of a new chapter in the life of LEFC. We need this more than we may realize.

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With that being said, we now know a little bit about Philippi, we understand the circumstances surrounding how this church came into existence, and we also have a fairly good grasp of why Paul felt compelled to write this letter to them.

But there's still one question to answer. And that is this: "What did Paul hope to accomplish in this letter? Meaning, what was his goal in writing to them?"

## What is Paul's Goal in this letter?

And I believe that there is one overarching goal in this letter with many implications that flow from it. The main goal of Paul's letter to the Philippians is to remind them that their citizenship is in heaven and not on earth. As he writes in Philippians 3:20-21:

*[20] **But our citizenship is in heaven**, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21] who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

Paul's main point, which is all over this book, is that our present life isn't what it is all about. Instead, all of our hope, focus, and work should be about our preparation for an eternal heavenly home with God, through our Savior Jesus Christ.

This is the main and most important point of the book. So from sermon one, if you get nothing else out of this book, I urge each of us, including myself to get this: **This world is not our home. Instead, we are working and being prepared for something better and eternal. A forever home with Christ.**

And everything else that I will talk about this morning and throughout the rest of this series, meaning all of the other commands, promises, and themes that Paul writes about flow from this one all-encompassing truth.

So if that is the central point of the book, then what are the other themes that flow from it? Let's just take a couple of minutes to name a few.

One of the other major themes that flows from our heavenly citizenship is a focus on the work of Christ and the gospel. Paul writes in Philippians 1:27:

*[27] Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind **striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,***

Paul wants them and us to be doing the work of Christ as we spread and proclaim the good news of his gospel.

Secondly, if we are heavenly citizens, then God will accomplish his sovereign purposes in us.

### **Philippians 1:6:**

*[6] And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ this morning. You believe he has paid the penalty for your sin, that he is the one who fully saves you, and you are seeking to trust and follow him, then you can be assured that he has done a good work in your life, and that he will be the one who completes it.

You are not alone. He is with you, he is for you, and he is doing a good work in you that he will finish by the power of his great Spirit.



Three, if we are citizens of Christ's heavenly kingdom, then we must strive to imitate Christ's example of humble servanthood.

### **Philippians 2:3-7:**

*[3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*

As followers of Christ, we are to imitate the ways and words of Christ, which means that we are to be humble servants of Christ. Because our goal, as Christians, is to be more like Christ, who didn't come to be served, but to serve and give his life up as a ransom for many.

We must be humble servants who look to serve God and others above ourselves.

Fourth, if we are heavenly citizens then we must be working to be unified within the body of Christ.

### **Philippians 2:1-2:**

*[1] So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*

Now, this doesn't mean we will agree all the time. But it does mean that we will seek to lay aside our own wants, desires, and wishes so that we can be unified in the cause of Christ and the work of the great commission that he has given us.

Fifth, being a heavenly citizen through Christ means that we will deal with earthly suffering for Christ.

### **Philippians 1:29:**

*[29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,*

As much as you and I may not want to suffer, it is part of God's good plan for us as his people. It is part of his plan so that we would become more like Christ, that he would use it to prepare our eternity, and it is part of his plan to bring us everlasting joy, which is actually our final theme for this morning.

Being a heavenly citizen who endures suffering, proclaims Christ, lives as a humble servant, seeks unity, and trusts that God will accomplish his purposes will result in our everlasting joy.

As Paul writes in Philippians 3:1:

*[1] Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.*

So even though the Christian life is hard, and even though the apostle Paul is calling the Philippians and us to a life that at times can feel very hard, the enduring refrain of this book is that all of it is for our joy as we wait for the day when our faith becomes sight and we receive the reward of our faith, our heavenly citizenship, the salvation of our souls.

And it is my hope and prayer that in the coming weeks, you will find this book both as challenging and as refreshing as I have found it, and that it will renew, in a fresh way, your hope in God, your zeal for Christ, and the joy that God has for each one of us in this life, as we work and wait for the next.

**Let's pray.**