

## Acts 16 — The Birth Of The Church In Philippi

**April 19, 2020**

Good morning. If you are a visitor, it is great to have you with us online. The changes in our community because of the coronavirus have made it difficult for all of us to find the new normal. When the encouragement to stay at home first happened at CrossWinds, Pastor Jordan and I gave a few sermons that were pandemic specific. There were on how to find peace in times of anxiety and how to handle grumbling when we feel it in our hearts. Now that we are a few weeks into social distancing, and it doesn't look like it will end soon, the goal around the church has been to change our pace from a sprint to a marathon. We are adjusting our pace so it is sustainable over the long haul.

One of the changes Pastor Jordan and I decided to make was that we want to move back to a teaching series instead of week-to-week sermons pertaining to this pandemic. Both of us felt now was not the right time to go back to the Gospel of Mark. As both of us thought, prayed, and considered what to teach, we felt now would be a good time to study the short book of Philippians. So today, we begin that series. This week, I am only covering the background of Philippians from the book of Acts. Next week, Pastor Andy will preach across both campuses on a Psalm. The following week, we will return to Philippians and begin working our way through the book. This series should take approximately 10 weeks. I hope we will be out of quarantine and back in our building by the end of the study.

We are calling the series, A Guide To Joy. Each week, the title of the message will relate to joy. We will talk about how to have joy in hard times —

how to have joy in loneliness, how to have joy in suffering, how to have joy in the face of death, how to have joy when exhausted, how to have joy in conflict.

Those are some of the topics we have in the upcoming weeks.

The reason we chose to wrap every week around the topic of joy is because Paul kept talking about having joy in hard times in this short book. In the four chapters of this letter, Paul wrote about joy 16 times. He talked about Jesus more than 50 times. Putting these numbers together should give you the focus of the letter. Christians can have joy in hard times through Jesus. Everything in our lives is not dependent on happiness and circumstances.

As we dive into this topic, it would be worth starting by defining the difference between joy and happiness.

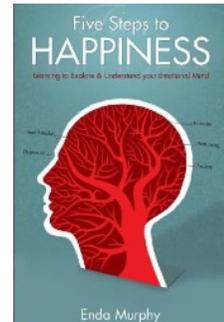
- **Happiness** — It is an attitude of satisfaction and delight based on present circumstances. Our happiness is based on our happenings.
- **Joy** — It is confidence that all is well in spite of our circumstances. Joy comes from our lives being in a relationship with God, being loved by God, being saved by God.

### **We are a society pursuing happiness.**

We live in a society founded on the pursuit of happiness. Let's talk about happiness and the problems that come when we pursue it. The Declaration of Independence says we are a nation founded on life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Life is guaranteed. Liberty is guaranteed. Happiness is something we are allowed to pursue, but there is no guarantee we will find it.. We pursue happiness by processes, possessions, places, and religion.

## We pursue happiness by processes.

The self-help section of the bookstore is filled with books that have titles guaranteeing you happiness if you follow the book's process. Here are a few examples: 5 Steps To Happiness guarantees you happiness in no time flat. 7 Steps To Joy also guarantees you happiness but it takes more work. My favorite is Men's Health magazine. It gave 759 ways to live the perfect life. That



is depressing. If the Old Testament had 600 commands and people couldn't keep them straight, what makes you think people are going to remember 759 commands for a perfect life? No wonder happiness is so hard to find.



## We pursue happiness by possessions.

All advertising is intended to give you one message. Buy our junk, and you will be happy. One article I found on the Internet even claimed that driving a sports car is more enjoyable than kissing! That's faulty advertising! The insurance payments for kissing are much smaller than what you pay for a sports car. Another possession people think will buy happiness is jewelry. In jewelry advertising, we always see a woman that is happy because



her husband bought her jewelry. The ads don't show the husband sweating out the payments. She was happy, at least for a

while. He was not happy. I think all the jewelry did was take a husband's happiness and give it to his wife.

### **We pursue happiness by places.**

We think that if we can just travel we would be happy. We think getting out of town brings happiness. Going to Florida brings happiness, especially for spring break. I found an article online about all the college students that went to Florida for spring break. Florida for spring break is where college students go to be happy. The problem is the article detailed how many of the students that went to Florida for spring break came back with COVID-19. That means when they came back, they weren't happy. They were happier before they left for spring break than when they came back. They wish they stayed at home.



### **We people pursue happiness by religion.**

The way most people pursue happiness by religion is something called the prosperity gospel. A leader in that movement is Joel Osteen. These are a few words from one of his sermons. He



claims God wants you to be rich, successful, and happy all the time.

Let me assure you, he didn't create you to be average. He didn't create you to barely get by, to have all kinds of things holding you back. You've gotta get the right vision. God created you to be totally free. To have peace in your mind. To walk in divine health. To have good relationships. To have plenty to pay your bills. God created us as victors and not victims. Fight the good fight of faith....He wants us free from poverty and lack. No matter what the bank account looks like, our attitude is, "I know I am blessed. I cannot be cursed. Whatever I touch will prosper and succeed."

Just so you know. That is not true. Joel may say God wants everyone to be happy and rich, but life doesn't work that way. If being a Christian meant you should be happy and rich, the first person that wouldn't measure up is Jesus. When Jesus doesn't fit your definition of what it means to be a Christian, you have drifted a long way from the Bible's definition of a Christian. Jesus wasn't prosperous and rich. He was born in a poor family. Jesus worked as a common carpenter for 30 years, in a blue collar job. He didn't make a lot of money. Jesus was often homeless, hungry, and in need of money to pay his taxes. He took his tax money out of the mouth of a fish. Jesus didn't have perfect relationships. His family disowned him. Judas betrayed him. The crowds demanded to crucify him. Jesus didn't have a pain-free life. Jesus was beaten, whipped, and crucified. As for right relationships, he was a victim of false trials and false accusations. Life was not a piece of cake for Jesus. Sorry, Joel. If Jesus' life wasn't a piece of cake all the time, as Christians who are following Jesus, we should not expect our lives to be a piece of cake all the time.

Life is not about happiness. It is about Jesus. Jesus gives us joy.

This is why we need the book of Philippians to teach us about joy that is ours because of Jesus so we don't live every day looking for happiness that is based on our circumstances.

So the theme of this series is joy that comes from Jesus. That is the theme of this letter. Before we look at the topic of joy, let's examine the background of the church in Philippi so we can better understand this letter.

## What is the backstory on the Philippians?

### God steered Paul to Philippi.

The story of the church in Philippi begins in the book of Acts. Paul and Barnabas returned from the famous council in Jerusalem. In that council, it was recognized by the early church that God was bringing Gentiles and making them part of the church. God directed Peter to a Gentile named Cornelius who became a Christian. God also directed Phillip to an Ethiopian eunuch who also became a Christian. The council in Jerusalem clearly stated that Gentiles did not need to adopt Jewish customs, such as circumcision, to be saved. They only needed to place their faith and trust in Jesus.

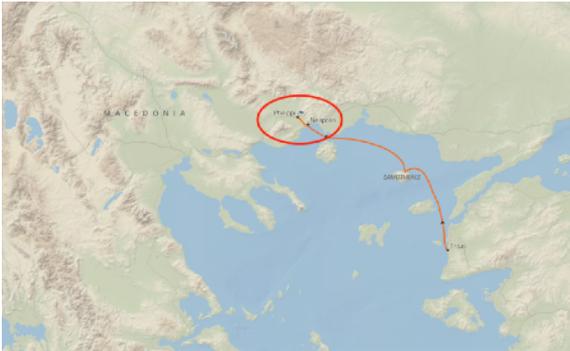
The Jerusalem council gave the green light for sharing the good news of Jesus with the world. After that, Paul and Barnabas separated. Paul took Silas and set out on his second missionary journey. In Acts 16, Timothy joined them in the city of Lystra. Paul's plan was to retrace the steps of his first missionary journey to encourage the churches he planted. As the trio traveled west, while they planned to return to Ephesus, the book

of Acts tells us the Holy Spirit would not let them go. When they tried to go north to Bithynia, again the Holy Spirit stopped them. Paul, Silas, and Timothy found themselves forced to head west to the city



of Troas and to the Dardanell Straits. There, at Troas, Dr. Luke joined them. They found themselves just outside of Europe, with a relatively small body of water

separating them from Europe. It was there Paul had a vision in the night of a man from Macedonia (northern Greece) urging him to come to Macedonia and help them. When Paul saw the vision, he immediately concluded God was calling them to preach the gospel in Macedonia, which is modern day Europe. This was a turning point in world history. God was bringing the gospel to Europe. Paul,



Silas, Timothy, and Luke boarded a ship for the two-day journey across the ocean, then landed at the city of Neapolis. They walked 9 miles to the city of Philippi. This was the first time in history the good news of Jesus set

foot on the continent of Europe.

There are a few lessons we can learn. Sometimes we find ourselves consumed with figuring out a life plan for our lives. Sometime mid-life is a time when people are consumed with crafting a life plan. Sometimes plans for the future consume people when they are leaving high school or considering college. They want to figure their lives so they know exactly how things will unfold.

That is not the way God works. He usually doesn't let us figure everything out about his will for our future. Many times, he reveals his will to us by opening and closing doors of opportunity as we live life. When Paul tried to go back to Ephesus, God shut the door. When Paul tried to go north to Bithynia, God shut the door. God shut those doors to steer Paul and his companions toward Europe. When Paul was close to Europe, then God gave him the vision of an open door

for ministry in Europe. That is how God revealed his will to Paul. He opened and closed doors when Paul tried to go different directions in his life.

God still works the same way. He is working that way in your life and mine. His will for us is revealed as he opens and closes doors of opportunity. That means, don't freak out if you apply for a job and don't get it. That is God closing a door to steer you in the direction he wants you to go. That is the same thing that happened to Paul. The Bible talks about God opening and closing doors of opportunity all the time in numerous Scripture passages. Here are a few.

...for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. 1 Corinthians 16:9 (ESV)

Paul concluded God wanted him to continue sharing the gospel at Corinth because a wide door for effective ministry was open to him.

At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison... Colossians 4:3 (ESV)

Paul was in jail. He asked the Colossians to pray for an open door so he could share the gospel while in prison.

**The city of Philippi was a strategic Roman city.**

Philippi was originally a gold-rush town because gold and silver were found in the hillsides in 368 B.C. At that time, people ran to Philippi like people moved to Alaska during the gold rush in our country. After the gold rush dried up, the city didn't turn into a ghost town. It remained popular because it was on



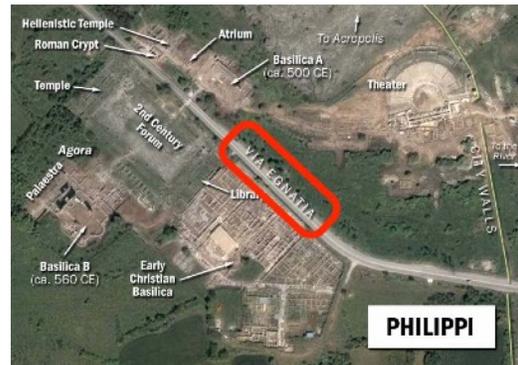
the Egnatian way. That was a 500-mile highway running east and west



connecting that part of the world with Rome. Highways in the ancient world were much simpler than highways in our day. They were simply a path with a number of large rocks pressed into the ground.

In this area, the Egnatian way passed through the center of Philippi because the city was seated between two mountain ranges.

Another important piece of history for Philippi is that a number of decisive Roman battles were fought near the city. That helped the Romans realize the



geographical importance of the city. As a result, around 31 B.C., they made Philippi a Roman colony. They settled 300 veteran soldiers in Philippi with their families. The Roman soldiers were charge with governing the city.

Philippi was not large, perhaps no more than 10,000 people, but being a Roman colony filled this small town with pride. Roman colonies had military significance. Roman soldiers were housed in them. They were used to keep the Pax Romona in the region. As a Roman colony, they were given the right of self-government. As a Roman colony, they enjoyed freedom from Roman taxes.

Everybody likes to live in a place where they do not pay taxes! As a colony, Philippians were given the rights of Roman citizens.

As you can guess, the city loved the benefits of being Roman. Since the city was led by retired Roman soldiers, they tried to imitate Rome in every way. Citizens wore Roman clothes and dressed like they were in Rome. The entire city was built to be a miniature replica of Rome with the same city layout and style of the buildings. That is the background of the city.

Paul's custom when he entered a city was to go to the synagogue, to preach the gospel to the Jews. If he was rejected by the Jews, he went to the Gentiles. When Paul came to Philippi, he didn't find a synagogue in the city. That meant there were less than 10 Jewish men among the 10,000 people. When there were 10 Jewish men in a city, that is when they started a synagogue. The book of Acts tells us that after a few days, Paul discovered a group of God-fearing women meeting by the river outside the city, having a ladies Bible study. That is where Paul began to share the gospel.

Why were these women by the river on the Sabbath? A tradition developed among the Jews during the Babylonian exile that in a city where they didn't have a synagogue, Jews would gather by the river to worship on the Sabbath day. That tradition still held in the days of the early church. Paul knew



that if there were any worshippers of God in the city, they would be found worshipping by the river on the Sabbath. That is where Paul found a small group of God-fearing women. They weren't Jewish women but Gentile women who loved the God of Israel. They were the closest thing God had to a foothold in the city.

### How did the church begin?

#### Lydia

One of the women in that group was a merchant named Lydia. She was from the city of Thyatira. She sold purple cloth. Purple cloth was highly valued by the Romans. It was very popular and expensive to dye. The color purple was made by boiling marine snails to extract their dye. Lydia was strategically located by the sea. She was involved in a very lucrative business in a very important place as people from all over the world passed through her store in Philippi as they walked the 500-mile Egnatian highway. Let's read about what happened when Paul met her.



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. Acts 16:14 (ESV)

For you trivia buffs, Lydia was the first Christian in Europe.

There is a great point of application in this verse. All Paul did was tell her about the good news of Jesus. Paul shared the good news about Jesus but it was up to God to open her heart so she would believe the good news of Jesus.

Nothing has changed. Our job is to share the truth of Jesus with our friends and our neighbors. We cannot open the hearts of our friends and make them believe. Only God can do that. God may not open all hearts to the gospel, but he will certainly open some hearts to the gospel. Our job is to simply share the good news of what God has done for us through Jesus then invite people to trust him.

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. Acts 16:15 (ESV)

Here we find it wasn't just wealthy Lydia who believed in Christ but it was her entire household that placed their faith in Christ. Everyone in her household was baptized. Notice it wasn't believe and wait three years to see if it sticks before you get baptized. It was believe and as soon as they believe, get baptized as a way of publicly proclaiming your trust in Jesus.

Incidentally, notice Lydia was a very persuasive woman. Even Luke said “she prevailed upon us.” This was a woman to whom people had a hard time saying, “No,” which is probably why she was so good in sales. She also had the gift of hospitality plus a large house to host. The church began meeting in her home and enjoying her cooking. I am sure it grew.

### **A Demon-Possessed Slave Girl**

The powers of Satan, that were upset about the gospel coming to Europe, did not like people leaving the kingdom of darkness for the kingdom of light. We find out about their displeasure from the voice of a demon-possessed slave girl. Let's read her story.

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. She

followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” 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. Acts 16:16–18 (ESV)

This is a very interesting scene. It says this young woman had a spirit of divination. The Greek word used for fortune telling in this passage describes a person that would roll her eyes, foam at the mouth, and go into a hysteric fit while prophesying under demon possession. The Greek diction quotes Plato and tells us these symptoms were sometimes brought on by the inhalation of drugs which allowed the demon to have better control of the person and speak more freely through the person. We have a slave girl that was possessed by a demon that enabled her to guess the future. The girl’s owners likely kept her on drugs so she was more controlled by the demon than her own mind. These guys are spiritual pimps.

For many days this girl followed Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke around Philippi simply speaking the truth. “These men are telling you the way to be saved.” Paul kept ignoring her but eventually he came to the end of his rope. He decided he didn’t want a demon in charge of his publicity campaign and writing all his Facebook posts, so he cast the demon out of her. That was a great moment for the young girl. This saved her life from demon possession and from the spiritual pimps that were running her life and using her to make money. Personally, I think she became a Christian and was the next covert in the church. When this girl lost her demon and had her right mind restored to her, that infuriated her owners that they lost the chance to make money from her.

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. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. Acts 16:19–24 (ESV)

Nobody took time to investigate things. The magistrates, who were the leaders of the city, decided to have Paul and Silas beaten with rods. It says many blows were inflicted on them. These rods would bruise the back, tear open skin, and sometimes break ribs. That was absolutely no fun. After the beating, Paul and Silas were put in stocks in the inner prison cell.

Remember they were aching, bleeding, and in pain. They now had their feet in stocks. I cannot imagine the pain and cramping. Instead of crying and whining, we know they were praying and singing to God. *They didn't base their life on happiness from their*



*circumstances, but they had joy from God in spite of their circumstances.* They knew this jail was the place God wanted them to be. After all, hadn't God directed them to the city by closing doors of opportunity for them to go elsewhere? Hadn't God given Paul a vision of a man from Macedonia? Hadn't God opened Lydia's heart? They were still doing what God wanted them to do in the city. If God had had them beaten and put in jail, that was not a mistake in God's plan. It was part

of God's plan. Somehow God would use that pain and suffering for the progress of the gospel in that city. God loved them and through Jesus had saved them. Nothing was off track. This is why they could pray, sing, and have joy in those tough circumstances, not just be sad because of their suffering. That brings us to the third member of the first church in Europe, the Philippian jailer.

### **The Philippian Jailer**

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, 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. 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. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 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. 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. Acts 16:25–34 (ESV)

Even though Paul and Silas were suffering, they were still filled with joy. They knew this is where God wanted them. They knew God would somehow use their time in jail as part of his plan to spread the gospel in this city. This is exactly what happened. Here is a thought for application. If God's plan was for Paul and Silas to go through suffering to spread the gospel, did you ever think it might be part of God's plan for your life and mine that we also go through times of suffering so we can display our joy in Jesus and spread the gospel? Too many times we subtly buy into the prosperity gospel that says God never wants us suffering. That is not true. What we know is that if God allows suffering in our

lives, it is for a good purpose. There was a good purpose for suffering in Christ's life, it was to save us from our sin. There was a good purpose for suffering in Paul and Silas' life, it was the conversion of the Philippian jailer and others in the prison. This is why we can have joy in adversity. God loves us. He has a good plan for us that will allow us to spread the gospel and grow the church when we display our joy in him while facing tough times.

I also want us to notice what Paul said to the Philippian jailer when the jailer asked what he needed to do to be saved. Paul did not tell him to go clean up his life. He simply said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." Nothing has changed. Today, anyone listening to me can be saved. You don't need to clean up your life. God doesn't ask that. The Bible doesn't say that. It says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." It is after you are saved that God gives you a new heart and he begins to change your life, not before.

This is the start of the church in Philippi, the beginning of the gospel in Europe. It was a rich woman who sold purple cloth, a formerly demon-possessed, drug-addicted poor girl, and a Roman jailer with his family. You have a wealthy white collar person, the jailer was a blue collar person, and the former slave girl was a very poor person. That was God's recipe to start the church in Europe.

There is some great application for us to notice. Sometimes we think the best way to start a church is to have people that are similar. Get together all the young people to start a church. Get together all the retired people in a retirement community to start a church. That is not the way God planted this church. He

mixed it up with white collar, blue collar, and the poor. Since they didn't have anything in common other than Jesus, everyone knew the church was about the common experience of Jesus.

That is the background on the church of Philippi. When we get to the letter to the church of Philippi, it was 10 years later. Paul loved this church. On various occasions, this church sent him resources to help with his ministry. He was one of the missionaries supported on the church bulletin board. At this time, the Philippians sent a man named Epaphroditus to visit Paul in Rome. He hand-delivered their financial support. Epaphroditus had become ill, but by God's grace he recovered. Paul was sending him back with this letter, and most likely also letters to the Ephesians, Colossians and to a man named Philemon. This letter was written somewhere between 60 and 62 A.D. While Paul had many purposes in this letter, the main purpose of this letter was to remind the Philippians that just as the joy he had in Christ helped begin the church in Philippi as he was in jail, he is confident that his joy in the Roman jail would help begin the church in Rome.

Paul was also challenging the Philippians to have joy from Jesus in spite of their difficult circumstances. Joy in the face of adversity because Jesus loves us and always has a good plan to spread the gospel through us is magnetic when everyone around has lost their happiness because of difficult times.

Across the corridors of time, Paul leans over and tells us that as Christians, the joy of Jesus shining through our lives still makes a gospel difference. In the upcoming weeks and months there will be financial challenges

ahead of us. Many people will lose their happiness. This is when we can shine because our attitude is one of joy. God has his hand on us. No matter what happens to us, he plans to use it to spread the gospel and grow his church. We just need to find our joy in him.



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