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WELCOME: Today we begin our study the second prison epistle (letter). These are all (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) written while Paul was in prison in Rome. He is imprisoned a second time in Rome and then dies a martyr's close to the same time that Peter is also killed.

The church at Philippi was Paul's "joy and crown" (4:1). Of all his churches it gave him the least trouble, perhaps no trouble at all, and the most satisfaction. So Philippians is a letter of joy, brimming over with expressions of gratitude, affection, and love.

Philippians is also a letter desperately needed by the modern church. It provides a picture of a church that takes seriously who she is as partners with Christ in the gospel, who accepts Jesus as Lord and patterns her ministry after him, "taking the form of a servant."

They always exalted the Lord and were being strengthened by him, living in hope "that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it" (v. 6), and expressing the fruits of the Spirit, living as witnesses to our servant-Lord on earth, but knowing our citizenship is in heaven.

The vivid story of Paul's first visit to Philippi is told in Acts 16:6–40. I encourage you to read this as preparation for the study of this letter. In a few lines, the work of the Holy Spirit guiding the missionary endeavor of Paul and his companions is boldly stated. The Holy Spirit had prevented them from going to Bithinia, so they went to Troas, where Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia, calling, "come and help us."

As the pattern of his life had been established by his obedience to the heavenly vision on the Damascus Road, here Paul, along with Silas, Timothy, and probably Luke, set out for Macedonia, "concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them" (v. 10).

They made their way to Philippi, a Roman colony, "a significant city of the district of Macedonia." There a Christian church was born, beginning with the conversion of Lydia, a dealer in purple, whose entire household responded to the gospel and were baptized with her. A church began in her house.

Dramatic events followed in which Paul, in Jesus' name, freed a slave girl from a spirit which made her a source of gain for her owners. Paul and Silas were arrested, flogged, and imprisoned, but this only became the setting for another display of the Holy Spirit's power as the jailer and his household were converted and baptized.

The city fathers were alarmed by the discovery that they had flogged a Roman citizen, Paul left Philippi. We may assume that Paul returned about five years later, when at the close of his ministry in Ephesus, he "departed to go to Macedonia," giving "much encouragement" as he passed through the districts of that country (Acts 20:1, 2).

Paul next went to Greece, returning to Macedonia three months later on his last visit to Jerusalem. We are told that he sailed from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread. So, three times Paul was in Philippi.

There is little debate about Paul's and Timothy's authorship of this letter. It is the most personal of Paul's letters and bears the mark of authenticity in almost every sentence. From the epistle itself we learn that Paul was a prisoner when he wrote it. Though a group of scholars claim the letter came out of an imprisonment in Ephesus, most connect it to his

imprisonment in Rome. Reference is made to the palace guard (1:13), whose headquarters were in Rome, and a greeting from the saints among the imperial slaves is included (4:22).

Whether late or early in his two-year imprisonment we cannot be certain; thus we date the letter within the years 61 to 63. The occasion for the writing, as indicated in the epistle, was Paul's gratitude that the Philippians had sent him another gift. Not only that, they had sent Epaphroditus to deliver the gift and to be a personal servant to Paul. What generosity!

When Epaphroditus later became ill and homesick, Paul sent him home. To prevent any misunderstanding, Paul gave him a marvelous testimony: "Receive him ... with all gladness ... because for the work of Christ he came close to death" (2:29-30).

The occasion of Epaphroditus' return gave Paul the opportunity to encourage the Philippians in the trials through which they were going (1:28-30), and to make a plea for unity. Through Epaphroditus Paul had heard that a tendency to party-spirit and some personal antagonism between two women converts were threatening the peace of the congregation.

Thus we have the most descriptive passage in Scripture of the Lord as servant, and the call for us to have the same mind of Christ (2:1-11). Too, Paul had learned there were false teachers seeking to dissuade the Philippians from the true path, and he urged them to "beware" and to "have no confidence in the flesh"—to rejoice only in Christ Jesus.

Out of concern for one person, Epaphroditus, and for an entire congregation, the Philippians; out of joy and thanksgiving for a people of faith who were partners with him in the gospel, and a passion to glorify Christ, Paul wrote to the church at Philippi and the Holy Spirit made that letter a word for the church forever and ever.

I believe you will find this letter an exciting read with a powerful message for us today. Remember to read Acts 16:6-40 as an introduction to Philippians. God willing, I will see you tomorrow.