

Philippians 1:1-2

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. I bring my own personal greetings to you, especially those of you who might be visiting today. Welcome. Welcome to Chicago. We're glad you're here, and I know that some of you perhaps have come along with a friend, and you're trying to decide whether going to church on a weekly basis will be worth an investment of your time.

I certainly hope that will prove to be true. So, you've come on a good day. We have before us something entirely new with this sermon, and by that I do not mean that a sermon is something entirely new.

But, in fact, if you're not used to going to church, and I know some of you are in that point, there's a weekly moment where we'll probably look at a biblical text for the better part of a half an hour anyway.

If Pastor Jackson's preaching, it might be a 45-minute package. I just couldn't resist. When I first met Pastor Jackson, he preached his first sermon here.

He said, what did you think? I said, that was good. I said, wow, that was a little bit long. And he goes, but Dave, I've got a 45-minute package. Well, what isn't new here is a sermon.

[1 : 22] So, if you're coming along to church, we believe that when God's word is read and proclaimed, God's voice is heard.

And so, it is kind of a centerpiece of what we do on Sunday morning. What's new is the series. We have left the book of Exodus last week.

We're going to leave the folk at the mountain. We're going to pick them up again next summer and work our way through Exodus next summer. But we have come this week to the book of Philippians.

And as a result, I will say that we've hit our first challenge even before we've begun. We've come to a different kind of genre or a different kind of literature.

Now, there was probably a day where this would have been one of the more familiar kinds of literature to look at, particularly in a church or to study, but it is increasingly unfamiliar, and especially for those of you who are younger.

[2 : 26] This is something that you might just be completely unaware of. There's a word that we call this, this genre. It's called a letter.

Now, I'm sure there are probably some people here in their early 20s who have never written a letter.

And you have decided that all communication comes in 140 characters or less. And today you are in a church, and we've opened up something that is new to you.

In the ancient world, by that I mean when some of us were younger, we wrote letters and we wrote them by hand, and then we would stick them in the post to a friend or loved one to read.

Not done so much anymore. In fact, you know that if you go to your mailbox and there's actually a handwritten letter, boy, it is a unique day, and you set that thing aside for a couple hours just to look at it.

- [3 : 38] The Bible has a lot of letters. The New Testament, complete letters, like the entire thing comes to you in the form of a letter.
- I don't mean the little bits in various parts of the Bible where a letter is inserted, like a king or a ruler in the Old Testament, and you'll actually see a proclamation embedded in a larger narrative.
- But I'm talking about actually the substance of the content of what is coming to you is a letter. Paul, by way of attribution, has a number of them in the New Testament, and we come to one today.
- I want us to get warmed up to what we're going to be in all fall until Advent by just introducing us to the letter of Paul to the Philippians by way of three remarks that emerged from the text itself.
- First of all, who the letter is from. There are two names given and one kind of noun that's kind of appended to a clause that answers this question.
- [4 : 49] Take a look. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. Two names and then that noun which describes who they are.
- Paul and Timothy. If you're not familiar with the Scriptures yet, Paul is the second name coming by way of a man that was born with the name of Saul.
- Jewish. In fact, learned. In Acts 22, he speaks of having been trained under Gamaliel, and he would have been one who was a leader in the Sanhedrin, known even outside the biblical record as a teacher of Jewish law.
- And from a youth, this young man, Saul, was schooled in Jewish life, which would have also included the law itself or Torah.
- This was a man who had gone to law school and was familiar with all of that. Paul was an unlikely convert to Christianity.
- [6 : 08] He had an experience, really. You really couldn't... An experience through word. There was a word that put him on his knees and changed his life forever.
- And then that word which came to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Because he was someone who was anti-Christian and was laboring to see that movement kind of have a lid on it.
- No oxygen on this newfound thing that was, in one sense, hijacking aspects of Jewish life, even their own writings.
- And so he began to try to do away with this sect. And a word came to him. Actually, a word from Jesus.
- He explains this a number of different times. And when you ask him what changed your life, he would basically say, Well, I came forward on a day that it was clear to me God had spoken to me.
- [7 : 16] And it wasn't a phase. He was an unlikely convert. And he immediately then begins to alter all of his energy into helping other people get introduced to this one who spoke to him, namely Jesus Christ.
- And he kind of traveled around in an itinerant way and took some serious heat for it. And then decided to go back on the road and take another run at it.
- And he ends up in the Lycus Valley. And he's stoned, actually, and left for dead. But this is the area where there was another young boy who was growing up by the name of Timothy.

He's the second name here. And the biblical record records that he meets Paul on the second missionary journey. Now, Timothy was not so much an unlikely convert, that is, someone who came to Christ as an adult after studying law, but was one who had been schooled in the Christian interpretation of Scriptures from his youth.

He had been in the Sunday school class that just walked out the back. And these two joined together to begin the proclamation of this new gospel message and to establish local congregations all over the place.

[8 : 44] I mean, they were the dynamic church planting duo. And they worked for a lot of reasons. They worked because they were so different from one another. Timothy, we hear about in Acts 16, had a Jewish mother, but his father was a Greek, and so he was from a mixed marriage, you might say.

And for Paul, that was, wow, that was heaven. That was the kind of man he was looking for because the message he had embraced was rooted in Jewish teachings and yet was to bless all the families of the earth.

So he stands Timothy on his feet as a young man and in his very blood, we have a representation of all that Paul wants for the world.

And so these two go on their way, pledging themselves to the gospel, but also pledging themselves to one another. And a lifelong run began with that mixed ministry team.

Well, that is some indication here of who's writing. What's interesting is the description by way in which you begin to, you see how they're put together here.

[10 : 11] They're called servants. The first one is the one that's written. The first one is the one that's written. The first one is the one that's written. The first one is the one that's written. Now, I want to stop on this word for a bit because I find it to be a surprising declaration by way of identity or introduction.

Paul has about nine letters in the New Testament that carry his name, and this is the only letter where this word is used in isolation to identify himself as a writer.

There are two occasions where the word is used, both in Titus and Philemon, but it's used in Romans and Titus, but it's used in connection with the term apostle.

So he's a servant, but he also wants you to know he's an apostle. He's a sent one. In the book of Philemon, he describes himself simply as prisoner, but here and here alone, he and Timothy describe themselves as servants, servants of Christ Jesus.

We need to think about this word by way of identity because it's going to come up throughout the letter by way of concept.

[11 : 32] We sang a song today, Pierce my ear, O Lord my God, take me to your door. Now, you might have sung that, but what is this? It's not metaphorical, like let me hear something today, although there might be some double entendre there.

It's not accessorized so I can hang something from it. It's taken from the Torah where a person who had been an indentured slave, in a sense, to another individual and had now served a complete length of time, for instance, if you're getting paid to go to school in the military, you might say, well, I'll pay for your education, but when you're done, you owe me five years, that kind of thing.

When the person had finally finished their term, they had an option to be free, go their way, chart their life, or on rare occasions, somebody would actually have such a good situation, they would say, wow, I don't want to go anywhere.

I want to stay here. I want to continue to work in your employ. And they would go to the all day. They would pierce their ear, in a sense, signifying that I am yours. I am your servant forever.

I will serve you. Now, now the song today is saying that, that while I'm free to do whatever I want, God, pierce my ear to your door.

[13 : 01] I'm staying here. This is my home. It's a pledge of uniting yourself to a family or a master.

Servants. It's the same term that Luke picks up on in Luke 17, where Jesus is speaking and telling a parable about a servant.

And he says, you know, a servant goes out and he works all day. And when he gets in, the master doesn't look at him and say, hey man, I know you put in a good long day. Why don't you come and join me at the table?

No, that doesn't happen. In Luke 17, the master assumes that while he's put in 12 hours in the field, he's now come in to prepare things for him. And only after all those things are done, does Jesus then say, and what does the servant say then?

And in one sense, the point of the illustration that he was making was, well, you've only done what's required. I mean, that's a servant.

[14 : 07] That's someone without privilege. Without access. Without the ability to navigate the halls that would acquire rank, position, vocation.

Someone without social capital. The most important capital we got in this country. Paul and Timothy have decided to describe themselves as servants.

That's surprising. Given the context in which they lived. Now remember when Paul was first in Philippi, there was a slave girl who agitated him to no end because she would show up at all his tent meetings yelling from the back row, these are servants of the Most High God.

Servants of the Most High God. This was the word that he was introduced to in Philippi. And it drove him nuts to when he finally said, you know what?

I've got to talk to that girl after the next meeting. And he actually delivers her from what becomes, we'll get into a little bit, her special powers, and she gets converted.

[15 : 32] So, what agitated Paul, he now is embracing back into their very ears. They would have heard Paul, servant of Christ Jesus, with those who had history in Philippi, wow, that is the way he came in the door, and he's still sitting on that word.

Now, what's equally unique then, or surprising about this description by way of the letter and who it is from, is that when Paul had been in Philippi first time around and planted the church, he had appealed to himself in very different language.

He had got himself in trouble, beaten in fact, put in jail, and his get out of jail free card was this, I am a citizen of Rome, Acts 16, I believe verse 37 actually uses the idea here of polis or a citizen.

It actually incorporates this very notion of citizenship. And citizenship is going to come up time and again in Philippians. It is going to be an anchor because Paul is going to speak about where the Christian's identity is from or where their citizenship is from.

But he's not appealing anymore to citizenship in human terms of privilege. Now, in that early Greco-Roman world, citizenship was about responsibilities, but primarily it's privileges.

[17 : 01] If you're born in this country, you are by birth a citizen. But not so in Rome. There were very few citizens. In other words, there would have been citizens and freedmen and slaves.

There were a lot of people that had no rights, zero rights under law. But a servant had in a sense no rights. No access.

No representation. No way to work it out. Paul, who was an individual who had all the rights of Rome, all the tools to get wherever he needed to get to get out of whatever he needed to get out of or to get into wherever he needed to get into, says, now, about ten years later, I came to you and at my first coming I appealed to my citizenship as a way of working what I needed to get done.

And now, I am writing to you and I'm calling you, I'm calling myself a servant of Christ Jesus. A man without rank, without privilege, without access. He has laid it all aside.

He's a servant of Christ Jesus. Now, that struck me this week when I think about our country, when I think about its argued and purported identity, particularly Christians, and an appeal to citizenship as a way of navigating life for ease or protection, something has changed between the time Paul planted and Paul wrote.

[18 : 55] He has laid aside an appeal to a title that would move him forward. and he's identified himself with a group that has no access.

Well, how many of us would choose that kind of word as the sole descriptor of my personhood?

Well, here it is. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, and I guess I would say for us, perhaps, something very instructive.

Well, who it's from. Two names. And that noun by way of description. What about to whom it is written?

It says there, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons. Here again, we've got some strong nouns, overseers and deacons.

[20 : 23] If you read elsewhere in the scriptures, they are those who hold a representative office in a local church. So, we're a long way from his initial days of planting.

There's actually structure now built in around this place. And notice this word, all. I'm not going to get into it now, but this word is going to be coming fast and furious in the letter.

you are reading a letter to all the church at Philippi. It's not a letter to an individual.

It's a letter to a local congregation. And notice, whereas in the first half of the verse you have two names and then that noun servant by way in which they are described, in this half to whom it is written, you are not given the names, but you are given that descriptor.

Saints. What a wonderful thing. I love the inversion of it in my own mind. The pastor teachers are identifying themselves as servants and the congregation is identified as the saints.

[21 : 38] That's just wonderfully instructive. Servants are pastor teachers. Saints are the congregation. Paul's got this order in mind.

to all the saints. Well, we're not given the names, but by way of introduction to the letter, I just want to mention three of them. This afternoon, just turn up Acts 16.

You don't need to go there now, but it tells of three founding core members of the church plant at Philippi.

First one, Lydia. Lydia. Whether that was her real name or not, I don't know. She was from the Lycus Valley and actually previously that had been the kingdom of Lydia, so she might have actually just been kind of known by her place.

You know how it is when I've got a friend here this morning who went to school in Philadelphia, so sometimes when I look at him I just say, oh, Philadelphia's in the house. Now, Philadelphia's not his name, but Philly's here.

[22 : 49] Now, it could have been something like that for Lydia. Oh, Lydia's in the house. That's where she's from. Sometimes when I travel I'll meet pastors in different places and I can't remember all the names.

You know, I'm at a workshop and I've got 80 guys and we're trying to get to know each other, so I'll just start calling them by their location. How you doing, Columbus? Well, it could be something like that.

But Lydia was a professional businesswoman in Philippi at the time. A lady of fabrics and dyes owned her own business and it was international in scope.

It was Lydia International, limited partnership. I don't know what it was, but she's found herself in Asia selling her wares. Paul and Timothy, and interestingly Luke, because in Acts 16 when you read it this afternoon you'll see that he uses this we word that comes in.

Luke would have been part of the group that went from Troas into Philippi and then he backs out again until chapter 20. But these guys are looking for the propagation of the gospel and there is no church building, there is no raised school, and they go down by the riverside to where people might have been praying and they run across a group of women, one of whom was Lydia, and it says that she listened intently and wanted to hear more, Lydia was someone like an inquiring, curious learner.

[24 : 19] Give me more. She would have fit well at the U of C. She wanted to know more and put it all together and she has this vibrant work, she's a successful business woman, she's educated, she's learning, and she becomes the first Christian there in Philippi.

She was also a God fearer in the sense that she had been down to pray. So she's a woman who believed in a God and was trying to figure it all out and then she stumbles upon Christianity.

The second one I already mentioned to you is a slave girl, not even giving her name, I guess appropriately so, given the way in which they speak there. This woman evidently had the ability to tell the future and there were some people that had co-opted her and had used her, were using her to make themselves a prophet.

The way many people today will use women of no rank or means to make their money. She did it with her mind and her spiritual prowess.

You can call her a fortune teller, a palm reader, whatever. She had something that was real. she was the one that started saying these are servants of the Most High and then Paul delivers her from that.

[25 : 45] So here's an unemployed single woman of no rank who's now taking membership vows for the church plant in Philippi with the Greek Asian successful businesswoman and then followed up by the narrative on a Roman soldier who was a Philippian jailer because when Paul got thrown into jail he starts talking to the jailer.

So Philippi realized, if you read your history, was a Roman colony. So this guy would have been probably serving under a general and in a war. Perhaps he's now retired. At any rate, he's over the cell block in Philippi.

He's at the county jail that's now his retired position or station. He has a family. He's there and he gets converted. And when he gets converted he takes a bowl and he washes the wounds of Paul and Timothy.

And as a good Presbyterian he probably then was baptized out of that same bowl. Didn't have time to get down to Lydia and the river. I'm serious on that.

Chrysostom actually says something to the effect that this is beautiful having washed their wounds his sins were now washed away.

[27 : 13] Big old military man. So it says here to all the saints. I'm trying to give you a picture.

Greek woman God fearer. Now unemployed slave girl. Now Roman citizen working class with all the privileges of that city.

And that's the core group. Now there was a day when I used to read that story and go wow that's extraordinary. And then when you I'll tell you what was fun this week was reading that and going well this just sounds like ordinary.

This just sounds like Holy Trinity Hyde Park. There's nothing extraordinary about this. This is what the gospel does. Now if you read the literature there are a lot of churches you're not going to find what you're sitting in right here today.

From what I hear it's kind of rare. But this is the only air we breathe. I mean I'm not in another church on Sunday. Most of you aren't in another church. But evidently Philippi is not a common thing.

[28 : 30] Praise God that the gospel as it worked its way out in Philippi through the apostolic record is the local congregation that I live in the midst of.

I've been here 18 years now. I remember one of the first converts to Christianity unemployed alcoholic middle-aged African-American man who we've buried.

I know of a doctor now in Nebraska came here to go to med school educated all the privileges of life and wealth around him.

Introduced to someone in the church. Walked into a community group. Looked at this stuff long enough said this is what I believe. Joined this family.

I saw them sit here having been gone for a decade about a year ago now. Walking in and said I can't believe you're here. What's going on?

[29 : 48] His response? We still believe it. I could start naming names here.

Right? I could name names from multiple ethnic backgrounds who have come to Christ here as an adult. Right? I know your stories.

I love your stories. people like I say there's a little bit of everything in here. Praise God. To all the saints in Philippi.

have come to them. I know your name is something instructive there for us. Let's continue to walk with one another. Continue to live with one another.

Let's continue to strive side by side for the same things with one another. and may God continue to bless the work of our hands.

[30 : 55] I guess what I want to tell you is if you've never looked at a letter in the Bible before, hey, this letter of all letters might actually have something for you in the coming weeks because it's evidently written to a congregation that just looks a lot like you.

Amen? Amen. Who's the letter from? Who's the letter to?

Let me say one word and sit down. The one who brought these two together. And for that I want you to see the noun but I kind of want to go to the, I want to pay attention at a literary level to the prepositions.

Paul and Timothy, here's the noun coming, servants of Christ Jesus. To all the saints in Christ Jesus.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Three times. This is the one who changed a student of Torah into the largest voice in the Christian history, perhaps arguably outside of Augustine.

[32 : 14] this is the one who takes a kid out of Sunday school and puts him in the most dynamic gospel altering combination in the history of the world.

Christ Jesus is the one who walks into business people's lives, slave girls' lives, car carrying local union lives.

This is the one. This is the one, the only one that can save a marriage. This is where hope is.

This is where change is. This is the one who would ask you to identify yourself now as the servant, notice the preposition, of Christ Jesus.

Notice the next preposition, to all the saints who are in Christ Jesus. Grace and peace to you from Christ Jesus.

[33 : 27] He becomes the orbit of all things in the letter of Paul to the Philippians. Christ. Well, I hope you come back because when God's word is read and at a raw level explained, I believe with all my heart God's voice is heard.

So align your life under the hearing of this word. Our Heavenly Father, we come to you now with thanksgiving for what's ahead of us this fall.

This surprising little letter. Help us to read it well and to enjoy our reading of it.

Help us to well, help us that it might begin to govern our week and life. We thank you for it.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. We thank you for it. We thank you for it. Thank you.