

Dead Man Living (Philippians) – Part 1

Paul's history with the church at Philippi is recounted in Acts 16 ...

- v. 1-12 – Timothy went with Paul on this journey, and the Holy Ghost led them directly to Philippi (vision of Macedonian man – “come help us”)
- v. 13-15 – women's prayer group, including Lydia who was baptized
- v. 16-24 – cast a demon out of a woman soothsayer who was following them, and cast in prison when her masters took them to the magistrates
- v. 25-34 – Paul and Silas worship in jail and an earthquake sets them free, then the Philippian jailer and his whole household are converted
- v. 35-40 – the magistrates discover they have jailed a Roman citizen

Paul made repeat visits to the Christians at Philippi during his later missionary journeys, and a relationship was forged. Years later, when he was taken to Rome as a prisoner awaiting trial before Caesar (at the end of Acts), the Philippian church sent Epaphroditus to do what he could to help the Apostle. Unfortunately, Epaphroditus suffered a near-fatal illness during the time he was in Rome; after he recovered and brought news of the church to Paul, he returned to Philippi to deliver the Apostle's letter.

You've heard the death row expression “Dead Man Walking”? Well, Paul is on the first century equivalent of Death Row at the end of the book of Acts, under house arrest in Rome and knowing that his only hope of freedom lies in the hands of the despotic Emperor Nero. Not a likely prospect! But you would never know it by the tone of his “prison epistles” (Philippians is the last of these letters to the churches – he writes some personal letters later.) In the middle of the worst circumstances, Paul is unmistakably HAPPY. Why? Because he has learned that the WORST circumstances are often the BEST opportunities for God and the gospel to work! That is a biblical principle we talk about, but often our actions and attitudes show that we don't really believe it! Paul has something we need to have, so over the next few weeks we are going to get inside the mind of this Dead Man Living.

PHILIPPIANS CHAPTER ONE

v. 1 – “servants” – “willing slave” or “bondservant” as in Exodus 21:5-6

Exodus 21:5-6 And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever.

v. 2 – God our Father, EVEN the Lord Jesus Christ – doesn't dispute Oneness but actually proves it, as in Colossians 1:3

Colossians 1:3 We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

v. 3 – can this be said by others of you?!

v. 5 – “fellowship” can also be accurately translated “partnership”

v. 6 – “begun” only used here and in Galatians 3:3 – you can't begin in the Spirit and finish in the flesh – God will “perform” (“complete”) the work!

Galatians 3:3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

v. 8 – “bowels” – synonymous with “emotions” (the word “heart” in the Bible is not synonymous with emotions, but means “rational nature” or “WILL”) – that is why LOVE IS A DECISION (and we serve God with our HEART!)

v. 10 – “sincere” – “sine cera” was a Greek term meaning “without wax” and indicated pottery that had no hidden cracks filled with wax before painting

v. 12 – Paul knew that the WORST circumstances are often the BEST opportunities for God and the gospel to work! He rejoiced at what God was going to do instead of complaining about what He had not done.

v. 13 – “palace” means “praetorium” as in the soldiers who guarded Paul

v. 14 – Paul's example of faith in persecution encouraged the church!

Acts 28:30-31 (KJV) And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

AKOLUTOS: In the Greek language, Acts ends with this single word. Biblical scholar I. Howard Marshall writes that “all the emphasis lies on that last phrase.” The word means “unhindered,” “unpreventable” and even “unstoppable.” It suggests a wide-open field of opportunity.

Let's get this straight – Paul is chained to a Roman soldier, forcibly confined to his lodgings, and has been awaiting trial for OVER FOUR YEARS – and Luke writes that he is “unstoppable”? **Is this God's idea of irony?** Paul immobilized by Roman chains doesn't exactly seem like a promising strategy for accomplishing the mission of the church!

Unstoppable?! He can't even leave his house! And meanwhile, Christians are being martyred wholesale in the city by the Emperor Nero who is on one of his rampages. Paul will soon be included in the killings, beheaded for the name of Jesus. **Unstoppable?!** Many of the newer Bible translations pick up on this term by saying something like “no one tried to stop him.” But that is not exactly the point – no one COULD stop Paul, because God was with him even though he was in chains! The ESV is probably the most clear:

Acts 28:30-31 (ESV) He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

The writer Luke understands something that you need to understand. All of the judicial foot-dragging that has Paul mired in prison, the religious blindness that has caused the Jews to reject their own Messiah, even the massacres that are filling Rome's coliseums with Christian corpses ... none of these qualify as hindrances against the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because the church in Acts was **UNSTOPPABLE**. You could fight those Christians, persecute them, throw them to the lions, burn them at the stake, fill the catacombs with their bones – but you could not stop them! They were determined to turn the world upside down, and they did. They absolutely changed the world – and we are called to follow in their steps. We believe the same gospel, we preach the same message, we have the same commission and the same Holy Spirit as Peter, Paul, James, John, Barabbas, Silas, Timothy and the rest. We can do what they did! And so, **“UNSTOPPABLE”** stands as the last word on the subject! Paul understood something that you need to understand. We are willing participants not only in WHAT God does, but in the WAY He does it. His ways are higher than our ways! **UNSTOPPABLE** tells us that all the obstacles that now loom large are simply of no account in the agenda of God's Kingdom.

Ephesians 6:20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

2 Timothy 2:9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.

v. 16 – “contention” – “to canvas for office, looking for people to support you”

v. 18 – Paul didn't care that the MOTIVES of other preachers were wrong – he simply rejoiced that Christ was being preached regardless!

v. 21 – to live is Christ, to die is gain ... as in Galatians 2:20

Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

v. 24 – Paul yielded his personal desires for the good of the church

v. 25 – “furtherance” – “blazing a new trail so that an army can advance”

v. 27 – “conversation” – “lifestyle” – indicates WALK, not TALK

v. 28 – when Christians suffer without being “terrified” (losing faith), it is a sign (“token”) to God's enemies that His church will ultimately be victorious

v. 29 – “given” – suffering is a GIFT that brings POWER and REWARD

v. 30 – “same conflict” – we are in this together! / “saw in me” – Acts 16