

## **The Letter of Paul to the Philippians Part 2 Philippians 1:1-7, Paul – In the Grip of Grace**

Everybody's journey through life is unique, would you agree?

As you get to know someone it is amazing to hear the things they have been through, what brought them to the Lord, where the Lord has taken them and the things the Lord is doing in their lives today.

I read somewhere, I think on Facebook that every saint has a past. That is true of me, of you and of Paul who we are going to be looking at in a minute. But I thought it might be time to tell you a little more about my journey.

Prior to my surrender to Christ my life was a mess. During my twenties and early thirties I struggled with a lot of things. Even though on the outside I had all the trappings of life, a new house, a new suv, a high paying job but inwardly I struggled because I sensed this wasn't what life was all about. Something was missing but I couldn't seem to connect with God in way that made sense and that I could grab ahold of.

I wonder if that might have been part of my trouble. Instead of coming to God and allowing Him to grab ahold of me I was trying to grab ahold of God in a way that made sense to me and that made me happy.

Well, it didn't work. Things began progressing down and down an ugly path. I began cruising in out of bars and then one night, I was in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong amount of alcohol in my system. I went to a party and someone was passing around a smoking pipe. I thought it was marijuana but it was crack, which is cocaine in a rock type form that you smoked. Again I was drunk enough that my defenses were down so I took what was offered and further and further down that black hole I went.

After that I tried meth and between the two I was stuck for two years. Now for me, I was self-employed so I could still maintain some sense of working, making money and living if that is what you would call it. But finally I came to the end of myself and knew that if things didn't change then I was going to end up in jail or dead. That was about the only future I saw.

But obviously that didn't happen. As I said before every saint has a past. For me, that was 25 years ago, before I met Michal and before I met the Lord in a dramatic way.

As I mentioned earlier maybe I was trying to grab ahold of God in a way that made sense to me and that made me happy. That is not what Christ wants. Jesus wants to grab ahold of you and take you where He wants you to go. It is by the grace of God that I was delivered and that I met Jesus. It was by the grace of God that I stand before you today.

As I read and study the life of Paul I think his journey was similar to mine in some ways.

As you study out the life of Paul, you will find that his past was as a man named Saul. Saul first shows up in Acts 7 at the stoning of Stephen. Stephen is described in the following verses.

**Acts 6:3, 5, 8, "...select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom...and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people."**

Stephen was a sold out disciple of Jesus Christ and Jesus was using him in great and wonderful ways. But the religious people who wanted to keep the old ways of reaching up to God, took offense at the preaching of Jesus that Stephen was doing and after listening to him the following occurred.

**Acts 7:58, “When they had driven him (Stephen) out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.”**

Before Stephen died he saw the heavens open up and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ready to receive him. This gave him strength and he is listed as the first person who died for Christ. But here we are also introduced to a young man named Saul.

Let’s read on. **Acts 8:1, “Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him (Stephen) to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem...”**

Let’s continue on for a moment.

**Acts 8:3, “But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.”**

**Acts 9:1, “Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked for letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way (the way of Jesus), both men and women, that he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”**

So here we have Saul, dragging Christians to Jerusalem to be jailed, tried and possibly put to death. I could not find anything on the fate of the Christians Saul brought to Jerusalem but surely it wasn’t good.

The amazing thing about what Saul was doing was he was doing it for the church, the church of the Jews. Later in this letter he talks about being highly educated in the church, zealous for the church and blameless in sight of the church. But he had it all wrong.

I wonder if Saul struggled with something similar to what I struggled with. Maybe he was trying to grab ahold of God in a way that made sense to him instead of allowing God to grab ahold of him and take him where He wanted him to go.

Most of you know how this story of Saul goes. God, in His great grace and mercy did grab ahold of Saul. Jesus showed up as Saul was traveling to Damascus and spoke to him in a way that Saul had no doubt that it was Jesus.

From there, Jesus took Saul, who would soon be renamed Paul, on a journey that would rock his boat. Paul would see and do things that, well, were miraculous.

Let's get back this morning to our teaching in Philippians. Read with me.

**Philippians 1:1-7, “Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in views of your participating in the gospel from the first day until now.**

**For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me.”**

Paul tells the Philippian church and us that we are all partakers of grace with him.

In John 1:16 we read, **John 1:16, “For of His fullness we have received, and grace upon grace.”**

Take a moment to imagine this: Video...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmPzbZVUp3g>

You're sitting on a beach, watching wave after wave from the ocean roll onto the shore in endless cycles. Before one wave has fully exhausted itself, the next one begins to build and comes crashing onto the shore powerfully. One wave on the heels of another. Endlessly.

Grace upon grace. God mercies upon mercies is what we receive.

**I'M GOING TO PAUSE – LET THE VIDEO RUN ON FOR A BIT TILL I START SPEAKING AGAIN.**

Let's think more on Paul for a moment. Look at what he says a bit later in this letter.

**Philippians 4:11-13, “Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me.”**

Scholars believe Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote this and several other letters. His imprisonment was different than you might think of prison today. He was under house guard and was able to receive visitors, write letters and a number of other things. But he was confined non-the-less.

But because Paul was so focused upon the forgiveness he had received and because he continued to receive His grace, Paul's trust in Christ grew and he was able to see the following occur.

**Philippians 1:12-14, “Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.”**

But because of his trust in God, he and the reason he was there became known to the whole praetorian guard which was some 4,700 soldiers. I thought about this and if 4,700 soldiers were talking about Paul and why he was in prison then these same soldiers were probably talking with their wives, their children, their family, their neighbors and who knows who else. The cause of Christ was being spread dramatically by Paul’s imprisonment. Plus Paul says some of the other Christians were gaining strength and speaking out more boldly because of Paul and the way he was showing such great trust in the Lord even though he was in prison.

Sitting in prison, waiting for who knows what outcome, possibly death, Paul writes this and other encouraging letters. He speaks with the guards and no doubt some of them get saved.

This is not the first time Paul was in prison. He was actually in prison in Philippi a few years before along with another disciple named Silas. You can read about it in Acts 16 but let me give you the cliff notes.

Paul and Silas were on a missionary trip, preaching and teaching about Jesus in Philippi for the very first time. In the midst of their ministry they cast out a demon out of a young girl who was being used as a spirit guide. Her owners got upset, drug them off to court and in the process, Silas and Paul were beaten and thrown into a dungeon where their feet were put in stocks.

Read with me **Acts 16:25**, “**But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them...**”

Even though they had been beaten and thrown into a dark dank prison they were still singing and giving God praise. An earthquake occurs, the jail door open the chains on their feet fall off and they have the opportunity to walk out of the prison but they don't. They interact with the jailer who was so distraught that he was preparing to kill himself but they stop him. He turns to them and asks, what must I do to be saved. The jailer and his whole household accept Christ and the church in Philippi is born.

Talk about the grace of God washing over you. Paul and Silas could have moaned and groaned about the predicament they found themselves in but they chose instead to focus upon the grace of God and as they did, miracles occurred.

I want you to know that there is a fresh wave of God's grace rushing toward you for every new trial or trouble that comes your way. Our natural inclination is to look in despair at the waves of adversity in our lives, but our loving heavenly Father wants us to look *by faith* at His waves of grace washing over us—one after another without end. When we look to God, when we rest in Him, give Him praise in whatever circumstance we are in then we will receive from His fullness every practical need we have in that moment.

Can you say that in whatever circumstances that you find ourselves in any given time are we standing in the strength of Christ? you can. You can expect the same Christ who gave Paul the ability to stand firm in the midst of his trials to give you strength.

I see this happening in some of your lives. I see this happening in my life. I see what is happening in this church and it is a miracle. The way you have come together, the growth we have seen numerically and spiritually, has been nothing short of miraculous. Some want to give me credit but it is not me but Christ in me and in you who is doing this.

All I am trying to do, trying and sometimes failing, is to do as Paul did and that is to surrender my life to Christ in such a way that He can use me and I can only do that if I allow His waves of grace to wash over me day after day.

**Show video again,**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmPzbZVUp3g>

Let me encourage you to be gripped in the grace of God. Let His waves of grace wash over you each and every day.

Let's pray

This morning you might find yourself in a prison of sorts. You might be experiencing an emotional prison of despair, a physical prison of endless bills, sickness or just plain fatigue in life. Prison comes in many different forms. God never promises that He deliver you out of your physical prison but He does promise that He will deliver your heart in the midst of it.

Last week I said where you see grace at work in someone's life you will find peace. This is true for you as well.

Philippians 4:6-7, “Be anxious for nothing but in everything, with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Peace I have come to give you Jesus says. Not peace like the world offers, but the peace of God.

Let's take a moment of quiet to think on these truths...