

A LETTER FROM PRISON



THE PARADOX OF JOY IN SUFFERING
paul's letter to the philippian church

Week 7: "MODELS WANTED"

INTRODUCTION: Warning, Spoiler Ahead!

We are once again reminded in this portion of scripture that in the face of suffering, trials and difficulties there is a great hope for those that Follow Christ. Paul challenges us to consider how we are living today in light of what God will do in the future.

Philippians 3:17-4:1

LOOK TO THE BOOK

- **EARLY CHURCH MODELLING:** Paul invites the Philippians to join together in following the example of those who live lives marked humility, radical service and the surrendering of entitlement. This is the same example that Jesus has given to us (Phil 2:1-11).
- **ENEMIES OF THE CROSS:** Paul sadly acknowledges that there are those who live at odds with Christ's work of reconciliation and restoration. Paul seems to be primarily critiquing those who find their identity in religious practices such as food laws and circumcision (his own religious background), and yet the warnings also have resonance with pagan culture (the primary population of Philippi). We must remember: "Paul, like Jesus and the prophets before him, critiques the Jewish religion because it is religious, not because it is Jewish." - *Bruxy Cavey*. Our challenge is to examine our own lives for places where we may be working against Jesus through our pride and identity in such things as: religious systems, outward appearances, leadership positions, nationality, careers and financial success.
- **FOR KING AND COMMONWEALTH!** Paul tells us that as Christ Followers, our primary allegiance is to God and His governance (*our citizenship is in heaven - 3:20 NASB*). This would have resonance with the Philippians as their city was a colony of Rome, with many of the inherent rights, privileges and governmental structures.
- **STANDING FIRM:** In the face of pain, struggle and suffering, Paul reminds us that we should stand firm because we are waiting for a true Saviour and Lord (note that these are Caesar titles - a not so subtle statement that Jesus is the true King while Caesar is not). Not only will Christ makes things right in ourselves ,(resurrection bodies) but He will also bring all of creation under his rule.

SO WHAT?

TAKE OUT #1: Ask yourself, who are the people that serve as your role models, and what is it about them that you are so drawn to? Does what you admire most about these people lead you more towards Christ or more towards misplaced priorities?

TAKE OUT #2: As "Citizens of Heaven" we must examine the question: Does Jesus have our primary allegiance or has something else captured our imagination and worship?

TAKE OUT #3: When looking at our own community we must ask ourselves, have we made room at the table for those our culture views as weak or lowly? A Church of the "successful" and self sufficient has little to offer a world that values people for their beauty, wealth, talent and career achievements.

TAKE OUT #4: Write down the names of all the people that are within your immediate circle of influence. Ask yourself, have you modelled a lifestyle of humility, service and self-sacrifice to them? Do you truly see your loving investment in them as one of your greatest achievements and rewards?

CONCLUSION – Sneak a Peak At The Ending

Revelation 21:4-5

HOME CHURCH QUESTIONS...

WARMING UP...

1. Take time to review this week's message. What things in the message most challenged, puzzled, or encouraged you?

LOOK TO THE BOOK...

2. Read our key passage (**Philippians 3:17-4:1**), in various translations if possible. a) What verse or idea stands out to you the most? Why?
3. In **3:17**, Paul is encouraging the church to follow the example of those who demonstrate Christ's way of radical love, self sacrifice and willingness to surrender entitlement (See also **2:1-3**). (a) Why is it important for us to have living, breathing examples in our midst who live like this? (b) Why is this way of living particularly needed in our culture today? (c) What benefit would this approach to living have in our friendships and family relationships? (d) How would adopting this lifestyle aid us in the task of peace-making in the midst of such issues as: family breakdown, quarrels amongst friends and disagreements at work?
4. Paul encourages the Philippians to "Join with others in following my example" in **3:17** (TNIV). (a) What is the importance in making this a community as opposed to individualistic pursuit? (b) What are some ways that we can encourage our communities to be more collaborative as opposed to individualistic when it comes to spiritual growth?
5. If you have the time, go through the entire text of Philippians and find as many "spoilors" as you can (verses that refer to what the future holds for Christ Followers). (a) In what ways can these verses strengthen and encourage us in difficult circumstances? Perhaps there individuals in the group who would like to take on the challenge of memorizing some of these passages together.

SO WHAT?...

6. Take some time in your large group or smaller prayer teams to share specifically about individuals who have modelled the characteristics mentioned in question #3. (a) What are some of the specific things about these people that encouraged you in your own spiritual growth? (b) In what ways are you actively trying to follow their example? (c) Pray for one another in these areas.

BIBLIOGRAPHY - for further study in Philippians

1. Paul for Everyone (The Prison Letters). Tom Wright
2. Friendship and Finances in Philippi, Ben Witherington III.
3. Regent Audio (www.regentaudio.com), Philippians, N.T. Wright

Paul Morris @ THE MEETING HOUSE – Sunday, Aug 5 & Aug 12, 2007