

# **Read the Bible in a Year**

Week 27 – December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**Read on Your Own this Week:**

*Psalms 79-81*  
Proverbs 17-20

**Readings in Class:**

Philippians  
1 Chronicles 1-12

## **Introduction to Philippians**

Philippians, along with Ephesians and Colossians, are known as the Prison Epistles written around 60 AD. The three letters form an interesting unit among Paul's letters. Ephesians is known as the letter about the Church, or the body of Christ. Colossians deals with the nature and being of Jesus Christ, or as we would say, the head. Sandwiched between these two books is the letter to the Philippians. This letter is the beating heart of our faith in Christ Jesus as it discusses the nature of the Christian life as we follow Christ and his love for us. These three prison letters form the head, the heart, and the body.

The purpose of the letter is a thank you to the congregation in Philippi, an important Roman colony. We would remember Lydia from the book of Acts as a member of this congregation, as well as the Philippian jailer from Acts 16. They had heard of Paul's imprisonment and sent him a supply basket to care for his needs while in prison. A member of the congregation, Epaphroditus, delivered the gifts personally. Touched by their gift, Paul writes them a letter. The letter is a thank you, but Paul uses it as a discourse to discuss the Christian life, which makes it unique also because Paul is not writing to combat conflict within the congregation but to exhort and encourage them.

Besides the thank you, Paul returns a favor by his theological thoughts and spiritual care, of which Philippians 2:1-11 is one of the most noteworthy and memorable passages in the New Testament, which is a hymn to Jesus Christ. Important concepts of who Jesus are and what he has done are found there. Paul also says that in order to thank them further he wants to send Timothy and Epaphroditus to them to further teach and admonish them. Overall, the letter is Paul's love epistle and is filled with thanksgiving, joy, and encouragement, even in the face of imprisonment and suffering.

### **A Brief Overview of Philippians**

1. Greetings 1:1-2
2. Prayer of Thanksgiving 1:3-11
3. Update on Paul's Work and Life 1:12-26
4. Call of Exhortation to Life in Christ 1:27-2:18
  - a. Behave in Manner worthy of Christ 1:17-30
  - b. Hymn to Christ and His Example 2:1-11

- c. Repeated Exhortation based on Hymn 2:12-18
- 5. Update on Timothy and Epaphroditus 2:19-30
- 6. More Exhortations! 3:1-4:9
  - a. Warning Against False Teachers 3:1-3:11
  - b. Push Forward and Mimic Paul 3:12-4:1
  - c. Final encouragement and Prayer 4:2-9
- 7. Thankfulness to Congregation for Gifts 4:10-20
- 8. Final Greetings and Blessing 4:21-23

### **A Hymn To Christ**

Philippians 2:1-11 not only forms the central thought and emphasis for the themes of the entire letter, but is perhaps the most clear and straight words when discussing the nature of Christ and his work. Verses 5-11 are most likely a hymn, one that the congregation sang in their worship frequently. Here are just a few thoughts on the ideas Paul expresses in it:

1. Jesus Christ is in the form of God. "God of God" we would say in the Creed. Jesus is equal with God the Father. He is of "one substance with the Father."
2. Jesus Christ did not count equality with God something to be used for his own purpose. Instead he forsook all of that by taking our flesh. Christ does not use his equality with God to use for his own gain, but for ours!
3. We are told here that Christ made himself nothing. The meaning here is that Jesus emptied himself of everything that would give him an advantage in life. Though he is God, he decided not to use his divinity. It does not mean, as some heretical factions thought early on, that Jesus is making himself less than God, it just means Jesus did not use his divine nature in his life in order that God might become a servant.
4. Christ's obedience and trust in his Father is rewarded with exaltation. The Father rewards his Son's faithfulness by conferring on his status and power, and authority. The Father grants his eternal Son the right that is His by nature because of his work of salvation for us. This lets us know that Jesus will be faithful in his judgement and ruling.
5. Jesus Christ is Lord. This is a key thought and confession in the early Church. In it, we find out that life fits under the reign and direction of Jesus and that we are called to follow suit.

### **Monkey See Monkey Do**

In many of Paul's letters he will tell the congregations to "mimic him." Paul wants them to see what living the Christian life looks like. But this might seem odd, why are we called to mimic the life of someone besides Jesus? Paul will note that they should mimic him as he mimics Jesus. Also, Paul wants them to see that his life looks like the life of Jesus.

We can remember how Jesus himself had said about Paul in Acts 9, "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Paul's life mirrors the life of Jesus. In fact, all Christians will have their life play out like Christ's in some way.

So to aid in that, Paul wants Christians to look at the manner of his life. He exhorts them to see how Jesus Christ has lived for them and gave up all for them. "To live is Christ. To die is gain." And we also see that for this cause Paul has given up all that he once counted as gain in his life. From his lifestyle, upbringing, and even status. He wants to show by his life all that is gained by following Christ and encourage other Christians what that looks like and follow him.