

Philippians 1

“Silas & Paul’s Excellent Adventure”

06/06/2010

Acts 16:1-40

INTRODUCTION

Around 60 A.D. an itinerant leather worker in the Middle East was arrested for disturbing the peace with his religious fanaticism. He would spend most of the rest of his life either in jail or under house arrest.

When he wasn’t pleading his case before different magistrates or being moved from one jurisdiction to another – usually at the whim of his captors – he received visitors, and he wrote letters.

His name was Paul. He was a Roman citizen from the city of Tarsus, in Cilicia. He was in his early 60’s – an advanced age for a man of his time and culture. He supported himself with his leather craft – making tents, mostly – but he was also a highly educated scholar and had once been a fiercely zealous Judaic Pharisee in Jerusalem.

He had experienced a rather fantastic religious conversion some 20 years before his arrest and had afterward dedicated his life to a new religion called “The Way”, a movement founded during Paul’s lifetime by a simple Palestinian carpenter named Jesus, whom Paul – like the other converts to this new religion – now believed to have been the *Messiah* foretold by the prophets Isaiah and Micah in the Hebrew scriptures.

In the two decades since his conversion, Paul had used the privilege of his Roman citizenship to travel through the southeastern regions of the Empire, preaching and teaching about Jesus, winning many converts, and establishing churches dedicated to The Way in a significant number of towns and cities.

Of those churches Paul had perhaps the warmest relationship with the one in Philippi, a Roman colony in what is now eastern Greece. One of the letters he wrote from prison was addressed to that church. It has been read, studied and cherished by millions of people the world over in the 2,000 years since it was written.

We shall, as God allows, read and study Paul’s *Epistle to the Philippians* here in the Rohrserville Chapel this summer.

Let us pray.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. Philippi

1. Began as a kind of boom town, the site of gold and silver mines which were played out by B.C. 400.
2. Became *Philippi* ("the City of Philip") in B.C. 386 in honour of Philip Macedon, father of Alexander the Great.
3. Became part of the Roman empire in B.C. 168. Its location along the *Egnation Way*, an important east-west trade route, ensured its growth in size and prominence.
4. Philippi became world-famous due to the two critical battles which were fought nearby.
 - a. In B.C. 42 armies led by Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar, were defeated by his loyalist Roman troops led by Mark Anthony and Octavian. This battle effectively ended the Roman republic.
 - b. Anthony and Octavian vied for control of the vast empire and, nine years later, led their respective armies into battle at Actium, near to Philippi. Octavian was victorious and would rule as *Caesar Augustus*, a name most Christians remember from the nativity accounts of **Matthew** and **Luke** in the New Testament.

(1) Octavian rebuilt Philippi, established a military outpost there, and assigned to it the official designation of *ius italicum*, a status which conveyed the legal rights of the inhabitants of Rome itself to the residents of specially-favoured colonies, and the most prestigious designation available to a Roman-controlled municipality outside the borders of Italy.

(2) By the time the apostle Paul arrived there during his second missionary journey, around 50 A.D., Philippi was teeming with commerce and industry, now firmly established as a small but strategic and increasingly influential component of the Empire, with a wealthy, educated and socially progressive population of Greeks and Romans, along with a small contingent of expatriate Hebrews. By all accounts the great majority of its residents were proud of their city, pleased with their elevated status as Roman citizens, and therefore understandably loyal to the emperor.

- B. How Paul got to Philippi and much of what occurred during his short but tumultuous visit there is recorded by one of his traveling companions, the physician / historian Luke, in **Acts 16**, which we shall now read together.

ABOUT THE LETTER

- A. Paul's authorship has been universally acknowledged by Bible scholars. That he wrote the letter from prison is well established, but when and where (the book of **Acts** records three long-term imprisonments for Paul – in Ephesus, in Caesarea and in Rome) has been debated for centuries. The majority opinion points to the time of Paul's house arrest at Rome, where he was awaiting trial before Caesar himself, a privilege available to every Roman citizen and one which Paul had claimed for himself (See **Acts 21:1 – 25:12.**). Tradition tells us that Paul was beheaded at Rome, so the "prison epistles" – **Philippians** among them – were almost certainly written near the end of the apostle's life.
- B. The exact occasion for the letter was probably Paul's concern for Epaphroditus, a member of the Philippian church who had been sent to Paul with gifts of money and, perhaps, an appeal for his release.
1. During his journey Epaphroditus had fallen seriously ill. Word had apparently reached Philippi, and Epaphroditus, now recovering in Rome, seems to have been worried about the anxieties he had visited upon his family and friends.
 2. Paul's epistle, then, appears to be both a "thank you" note and a kind of "letter of reference" for Epaphroditus, citing his improving health and good character.
 3. Within with these friendly sentiments, however, is contained evidence of Paul's pastoral concern for what scholars regard as his favourite congregation. In his discussions with the apostle about the comings and goings at his home church, Epaphroditus had probably included a few not-so-good news items.
 4. We are not surprised, then, that Paul includes in his letter words of instruction, exhortation and encouragement. Some of our favourite passages of Scripture are contained in its 104 verses. I've asked some folks to read some of these aloud:
 - a. **Philippians 1:21**
 - b. **Philippians 2:5-11**
 - c. **Philippians 3:7-9**
 - d. **Philippians 3:13-14**
 - e. **Philippians 4:4-7**
 - f. **Philippians 4:8-9**
 - g. **Philippians 4:12-13**
 - h. **Philippians 4:19**

One of my favourite verses in this epistle has become more dear to me due to the musical talents of Fernando Ortega who, on his CD "The Shadow of Your Wings", put **Philippians 1:2** to music. Let's listen to it as we close our service this morning.