

Outrageous, Contagious Joy: A Study Through Philippians
Pt 2: Love, Knowledge, and Depth of Insight
Eli Boragine / August 14, 2016

- **Let's get into our text this morning. Please turn in your Bibles to the book of Philippians.** Last week Pastor Jeff started us in on this series called Outrageous Contagious Joy, and I am going to continue us on in that.
- Last week, Jeff did an awesome job introducing us to this book, and he really helped us to understand the Philippian church. He helped us to understand their culture, where they're coming from, why Paul wrote to them the things that he did and the way that he did. And we also talked about the origins of the Philippian church—who was there, and what part they played in getting this thing off the ground.
- And in my mind, the most important thing that we talked about concerning the Philippian church and the city of Philippi was this: that **Philippi was a Roman colony**, the only city of its kind that could boast of a title like this. Philippi modeled itself after its "mother city" Rome in every way possible: language, fashion, politics, culture. People who went there would have said that it reminded them of being in Rome. And because of the distinction that it had, it was known as the leading city of the region of Macedonia. Now technically the capital city of Macedonia was Thessalonica, but **Philippi was the leading city of Macedonia**. When somebody mentioned or talked about Macedonia, this the place you would think of.
 - If you were here, Jeff likened it to the state of Washington, right? He said that even though Olympia is technically the capital of Washington, Seattle is the leading city, Seattle is the place you think of when you think of Washington. Being a Californian, I think of LA, right? When somebody is talking about California and what California is like, I know instinctively that before they even open their mouth that they're not talking about Sacramento. They're going to describe the smog and the gangs and the palm trees and the beaches and Disneyland, and Hollywood. LA culture, to many, is synonymous with Californian culture, and the same could have been said of Philippi 2,000 years ago.
- And because of the unique standing that Philippi enjoyed among the other cities around it as a Roman colony, **Philippi was extremely status conscious**. Every person in that city was clearly identified by their rank and every person in that city was hell-bent on clawing their way, tooth and nail, to the highest available rank they could get to. The goal was to accumulate as much honor/glory/praise for yourself as possible for themselves, and to get as far away as possible from the lower ranks which would have been associated with shame.
- **And I'm rehashing all of this because** when we read the very first verse of Paul's letter to the Philippian church, these facts suddenly become much more interesting. Check it out: **Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ**. — Did you catch that? Did you see how Paul identified himself and Timothy? In no other letter does Paul identify himself like this: a bondservant. The most shameful status, the poorest of the poor. To be any lower, he would

literally have to be dead. Why would he identify himself like that? Paul helped to establish this church, he's the one who brought the gospel message to Philippi. I'm sure they respected him and honored him. And in such a status conscious city, he would have certainly been aware of the kind of impression this would have on the Philippians. So what's going on here? Does Paul have a self-esteem issue? Is he fishing for compliments? What's he doing?

- What we're seeing here, even in this very first verse, this seemingly insignificant introduction, is that **Paul is setting the tone for this letter**. He's establishing, in an actually significant and shocking way, one of the themes that he's going to continue to expound on throughout the letter: humility, submission, lowliness.
- But he goes on in v. 2 with his introduction, and he starts out this letter with a prayer of thankfulness/gratitude for the Philippian church... **Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy,**
 - Now I want to talk about this... Why is he thankful for the Philippian church? Why does he start his prayer off like this?
 - I was talking with some of your students this last week about prayer, and how so often we don't really think when pray. I don't want to put my sin on you so I'll just speak for myself. I think that a lot of times, when I pray, especially when I pray with other people, I have a tendency to go on autopilot. And here's what I mean by that. When I was little, whenever my mom and I would eat dinner together, she would have me pray before the meal. And the prayer sounded a little bit (or maybe exactly) like this: "Dear God thank you so much for this nice I pray that you would bless this food to our bodies in Jesus name amen." It was basically unintelligible, I wanted to eat as soon as humanly possible. But I was *saying*, "REPEAT". And I felt totally justified in praying like that because one time we were visiting my Great Uncle Zeke in SC, and I was asked to bless the meal before we ate dinner. I didn't care that I had just met this guy, and so I gave my standard blessing and once again, nobody on earth could have understood the words that were coming out of my mouth. And my mom, possibly embarrassed, told me, "Eli, we can't understand you when you pray like that." And my Uncle Zeke looked at her and said, "He's not talking to you, Megan." And that was it. That was the end of the conversation. And so I continued to pray like that for a long time! Long after, in fact, it actually meant anything. Right? Because I wasn't thinking about I was saying. It was just the rote prayer that I had come up with that I could say as fast as possible so that I could eat my food.
 - And I don't pray for my food like that anymore, but I still have these kind of rote meaningless phrases that make it into my prayers. I still find these recitations, these motions that I go through in prayer where I'm not really saying anything. I'm on autopilot. — And sometimes we read these beginning introductions like that, don't we? We just assume that Paul's writing this really standardized thing, he's probably

- got like a template that he uses to write these first few insignificant “grace and peace to you” type deals. — But what if he’s not? What if he’s actually choosing his words carefully here? Why is he thankful? Why is he starting his letter off like this?
- The Philippian church, and we’ll see this as we read, but **the Philippian church loved Paul**. They had been one of Paul’s biggest and most generous supporters in his ministry, **their love for Paul was a generous love**. And wherever he had been going, whatever he had been doing, this small church in Philippi had been by his side the entire time. They sent Paul supplies while he was in prison through a messenger, one of Paul’s friends, named Epaphroditus. They helped him tangibly in any way that they could, and were looking to do more. Not only was their love for him generous, **but their love for Paul was persistent**. It was a persistent love. And so in all of Paul’s prayers for them, he thanks God. Man, what a sweet church! What a community of love and friendship Paul has left there.
 - **Note also that mention there of joy...** As you may have picked up on in the title of this series, Outrageous Contagious Joy, one of the purposes of Paul’s letter is communicate and pass on to the Philippian church the joy that he has in Christ. And he’s not subtle about it. Within the few pages of this letter, Paul uses the Greek word for joy more times than it is collectively used in the NT. And this made even more significant when we remember that at the time that Paul was writing this, he was in prison! Remember, he’s writing to the Philippians from a jail cell. Clearly not the ideal place for a missionary. But his joy, as he will continually remind the Philippians, does not stem from his current circumstances. Rather, his joy is in Christ.
 - And much like the mention of being a bondservant in the first verse, this mention of joy that has been weaved into Paul’s introduction helps to signal to his readers that this is something that he’ll be talking about more as they read on: **humility, lowliness, submission, and now joy.**
 - **... making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.**
 - And so Paul ends this prayer of thanksgiving for the Philippians, and he can barely contain his affection for them. He says, “I just you love you guys! Even in my chains, you have been my faithful allies, my faithful friends. You have held nothing back, but in everything you have been my loyal companions, my loyal partners in the ministry of the gospel.” What is so sweet about the Philippians’ love for Paul is that it wasn’t just a one-sided love. This is not the celebrity pastor mentality. **The love in this relationship is mutual**. And he says “I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ”. One of the

translations I was reading this week says simply, “I miss you.” — The connections here are deep, the friendship is real.

- And because of that, his prayers for them are personal, intimate, heartfelt. We haven’t even gotten to that yet, we’ve just talked about how thankful he is for them. But what are his desires *for* them? What in his wildest imagination and aspirations does wish for them? What are his hopes for this young community of believers in Philippi? In v. 9 he tells them...

This I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and depth of insight...

(and this love that Paul prays that the Philippians would have for God, some of your translations may say “that your love may abound all the more” or “that your love may keep on growing”— he’s talking about an overflowing love, a love that cannot be contained, a love that spills over, **an abounding love**)

... that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.

- **You guys, I love that word in there, knowledge.** It is so good, so packed with theological deliciousness. And here’s why. That word “knowledge” is translated from the original Greek word *epignosis*. I sometimes make your students do this—we’re gonna all say that word together on the count of three: epignosis. And I love this word because it doesn’t just mean knowledge, like “Oh yeah, I *know* every lyric to the Black Eyed Peas song ‘Where is the love?’” or “I continue to read Hamlet over and over again even though I *know* how it ends,” or even “Yes, I *know* who Jesus is and what He’s done for me.” — All of those things, all that knowledge, is informational. It’s describing facts about something or somebody. Epignosis is different, because the kind of knowledge that it’s describing is relational knowledge...
- You guys, **I’m about to bring an extremely controversial and well-debated issue**, I just want you to know I’m going to be as unbiased as I possible can while stating truthfully my convictions on this sticky topic: Christmas movies. — One of my all time favorite Christmas movies is Elf. It came out when I was 11 (which should help you figure out my age), and I have loved it ever since. — If you are unaware of the plot of this movie, here’s the skinny: Will Ferrel is a human but he thinks he’s an elf. He was raised by elves as an elf in the North Pole. He has elf friends, he makes toys, he is on a first name basis with Santa Clause, the whole deal. One day Will Ferrel finds out that he’s not an elf, and he goes to NYC to find his biological family. Comedy ensues. — There’s this one scene where Will Ferrel is in a department store and it’s all decked out for the holidays because Christmas is coming soon, and the manager makes an announcement: “OK people, tomorrow morning, 10am, Santa’s coming to town!” And before he can even finish the sentence Will Ferrel loses his mind! “SANTA!! I know him! I know him.”
 - As you can imagine, he was the only person in the room who reacted so strongly. And why? ... Because he was the only person in the room who really did know Santa. Everybody else knew things *about* him, right? They knew the songs, they saw the

presents on Christmas morning, but in the end, they had never met the man. But Will Ferrel had. He had a personal relationship with Santa. He *knew* him. And that was expressed by his love, which abounded still more and more. This love that he could not contain, this love that spilled out of him.

- **And you guys, that is Paul's desire, that is his prayer for the Philippian church:** That their love for Jesus would be **based on a relational knowledge**. His prayer is that because of their epignosis, because of their relationship with Jesus, that their love for him would keep on growing, that it would abound all the more, that it would overflow from their lives.
- Now here's what I'm not saying. Every time somebody drops the name of Jesus, I'm not expecting you all to lose your minds and start jumping up and down. In fact, probably don't do that. It's weird. But here's what I am saying... Can people tell? Can people see by the way that you live your life that you know Jesus? or do you just know about Him? Do you know some facts about His life that you can spout off, who He was, what He did? Or is that relational knowledge apparent? Is your love for Him so much a part of you that it spills out? Does your love for him abound more and more, does it overflow out of your life in such a way that others can tell that you *know* Jesus?
- And you guys, Paul goes on to say, **I pray that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and depth of insight (verse 10) so that/in order that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense until the day of Christ.**
- And you guys, this is how I know that Paul wants us to do more than just jump up and down scream "Jesus". The love that we have for Him, that growing and overflowing love, abounds more and more so that we can make choices that honor God. **Our love for Him is manifested in right living**, approving of things that are morally excellent. Later on in his letter, Paul is going to remind the Philippians that as people who know Jesus, they are to shine as lights in a dark and crooked generation. *This is how* people will see that you know Jesus. This is *how* they will recognize you. This is *how* they will recognize the love that you have for Him, as you approve of the things that are excellent, as you decide rightly what is best, as you live and represent Him well.
- Paul caps off his prayer for the Philippian church in v. 11 by asking that they would be **filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.**
- Now remember, in the Philippian culture, what did people live for? What did people strive for? What did anybody do anything for? To attain and amass glory and praise for themselves. That was the goal, that was the mindset, that was the motivation that every person brought to the table. — And so so Paul's heart for them, his prayer for them is this: that they would do all things, not to elevate themselves in the eyes of others, not to bring themselves fame or

regard, but **to the glory of God**, to elevate Jesus: the only one who deserves the praise and the honor and the attention and the glory.

- In summary, **Paul's prayer for the church is this:**
 - **that their love for God would grow because of their relationship with Him**
 - **that their love for God would be manifest and made visible by the way they live their lives**
 - and that at the end of the day, **that the church would make Jesus famous in Philippi.**

- **So as we step back from Paul's prayers for the Philippian church, here are the takeaways:**
 - **Who have you partnered with in your ministry of the gospel?**
 - As you go back to your homes, as you go back to your jobs, as you go about the ups and down of daily life, who is there supporting you through it all? Or do you have anybody like that? Seek out the kind of partnerships/friendships that Paul had with the Philippians. Do not be a lone wolf Christian. Seek out others who can love and support you along the journey.
 - **Do you know Jesus? and can people tell?**
 - Do you know things about Jesus, or do you know Him? Do you have a relationship with Him? And how is that relationship being manifested in your life, if at all? Can people tell that you know Jesus?
 - **Who are you making famous?**
 - On my wall at home, I have a note that I've stuck there to remind of this: you cannot promote yourself and God at the same time. As you go about your day, as you strive to live rightly, as you partner with others in the ministry of the gospel, who are you making famous? Who is receiving attention and glory? You guys, I'm reminded of Psalm 16 where the writer says, "My goodness has nothing apart from you." The fruits of righteousness are by Jesus Christ, they come through Him, from Him. The glory is not ours to claim. Who are you making famous?