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WORDS FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

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Dear Friends,

I don't think the Monday Night Bible Study reunion could have gone any better! June and Jerry and all of us were so happy. There were people there from all those years ago and from Retreat days. There were 4 of the original small group that started the Monday Night Fellowship. I gave a short teaching and then the people took over, sharing their stories and their remembrances. We were in hog heaven!

I contracted Covid since then but thankfully am recovering well. May the Lord give you strength for whatever you are walking through. I am on the MS coast continuing to work on the Bible Survey, pressing on.

I'm very thankful for the Roe vs. Wade turnover, as I know you are, and I encourage you to all step up donations to crisis pregnancy centers in your area or to get more involved in any way you can!

--Tom



modern Macedonia (photo by Darko Cvetanoski on Unsplash)

It was situated on a wide, fertile plain; and it was on this plain in 42 BC, west of the city, that Marc Antony and Octavian defeated the army of Brutus and Cassius, avenging the murder of Julius Caesar. This battle marked the death knell of the Roman Republic, and the birth of the Roman Empire. Octavian (later known as Augustus Caesar, the first Roman emperor) established Philippi as a Roman colony to commemorate his victory there.¹



Octavian, Caesar Augustus (photo by Clemens van Lay on Unsplash)

**This newsletter's excerpt from Tom's Study
Guide to the Bible: The Introduction to
The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians**

Philippi, a leading city of the Roman province of Macedonia (what is now northern Greece), was established by King Philip of Macedon (father of Alexander the Great), and he named it for himself.

Philippi was a thoroughly Roman city; it could be thought of as a miniature Rome, for its people were Roman citizens with voting rights, and Philippi was self-governing, with its own senate and legislature. All of the names of local people mentioned in this epistle are either Greek or Roman names. Philippi was also a prosperous city; the plain was fertile farm land, there were gold mines there, and it was strategically located on the Great Northern Military Road that connected Rome with Asia.

Philippians is the second of the four “prison epistles.”² The Church at Philippi was the first church established in Roman Europe, early in Paul’s second missionary journey; it was here that he first preached on European soil. While at Troas, he had been directed to go into Macedonia, contrary to his plan, by the vision of a Macedonian man saying, “Come over into Macedonia and help us”³. It was in Philippi that Paul and Silas were miraculously delivered from the jail and salvation came to the jailor and his family⁴. While at Philippi, Paul wrote I and II Corinthians.

Was Luke the First Pastor in Philippi? There is reason to believe that Luke was left behind temporarily when Paul and Silas left Philippi, and that he became the first pastor of the church at Philippi. This would be fitting, for Philippi was a thoroughly Gentile city, and Luke was a highly educated Gentile physician. It appears that there was no synagogue in Philippi, so there was probably no significant Jewish population in this thoroughly Roman city. But this is only interesting speculation, and not a fact.

Financial Support for Paul from Philippi: The prosperous Philippians had been generous in their support of Paul. And they were similarly generous when Paul was collecting funds for the impoverished Christians in Judaea, during a disastrous drought. He also had received generous financial support for himself and his party from the church at Philippi: at least twice during his brief stay in Thessalonica; and, probably, on one other occasion, while he was in Corinth⁵. Epaphroditus had brought this gift of money from the church at Philippi, nearly losing his life in the process. After he recovered, Paul sent him back to Philippi with this epistle.

Was Philippi Paul's Favorite Church? Unlike some of Paul's other epistles, this one corrects no heresy or disorder in the church (except for a conflict between

two of the women, Euodias and Syntyche). Perhaps this is to some degree true because it was a thoroughly Gentile church in a thoroughly Roman city. It must have been an unusually well-taught and well-led church, and there was no synagogue there. Also, it seems, the trouble-making Judaizers had not gone there. Some commentators believe that Philippi was Paul’s favorite of all his churches.

A. Author. The human author is Paul. He tells us this in the very first verse, and his authorship has been almost universally accepted since the time of its writing in the mid-1st Century. Eusebius (263-339 AD), in his classic “Ecclesiastical History,” attributed to Paul all 13 of the epistles that bear his name, plus Hebrews.

B. Place and Date. Philippians was written from Rome, about 60 AD.

C. Occasion. About 10 years after the founding of the church at Philippi, and four years after Paul’s last visit to the church, a messenger named Epaphroditus had arrived in Rome with a gift of money for Paul’s support. He had nearly lost his life in reaching Paul, apparently from ongoing physical exhaustion and sickness. He apparently stayed with Paul in Rome for some time, until he recovered sufficiently to make the return trip. He had been away long enough for word to reach Philippi that he was very sick, and for word from them--that they were worried about him--to reach Rome. When Epaphroditus returned to Philippi, he completed his long and hazardous round trip by delivering this epistle to the church there.

D. Theme. The theme of Philippians is joy--and in all circumstances. Joy, in its various forms, is mentioned 19 times in the four chapters of this epistle. It is noteworthy that the man who wrote “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice” was writing from prison. Happiness depends on happenings (circumstances), and can be fleeting; but joy is transcendent, regardless of circumstances--it is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10), flowing from our regenerated spirits and our relationship with the Lord. Joy is transcendent--in fact, it seems, eternal. Suffering and trials are to be expected--they will come; but we can overcome them and live joyfully if we keep our eyes on Jesus, stay near to Him, and press toward the mark of our high calling in Him.

¹Octavian was later given the title “Augustus” by the Roman Senate; and, after his defeat of Antony and Octavian at Philippi, and of the navies of Antony and Cleopatra at the

Battle of Actium in 31 BC, he consolidated power and became the first Roman emperor.

²The other three prison epistles are Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon.

³Acts 16:8-12.

⁴Acts 16:16-40.

⁵And they possibly sent financial support while Paul was in Rome: Acts 18:5; II Cor 11:7-9; Phil 2:25-30; 4:15-17..

Food for Thought—Lessons from the 10 Lepers



a healthy (non-leprous) hand; photo by Syd Wachs on unsplash

We can glean a lot from the story of Jesus and the 10 lepers.

In this encounter, recorded in Luke 17, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem for the last time, and He knows what is waiting for him there. On this journey he continues to talk, teach, and heal. It's a subtle reminder that no matter what segment of life we are walking in or how close to death we are, we can still be used by God to minister to others. We are still on duty in every phase of our lives.

He is passing through Galilee and Samaria (something many Jews farther south would never do—considering the region unclean, they would travel around it, making their journey far longer in order to avoid it). But Jesus passes through it. As he enters a village, a group of 10 lepers call out to him. This is a racially and culturally mixed group. Most of the lepers are Jewish, but at least one of them is a Samaritan. Under normal circumstances the Jews and Samaritans would not mix. Bitter, long-seated, mutual suspicion and ill will existed between the two groups. But leprosy is a great leveler. The old distinctions are gone. A leper is unclean; there's no point in a Jewish leper keeping his distance from a Samaritan leper. The dire consequences of this disease have made them brothers in an outcast and solitary group.

Being together in a dire situation does bring people from different walks of life together to a degree

which is rarely seen in normal life. This is one of the few good things about dire situations. We humans, whether we know it or not, seem to sense this and are drawn to it. We write and read books (and make and watch films) about this dynamic. We watch a dire situation like a plane crash or a battle or an earthquake bring together rich and poor, educated and uneducated, working together to try to survive and looking out for one another. These books and movies usually contain at least one character who does something selfish and despicable. But they also inevitably have characters who had little in common before the catastrophe struck (or had downright relationship friction before) but are now powerfully linked by their plunge into danger and high stakes and become brothers and sisters through this shared experience. Something dire--like leprosy--brings the old barriers crashing down. A friend of mine once commented that if we lived in a country where Christians were persecuted, all our bickering about doctrine and so forth would immediately cease. We would be thankful to be able to spend even a minute in the company of another Christ follower of any stripe. We would have Jesus in common, and that would matter far more than anything else.

OK, back to the 10 lepers....Leprosy has made all the former distinctions between Samaritan and Jew—which once seemed so important—to fall away.

It's also worth noting that—in the old orthodoxy of their time and place—leprosy would've been assumed by almost everyone to be a result of the lepers having been especially sinful. Even the lepers themselves have probably wondered many times what they'd done to deserve this, adding this mental anguish to their suffering. (Jesus makes it clear in the gospels that this assumption regarding suffering and sin is not correct.)

The action begins with Jesus steering his journey through this village, but the next step is taken by the lepers. Instead of staying away in a cave, too filled with hopelessness or self-loathing to even bother to catch sight of the famed rabbi, the lepers take action in hope. They call out to Jesus, and when they do, their words are a perfect prayer. They simply say, "Master, have mercy on us!" These simple words include implicit humility, the expression of need, and the hope that they have found the one who can help them.

Jesus is going to heal these men, and it's worth noticing how he does it—or perhaps I should say how he does not do it. As Michael Card notes, there is no stage-magician fanfare, no colored smoke, no magic words, no

shouting, no waving of arms. The healing will be simple, it will occur off-stage really, and it will not be for show—it will be for the afflicted men.

Jesus tells the lepers to go show themselves to the priest. The books of Moses had instructed that if people with a skin disease were healed, they were to go show themselves to the priest so that he could verify that, yes, they were well now and could safely re-enter the community. We are told that it is as they are obeying Jesus, as they are turning and running toward the priest, that the lepers are healed. The miracle happens as they *obey*. Often obedience itself both requires faith and increases faith. Obedience is important and powerful.

And there is more. One of the (former) lepers (now healed) runs back to Jesus, falling at his feet and thanking him with a loud voice. Again, as so often happens in the ministry of Jesus and in God's kingdom, it is the one person who perhaps seemed least likely to remember to thank Jesus (a Samaritan) who does remember to thank him and does so with his whole heart.

It's also important to note what Jesus doesn't do at this point—he doesn't un-heal the other 9 lepers for not coming back to thank him! It's a good reminder that the Lord is not constantly looking for small faults or petty, tiny reasons to curse us. He wanted all 10 of those men to be healed and is still pleased that they all are healed and probably still pleased and refreshed by their humility and obedience-in-faith.

But the thankful Samaritan who comes back to thank Jesus will find an additional blessing. After he falls down at the Lord's feet exuberantly thanking him, Jesus tells him that his faith has made him "whole." The Greek word translated "whole" here, *sōzō*, does not mean just physically whole, but also spiritually healed and whole. It is the same word that is often translated in the New Testament as "saved"—as in John 3:17 ("For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved") or Acts 2:21 ("whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved"). This Samaritan leper first received the gift of physical healing, and then his gratitude, it seems, has opened the door for more blessing—spiritual wholeness, salvation. Thankfulness opens the heart.

The lack of thankfulness does the opposite. If it is present often enough or long enough, an absence of thankfulness tends to harden the heart. And a hard heart has a more difficult time receiving good things from

God. It is like hard, packed soil which a seed would bounce off of rather than sink into.

Being thankful turns things around and puts us in the right direction. God is not, by the way, I think, asking us to be thankful *for* each and every thing (we are not asked to be thankful for Hitler or Satan) but for us to find things to be thankful for *in* every situation.

It's difficult to overrate the value of thankfulness. I often find that even a little of it can completely turn around my feelings and launch me into better directions in thoughts and actions. And I have found it helpful—when I know I need an attitude tune-up—to remember very simple things. I'm thankful for trees. I'm thankful that I have modern plumbing. I'm thankful I'm not in a concentration camp. I am thankful that if I ever am in one, I won't be alone—He'll be with me.

You may have heard this story already, but in case you haven't, Matthew Henry was once robbed, and his first reactions were very human—he felt upset, angry, vulnerable, etc.—just as I would and most anyone would. But then he stopped and thought about what he could be thankful for even after being mugged. He thought of these things: he was thankful because he'd never been robbed before; he was thankful that while his assailant had taken his wallet, he hadn't taken his *life*; he was thankful that even though the mugger had taken all he had on him, he hadn't had a great deal of money on him; last, he was thankful that he hadn't been the one doing the robbing (that would've been worse because it would've harmed his soul). Thankfulness can open our eyes, bring us out of a pit, remind us of priorities, change our direction, and make our hearts more like good receptive soil.

Hope and faith through obedience brought all the lepers physical healing, and the thankfulness of the Samaritan leper brought him spiritual wholeness on top of that. I hope all of the other 9 found spiritual healing at some point too, but we can tell that the one who came back in gratitude found it right away.

--Sally

A FINAL WORD

Treasure and use each day as if it were your last, and never give up hope: God has a limitless supply of new beginnings, and He makes beautiful things out of broken pieces.

