



JOY • RIDE



Touching Lives
with James Merritt

JOY RIDE

SERIES OVERVIEW

Philippi was an ancient city in Northern Greece that, in its day, was a bustling metropolitan city with a strong industrial base and a great economy. Paul visited there around 50 A.D. and founded the first church in Europe there. In the book of Philippians in the New Testament, Paul is writing to this church from prison ten years later. If Paul had a favorite church, this might have been it. And as we study this letter to the church at Philippi, you will find out why. This church was overflowing with joy, and there is a lot we can learn about to live our lives joyfully as we read Paul's words to the Philippians. In this series, we are going to take a closer look at Paul's words of encouragement to this church, and in doing so, I believe we will be encouraged as well to find joy, capture joy, and spread joy as we follow Christ.

SERIES VERSES

Philippians 1:1-6

Philippians 1:21-23

Philippians 2:1-4

Philippians 3:7-11

Philippians 3:12-14

Philippians 4:4-7

Philippians 4:10-19

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PART 1: Church Wanted

Philippians 1:1-6

OVERVIEW

The Apostle Paul wrote thirteen books of the New Testament. All of them were letters. Of the thirteen letters, eleven of them were written to seven different churches. Philippians is the only letter that we have in the New Testament where Paul never one time corrects bad teaching, rebukes bad behavior, or handled a bad situation. We see only a completely positive letter to a church he wrote. This was a church that was full of joy. It was a church that gave joy to the pastor that founded it and gave joy to the people who attended it. Nineteen times you will find in this book the words “rejoice, joy, and gladness.” When you read this book you realize this is what a church should look like on the inside to the people who attend it, but it is also what a church ought to look like from the outside to people who don’t attend it. I want to share with you today the three things that are true about that church that I want to be true about the church today, both to insiders and to outsiders. I want to be a church wanted.

KEY POINTS

1. Grateful When They Think About Us

Paul is talking to two groups of people that actually make up every church that has ever been and ever will be and those are Jews and Gentiles. Whether you realize it or not, everybody is one or the other. If you are a Jew, you are not a Gentile; if you are a Gentile you are not a Jew. I know there were Jews and Gentiles here, because of the greeting that Paul gives. Grace was a greeting you would give to a Gentile.

Peace-Shalom was a greeting you would give to a Jew. You are going to see this was a very diverse church and the fact it was a church full of joy that evidently had very few real difficult problems was even more amazing! But the next statement that Paul makes tells volumes about Paul’s love for this church and the equality of this church. “Every time I remember you, I thank God for you.” It is very rare that anybody has great memories about anybody always. Yet, Paul said “Every single time I remember you I thank God for you.” That is what I want people today to say about the church - those who attend church and those who don’t, those that know about church and those who just hear about church. I want them to be grateful when they think about us.

2. Joyful When They Talk About Us

Every time Paul prayed for this church and talked to God about this church it was always with a smile on his face and joy in his heart. Keep in mind that Paul is writing from a prison. You need to understand the kind of joy that Paul was talking about. It isn’t even the kind of joy that most people think about. For Paul, there were not a lot of beautiful days, but every time he thought about this church, his day was filled with beautiful joy. My prayer is that people would speak about the church today with that same joy that Paul had when he wrote this letter to the Philippians.

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PART 1: Church Wanted

Philippians 1:1-6

3. Boastful In What They Trust About Us

There were a lot of things that Paul in this point in his life was not sure of. Would he ever get out of prison? Would he even get out alive? Would he be in another church? There was one thing he was rock-ribbed sure about, "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

Now Paul was actually talking about two things here. He was talking about their relationship to God; their salvation. He was absolutely sure that they would never lose that salvation. That relationship would never be broken, not because of their goodness, but because of God's grace. When God saves a person, He saves that person completely. No one is half saved or three quarters saved. You are one hundred percent saved or one hundred percent lost. There is no in between. When He saves, He saves completely - body, soul and spirit - and I want those in the church and outside of the church to trust in that.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is something you could do as part of the Church to make others grateful when they think about us as the body of Christ?
2. Are you joyful when you talk about your church, or do you often find yourself complaining about it instead?
3. Have you ever doubted your salvation, or thought you could lose your salvation? If so, what are some Scripture verses you can begin to commit to memory in order to combat this lie?

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PART 2: Always Ready

Philippians 1:21-23

OVERVIEW

There are two things that every human being has to face from the moment they are born. That is life and death. I don't believe you are ready to live until you are ready to die. I also don't believe you are ready to die until you are ready to live. I believe that Jesus is the only one who can truly get you ready for both. When Paul was in prison, he had to go to sleep every night ready to die the next morning. But even in this terrible set of circumstances, he continued to rejoice because he recognized that his life was in Christ, and to die was gain. In this message, I want to walk through the different things we gain when we die, so that we can live our lives unafraid of death.

KEY POINTS

1. Experience The Personal Presence Of The Son Of God

I believe there is something we can learn from Paul in today's key passage. Our desire to be with Jesus there is directly related to the degree that we love Jesus here. Shouldn't we always want to be with the person that we love more than anything on this planet? Shouldn't we want to love Jesus so much that we always have this burning, passionate desire to be with him whenever he is ready to take us?

Paul didn't say he had a desire to go to heaven. He said he had a desire to be with Jesus. How do you make that distinction? People sometimes ask, "Where is heaven?" The answer is, "Heaven is where Jesus is." What makes heaven heaven? Not golden streets and not pearly gates. What makes heaven heaven is Jesus. Jesus is not where heaven is; heaven is where Jesus is. That is why when we get to heaven, we are not going to go site seeing; we are going to go Savior seeing.

2. Enter The Powerful Place Of The Kingdom Of God

This universe is not a democracy. It is not a republic. It is not a dictatorship. It is a kingdom and as children of the king we are meant to live eternally in this place called heaven (this kingdom of God) and it is a place unlike any other place we could even think about. It is a perfected place. There are no tears, no sorrow, no graveyards, no hospital, no chemotherapy, no crying, no dying, no pain and no suffering. It is a place that only God could think about and we can only dream of. The place where we are going (this place called heaven) is a place that is built by the hand of God, a place that was conceived in the mind of God, and a place that is dear to the heart of God.

3. Enjoy The Precious People Of The Family Of God

When you were born you came into a world full of people. When you leave you are going to be entering into another world full of people. The difference is all of these people are your true family. I want you to listen to something that Jesus said would be true of everyone who enters into

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PART 2: Always Ready

Philippians 1:21-23

the Kingdom of God. "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11). What a beautiful thing it will be to spend eternity with our family in Christ.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Do you enjoy Jesus' presence now as much as you believe you will in heaven?
2. What is something you can do to enjoy the Lord's presence more while you're here on earth?
3. Who is someone you are looking forward to talking to when you get to heaven?

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PART 3: Joyride

Philippians 2:1-4

OVERVIEW

We only get to take the ride of life once. Shouldn't it be a joyride? Even with the bumps in the road, the sharp curves, the steep cliffs, and the deep valleys, don't you want every hour of every day, of every week, of every year, to be filled with joy? In the coming days, would you like to be less stressed out? Would you like to maximize your pleasure and minimize your pain? Would you like to face life every day with a smile on your face, a bounce to your step, and joy in your heart regardless of your circumstances? In the second chapter of Philippians, Paul gives a three-step formula on how to do that. So, if you want to enjoy the ride of life, I guarantee that you will if you take these three steps.

KEY POINTS

1. Give Jesus Preeminence

In Philippians 2:2, Paul says, "Then make my joy complete by being like-minded..." To be like-minded doesn't mean we always will think the same way, but it does mean we will think on the same things. By thinking the same way that means we all agree that we should give Jesus preeminence to become first. We are to stay in love with him and each other and that we are to be in full fellowship with the Holy Spirit. That does not mean we will also think the same thing. It doesn't mean we will all see things the same way. There is nothing wrong with having differences and discussions and debates and even disagreements. Today, we will let nothing, not politics, not differences, or personalities ever divide us.

If I love Jesus supremely and you love Jesus supremely then we will love each other. When you are hitting on all eight cylinders with the Son of God, the love of God, and the Spirit of God you will be full of joy by giving Jesus preeminence.

2. Give Others Priority

I know that is counterintuitive and countercultural. We are told today to look out for number one, but the way to joy is to look out for number two. We are told to do everything you can to get ahead. The Bible says to do everything you can to get behind. We are told, "If you have to step on other people to get to the top." The Bible says, "Put other people on your shoulders to help them get to the top."

The way to joy is to think of others the way you ought to think of others and think of you the way you ought to think of you. That means you should always consider others more important than yourselves. That word "consider" refers to a conclusion that is carefully thought out based on what is true. You don't just pretend that others are more important than you are. You've got to actually come to believe that others actually are more important than you are.

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PART 3: Joyride

Philippians 2:1-4

3. Give Yourself Pleasure

Do you realize that when you give Jesus first place, others second place, and yourself third place you are going to be full of joy and that is what is going to give you the most pleasure? No one who has ever lived was more full of joy than Jesus. No one who has ever lived gave out more joy than Jesus. The reason that his life was pure, unadulterated, undiluted, undeniable joy was because from the moment, he came to this planet, to the moment he left he was looking out for our interest, not his own. You know the way you want to get to where you want to go in life? It is to help others get to where they want to go in life.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does Jesus have preeminence in your life, or do your priorities seem to be out of order?
2. What is something you can do this week to consciously put others needs and interests before your own?
3. When was the last time you felt pleasure and full of joy because you did something for someone else?

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PART 4: What Difference Do I Make?

Philippians 3:7-11

OVERVIEW

I believe that two things will determine what difference you made and to the degree that you made a difference - what you know and who you know. Nobody got a bigger bang for the buck of their life, outside of Jesus, than a man named Paul. Besides him, I don't believe anyone who has ever lived had a more productive life, got more out of his potential, or had a greater long-term impact than this man who took a seed called the gospel, planted it as far as he could go, and the result has been the explosion of Christianity that we see all over the world two-thousand years later. How did he do it? What was the secret to his unbelievable influence and impact? Well, we have discovered the secret of who we should know and what we should know that will help us to get where we need to go in life and where God wants us to be when it is over. We should be determined to know three things on a daily basis, and they made all the difference.

KEY POINTS

1. We Must Know The Supreme Person Of Jesus

It has been said and I think one hundred percent accurately that at the end of the day it is not what you know; it is who you know. Paul is looking back on his life - all the people he had met, all the things he had learned, all of things he had accomplished. When he adds it all up, he makes this incredible statement. "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:7-8).

In effect, Paul thinking like an accountant described all of the things he though were gains and profitable in his life - things he thought were his assets before he knew Jesus. Then, when he compared all of that to knowing Jesus, he moved them from the asset column to the liability column and said it was a total loss.

Take your titles and your treasure, your position and your possessions, your awards and your achievement, your trophies and the case and the car in your garage and if you do not know the supreme person of Jesus you are spiritually bankrupt.

2. We Must Know The Supernatural Power Of Jesus

Paul knew it is not enough just to know the person of Jesus. You must know in a real way the power of Jesus. The greatest power the world has ever seen, known, or heard of is resurrection power. It is one thing to have the power to kill somebody, but it is a totally different thing to have the power to bring that dead person back to life. There is not a computer, an engine, a chemical compound or any other kind of power whether it be electrical or nuclear that can pull that off. Bringing a person back from the dead takes resurrection power.

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PART 4: What Difference Do I Make?

Philippians 3:7-11

The power that God used to raise his son from the dead is available to us. You can take that power and put it in a jar and put it back on a shelf. God has made that power available to us. It is one thing to believe in the power that raised Jesus from the dead. It is another thing to know that power and experience that power in your daily life. The risen Lord didn't just come back from the grave to save us. He sent his Holy Spirit to live in us. If you want to be a frustrated person, come to know the supreme person of Jesus, but fail to know and experience on a daily basis the supernatural power of Jesus.

3. We Must Know The Suffering Passion Of Jesus

God's goal for all of us is to become just like Jesus. If you are going to become like Jesus, you don't just enjoy the view from the mountaintop; you also have to endure the trouble in the valley. I have learned that you worship God on the mountaintop, but you walk with God in the valley. There is no such thing as a suffer-free Christian life. If you stand for Jesus and speak truth you are going to suffer rejection no matter how much you love Jesus and how much you love others. Eventually, you are going to suffer hurt, and heartache, and physically, eventually you will suffer problems and pain, but there is nothing that will focus you more than Jesus, draw you closer to Jesus, make you more dependent on Jesus, and give you more of a desire to know Jesus, than when you know his suffering passion.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Have you come to a point where you truly believe that Jesus is greater than anything or anyone else in your life?
2. When was a time you can remember experiencing the power of Jesus working in your life?
3. Has there been a season in your life where you suffered, but you grew in your faith? If so, what did you learn from that time?

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PART 5: Eyes on the Prize

Philippians 3:12-14

how dire my circumstances may be, no matter how discouraging things may appear, I am going to keep running. I won't be deterred. I won't be detoured and I won't be distracted. I am going to keep my eyes on the prize of knowing God and glorying him until I hit the finish line of my life.

Let me ask you what one thing will you focus on for the rest of your life? At the end of the day, at the end of every day, we all focus on one or two things - what we want or what God wants. Too many people spend their life making things instead making things count. What would it mean for you if you finally got your eyes on the right prize and every day you pressed on toward that prize?

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is something in your past that you need to learn from and then let go of?
2. What has God put right in front of you, in your windshield, that you can focus on in order to bring Him glory?
3. What is one verse in Scripture you can commit to memory to help you keep your eye on the prize as you run the race that is a life devoted to Christ?

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PART 6: Stress Out

Philippians 4:4-7

tend to worry about everything and pray about nothing! Those are your only two alternatives and you will do one or the other.

4. Rest In The Peace Of The Lord

God's peace is the only peace that can come from God. The peace that only God can give will be a guard over your heart and your mind. Stress cannot penetrate. This is not the kind of temporary peace that people try to find through money or drugs or alcohol or sex, because that peace never lasts anyway. It is a peace that can't be bought, borrowed, or stolen. It is not found in a pill; it is found in a person. It is not a drug or a drink; it is found in a deity.

So, when you want to get the stress out, when you are stressed out, I want you to imagine you have three boxes. One box is labeled "worry." One box is labeled "prayer." One box is labeled "thanksgiving." In the worry box, you put nothing. In the prayer box, you put everything. In the thanksgiving box, you put anything. If you put each of those things in the box where they belong, you will find when you are stressed out, God will take the stress out.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is something that causes you a lot of stress?
2. What is one practical step you can take to relax in God's presence and rest in His peace?
3. What is one thing you can release to the Lord right now so that you can stop worrying about it?

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PART 7: Totally Satisfied

Philippians 4:10-19

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Let me tell you, there are some great promises in the Bible, but I don't know of a greater promise than this one. If you are living in the center of God's will, being obedient and faithful to him, you have every right and reason to expect that any real need you have in your life God is going to meet. Now to be clear, God has promised to supply your needs, not your greed. God has never promised to supply everything we want, but everything that we need.

If there is a real need in your life, God will meet that need. If he hasn't met that need yet, one of two things is true. Either it is not a true need, or you don't need it yet. That need make not be met in your way, but it will be met in his. It may not be met in your time, but it will be met in his. He will provide.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What do you believe is God's purpose for your life? What are you doing to live out that purpose?
2. Is there something God is calling you to do, but you've been too afraid because you don't think you're capable of doing it?
3. When was a time God met a need in your life, but He met it in a different way than you expected?

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