

Philippians in Ten

Week One: Remapping the Universe

Readings:

Phil 1: 1-18, Phil 1: 27-30, Phil 4: 14-18, 2 Cor 8: 1-5

Recommended Reading:

These are both easy-to-read commentaries on the letter which are very good for both background to the letter and application to today.

- Michael F. Bird & Nijay K. Gupta (2020) *Philippians*, Cambridge University Press
- N.T. Wright, N.T. (2004) "Philippians," *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters*, Westminster John Knox

Recap

In this letter there is joy, there is a wonderful description of what God is like, what Christ is like, there is thankfulness, and there is a lot about God's people being united. But more than that, Paul is doing something quite remarkable: he is "remapping the Philippians' universe."

Paul was in dire circumstances in a Roman jail. The Philippians had always been supportive of Paul and had sent Epaphroditus to take him something to meet his needs.

Things were tough for the Philippians too. Like most of the people in the Empire, they lived in poverty or just about getting by. This is the background against which we see their generosity to Paul.

The Philippians faced opposition. Their neighbours were suspicious of them because of their dishonouring of the gods and it is likely the authorities were too (as they were when Paul and Silas had first come to Philippi (Acts 16)).

But something in the world has changed. Roman jails and ill-tempered neighbours and hard times are not the last word. The centre of this letter is chapter 2 with its description of Christ, his humility and his Lordship over everything. That's why the current trials are not the last word, and why it's possible to have hope and joy and be thankful.

Questions to Consider

In Phil 1, how is Paul handling his imprisonment? What is giving him cause for confidence?

What is Paul's attitude to living and dying?

Read the handout *Suffering in Philippi*. Can you think of examples either here or elsewhere in the world where following Jesus can cause economic hardship?

What difference does it make in reading the letter when we realise the tough situation of both Paul and the Philippian believers?

How would you characterise the Philippians attitude to giving? What can we learn from that?

Paul is writing to a church that was a Roman colony – it was, in effect, a mini-Rome. Why would Paul think it necessary to “remap their universe”? (more on this next episode)