



SESSION SIX: THE BELIEVERS GATHER IN JOY

Jesus brings unlikely partners together as family

The Story of the Church at Philippi

RELATING TO THE WORLD'S STORY

In our world today, many factors lead people to crave a feeling of belonging. Being left out brings a sense of unhappiness or even disgrace. Will they ever fit in? Will anyone really care?

What situations or conditions make people feel lonely or excluded?

Read Acts 16:40 (*The Philippian Church story*)

Watch "To the Ends of the Earth" – segment 6 (33:34-end)

*"Hark the Voice of
Jesus Crying"*

CW 573

- *Express what most stood out for you about this part of Paul's adventure in Philippi.*
- *What questions does it raise?*

LEARNING FROM PAUL'S STORY

A. Claiming and Celebrating our Citizenship

When you travel to another country, you may feel out of place. But no matter where you are, you carry a passport that gives you benefits in your country's embassy. And when you find someone who has the same citizenship as you do, there can be an immediate connection in your conversations. Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. Roman citizenship entitled them to a fair trial and was to protect them from degrading forms of punishment (flogging, crucifixion). It failed for them in Philippi.

When we get fearful, frustrated or excited about politics and governments, it is important to remember that "we are part of a kingdom greater than Rome will ever be." Paul wrote "Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:20-21).

1. What are the benefits of having our primary citizenship in heaven compared to the temporary earthly citizenships we also enjoy in this world?

All this was good news for non-Jews (Gentiles) like the jailer. He and Lydia were now equal citizens of heaven alongside Christians who had been Jews all their lives. Same benefits. Same protections.

2. Read Ephesians 2:11-22. Write down what Paul says about our citizenship in God’s kingdom and how that affects our daily perspectives. Share your top two points.

Want to know more?

Jesus is King over all
Ephesians 1:18-22
Philippians 2:6-11
Colossians 1:12-23

Abraham lived like “a stranger in a foreign country.” He was “looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” Others who lived by faith saw themselves as “foreigners and strangers on earth ... longing for a better country—a heavenly one” (Hebrews 11:8-16).

3. Read 1 Peter 2:9-12. How does an assurance and appreciation of our heavenly citizenship transform the way we live here? Discuss the effect that can have on the people around you.

B. Loving One Another as Family

Often people flock together with those who are pretty much like themselves. Not this group in Philippi! Those who formerly would not have respected or associated with each other in Roman society now were united as a loving family—a testimony to the international mix of citizens of heaven.

1. Read Acts 2:36-47. List things that characterized the gatherings of the early Christians. Compare that with Christian gatherings today. Your conclusion?

Want to know more?

In Christ, all national distinctions are broken down and all share equal status in God’s eyes
Romans 10:12-13
1 Corinthians 1:1-2
Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29
Ephesians 4:1-16

When Paul later wrote to the Philippians, they may have still been gathering in Lydia’s house. They had developed “overseers and deacons” (Philippians 1:1). They were the only church that helped support Paul financially and sent people to encourage him. They were light and salt in their world, just as we are called to be to our world (Matthew 5:13-16). When unbelievers witnessed the inner peace, humility, love and joy of new believers, they were attracted to the message. It prepared the soil for the seed of a movement of Christianity that eventually spread throughout Europe as well as into Asia and the world.

2. What can we learn from the growing faith and love of the church in Philippi?

C. Living Out Our Mission

Paul continued to nurture the churches through visits, representatives, or letters. He told the Philippians he always prays with joy “because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 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 1:5-6). They were partners in this mission, each carrying out their unique role at home and away. Prayer also was inseparable from mission work—asking the Holy Spirit to open our lives to his mission, to open doors in areas closed to Christianity, and finally to open hearts of specific individuals or groups of people. Global people networks and internet has provided new opportunities.

1. Comment on the role prayer plays in mission work. Determine ways you can be more active in prayer-support for God’s mission to bring Christ’s name to the ends of the earth.

 Matthew 9:35-38

 John 17:20-26

 Ephesians 6:17-20

 Colossians 4:1-4

Want to know more?

Paul’s love for the people

Romans 16

Philippians 1:3-11

What a growing phenomenon it was for Christianity to bring different skin color, different backgrounds, different ages, different genders united around a communion table and equipping everyone to do their part to “declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

2. Read Revelation 7:9-17. What excitement and encouragement do you get from the picture of heaven? How does that change your view of the people around the world?

Want to know more?

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us

John 14:12-17, 25-27

John 16:8-15

Acts 1:6-8

You are part of the continuation of what Jesus started with the first followers: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Yet of the 7.6 billion people in the world, it is estimated that only 31% even nominally call Jesus their Savior. You are “the bride” of Christ and part of this effort: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life” (Revelation 22:17).

Motivation from Isaiah

Isaiah 9:1-7

Isaiah 11:1-10

Isaiah 52:5-10

Isaiah 65:17-25

Ultimately it is about **TELLING THE STORY OF JESUS**, who makes us co-heirs of eternal life.

TELLING YOUR STORY

1. What excitement and value have you found in belonging to the people of God? Do you treat new people as equally belonging? Why or why not? What should change?
2. Paul made use of the more recent advantages of the Roman roads, a common language, and freedom to travel as an opening of doors for the gospel. What are some of the tools and opportunities that open new doors for us? How are you using them?
3. Suppose you met someone in a coffee shop who was curious about your church. What are key things you want to share with him? How would you do it in a way that doesn't scare them off?
4. Write down names of five non-Christians you will pray about and pursue ways to share Jesus.

LIVING THE STORY – PROJECT

1. Learn well another Bible Story to share: **Pentecost** (Acts 2).
2. Research the progress of the gospel around the world and pray for those areas less reached.
3. Learn how Multi-Language Publications - <https://mlp.welsrc.net/> provides a way to reach people in print, internet, and television. Find special ways to support mission work through Ministry of Christian Giving - <https://wels.net/giving/ministry-of-christian-giving/>

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