

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Philippians 1:3-6

This is week two in a series based on Paul's letter to the church in the city of Philippi.

I'm calling it *Jail House Rock*—and no, we're not going to break out the Elvis tunes!

It's a story from Acts 16, set in a locked jail cell that was literally rocked one night by an earthquake. Paul and Silas were chained up together at midnight, singing their hearts out in praise to God. That moment was the beginning of something beautiful.

Out of that prison break came the birth of a brand-new church in Philippi—a church plant that would become one of Paul's best partners in the gospel. And this letter we call Philippians is Paul's thank-you note, written years later while he was in another prison cell in Rome.

It's almost as if Paul is saying: *The chains can't stop the gospel! In fact, sometimes the chains only make the message ring louder.*

And here's why it matters for us: Paul's joy, his confidence, and his courage were all rooted in the Rock of Ages, Jesus Christ. He is the true Jail House Rock.

That's why Paul could say in Philippians 1:21, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." That's why he could write about contentment, joy, humility, and partnership in the gospel—even while shackled to a Roman guard.

This series is going to remind us that no matter what tries to lock us down—fear, guilt, failure, discouragement—our God can shake those foundations. And when the dust settles, the only thing that remains unshaken is the Rock Himself, Jesus Christ.

That's why we can sing with believers throughout the ages: *My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.*

I love the message of this great little New Testament book. Friends, if He could build His church out of a midnight earthquake in a Philippian jail cell, then He can build something beautiful out of whatever you may be facing in your life right now.

That's the heartbeat of Philippians. That's the hope of the gospel.

Last time, we looked at chapter 1, verses 3–6. I brought a brick with me—it was a reminder that God always finishes whatever He starts. It came from a church work in Kharkov, Ukraine. Surrounded by unfinished projects, that project was complete and still stands today, in spite of all the damage and destruction surrounding it because of the ravages of war.

Today, we're going to back up a bit and look at the first two opening verses. But before we do, let's invite God into our look at His Word.

Have you ever had the experience of pending panic—tearing the house down looking for your sunglasses, and then you catch your reflection in the mirror? Or standing at the fridge for five minutes swearing up and down that there's no ketchup, only for your spouse to move the pickle jar and there it is?

That kind of thing happened to me the other day while reading Philippians again. I've read this book many times, but I never noticed this before. Paul says the exact same thing in his opening and in his closing statements. In fact, the same word. The Greek word *charis*—our word “grace.”

In Philippians 1:2 he says: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” And in Philippians 4:23 he writes: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”

What jumps off the page is simply this: God's amazing grace is the perfect set of bookends for all things important in our lives. From the first hello in chapter 1, verse 2, until the final amen in chapter 4, verse 23, let's wrap ourselves in God's grace and hold it out to others as we go about our days.

Because no matter what happens in life, if grace gets the first word and then grace speaks the last, nothing else gets the final say.

In Philippians 1:1–2 Paul begins:

“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

I want to point out something here that's very simple, but at the same time profound. It's in two sets of three words found in verse 2—as well as the order in which they appear. Notice that “peace from God” always follows “grace to you.” It's a package deal, and it's always delivered in that order.

Grace comes first. Then comes peace. And that is true in just about every relationship of our lives. Only where there is grace will we experience peace. You want a peaceful home? A peaceful marriage? A peaceful workplace? Grace is the hinge on which peace swings.

The Bible talks about both our peace with God—the objective reality (Romans 5:1)—and the peace of God, the subjective experience (Philippians 4:7). Peace with God is the foundation, the result of justification through the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross. And the peace of God is the fruit, the day-to-day enjoyment of it. It's that peace that passes human understanding.

But we cannot know the experience of peace until we first experience the reality of it. And Paul says in Ephesians 2:14, talking about Christ, that He Himself is our peace.

The Bible is a book about peace between God and man. It's a book about Christ, the personification of our peace—all by God's grace.

We started with this foundational truth: Christ is the protagonist. Which means Christ is the main character. This “protagonist” idea opens up a line of thinking about the entire Bible that's really important, especially in a culture where there's so much confusion concerning who and what everything is really all about.

In the past few years, there's appeared a trend on social media that revolves around the phrase “main character energy.” The point being that we should live like we are the main character in the story of our lives. Books have even been written on how to create your own “main character energy.”

But is that really what people need—more reason to focus on self? This is the script of our cultural moment. It's not just about finding ourselves anymore. It's about creating ourselves as we wish to be.

As this ideology developed, it eventually morphed into something called “main character syndrome”—a deeper obsession where people become consumed with perfecting their lives: perfecting their bodies, jobs, kids, marriages, and friendships.

One way or another, all of us struggle with this idea of trying to be the main character. For example, when I look at a photograph with a group of people, I pretend like I'm looking at how everyone else looks—but really, I just want to see how I look. That's our default mode.

But God has been hammering home to me that it's about something bigger than just you and me.

If a sermon is just about “how to” do something, then that sermon has missed the point. The truth is, a lot of people look to the Bible as a “how-to” manual to do better, be better, live better, or feel better. But if we approach the Bible only as a self-help guide, we have missed the point entirely.

How do I know? Because Jesus said so. In John 5, He confronted a group of Jewish leaders who thought Scripture was about behavioral modification—how to do better, be better, live better, feel better. But Jesus told them: “You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to Me!”

It could not be clearer. It's not about you. It's not about me. It's about Him.

So today, as we read and study the Bible, let's resolve to ask a better question than “What can I get out of this?” or “How can this improve my life?” Instead, let's first ask: “What does this reveal to me about Christ? How does this point me toward Him?”

Here's the truth: if you seek the answer to that second question, you'll get the answer to the first. But if you start at the first, you may miss them both. The intent of Scripture is to point us toward Christ.

That's why Jesus said in Luke 24, after He was raised from the dead, that all the Scriptures pointed to Him. On the road to Emmaus, He explained to His followers everything in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms concerning Himself. Their hearts were on fire as He spoke.

The question is: What are we looking for?

Sinclair Ferguson once said, "Most preachers not only don't preach Christ from the Old Testament, they don't preach Christ from the New Testament. The teaching is about the people in the Gospels instead of about Christ, who is the Gospel."

The fundamental issue is: What is the Bible all about? Is it basically about me and what I must do? Or is it about Jesus and what He has already done?

This is important, because my "do" must always start with His "done." What Christ has done for us, and then what Christ would do through us. That's Christocentricity—Christ at the center.

The Bible is not basically about you or me. It's about Jesus.

That's why we can say Jesus is the true and better Adam, who passed His test in the garden and whose obedience is credited to us by faith. He is the true and better Abraham, who answered the call of God to leave the comfortable and familiar and walk into the unknown.

Jesus is the true and better Isaac, who was not just offered by His Father on Mount Moriah but was sacrificed on Mount Calvary.

Jesus is the true and better Joseph, who is at the right hand of the King, forgives those who betrayed Him, and uses His power to save those who meant Him harm.

Jesus is the true and better Moses, who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and mediates a new covenant.

Jesus is the true and better Job, the truly innocent sufferer, who intercedes for and saves his foolish friends.

Jesus is the true and better David, whose victory becomes His people's victory—even though they never lifted a stone themselves.

Jesus is the true and better Esther, who didn't just risk His life but gave His life to save His people from their sin.

Jesus is the true and better Jonah, who was cast out into the storm so we could be saved from certain death.

Jesus is the true and better Passover Lamb, the true Temple, the true Prophet, Priest, and King, the true Vine, the true Light, the true Bread.

The Bible is the good news of Jesus Christ, from cover to cover—the story of Him who is the true and better everything. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:20, in Him all the promises of God are “Yes” and “Amen.”

And to that, we say Amen.