

Where Do We Fit In?

Three teachers were in a contest. The directions were simple: “Whoever answers this question correctly will win \$1,000.” The question? ***What do you see in the very center***

of this picture? How would you answer?



The math teacher quickly answered, “the number, 13.”

The English teacher, “the letter B.”

The ***winner***, a philosophy teacher, answered, “***It all depends.***” Understanding context is essential to determine meaning.

Christians come to the Bible for a variety of reasons: for some, it’s an encyclopaedia of promises; for others, a precise roadmap for understanding future events. Still others read it as a rule book for getting to heaven. Some, unwisely, treat God’s Word like a good luck charm, believing that a daily dose prevents bad things and promises good things happening to them. *You’ve had a bad day, then you remember, “Oh, I forgot to read my Bible this morning!”*

Looking to God’s Word for guidance, a man opened his Bible randomly and, with eyes closed, placed his finger on a verse.

And Judas went out and hanged himself. Deeply shaken, the man tried again:

Go and do likewise! Third time’s a charm, he thought:

What you are going to do, do quickly.

Each sentence came directly from the Bible. So where did he fail? He failed to recognize that meaning doesn’t emerge simply from the words and order of words; it depends, hugely, on context.

Today, beginning a series on Philippians. We’ll look at word definitions, history, grammar, theology. Each provides elements essential to understand and apply this

letter. But, even with that help, unless we understand it in light of its broadest context, we'll miss much of what Paul has to say.

If you open your Bible to the "Table of Contents," you find 66 books listed: 39/OT and 27/NT, written by at least 40 authors writing over a span of more than 1500 years. Talk about the potential for continuity problems and for determining context!! It's complexity leads some to see the Bible as a confusing mishmash of writings, moving us across pages of history, supposedly from creation to the end of the time. To suggest there's a simple, straightforward theme that embraces the whole of the Bible strikes some as bending the truth.

I believe that we can find unity and a single primary message despite a confusing multitude of characters, activities and sub-themes. Consider this very brief overview of the entire Bible, one which allows us to better understand where every book, including Philippians, fits in and how it can and should influence/impact our lives today. This overview places Jesus and the church where they should be: smack dab in the center of God's eternal, redemptive purposes.

I would suggest that the Bible is God's great story or narrative about his One Unchanging Mission, namely his eternal plan and purpose to rescue, redeem, and restore his broken creation and to reconcile all things to himself in Christ. The books, characters, themes, and stories of the Bible present that one great story, God's Great Story of redemption and rescue, his one unchanging mission.

God's great story – WHOLE BIBLE IN FIVE MINUTES

Introduction (Gen 1:1 – 12:3)

- ***The Context and Original Cast (Gen 1–3:1)*** From the world to the garden
- ***The Tragedy and Resulting Conflict (Gen 3:2-24)***

- ***The Context and Cast Expanded: (Gen 4-11)***
Adam→Seth→Noah→Shem→Abraham
 from the garden back into the world, a broken world
- ***The Central Theme: to redeem his broken creation, to reconcile and bless all people on earth (Gen 12:1-3)***

Chapter One: The man God chooses to bless all people becomes a family (Gen 12:4 – 50:26)

Chapter Two: That family that will bless all people becomes a nation (Exod - Deut)

Chapter Three: The nation is established in the Promised Land *to be a blessing to all nations*** (Josh 1:1 – 1Kings 10:28)**

- **Interlude: The nation's worship and wisdom (Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon)**

Chapter Four: That nation falters, fails, falls under judgment (1Kings 11:1 – Malachi 4:6)

- **Intermission: God's Great Story goes silent**

Chapter Five: In the fullness of time, the promised hero appears (gospels, Gal 4:4-6)

Chapter Six: God enters His Great Story in Jesus, one who doesn't falter or fail (Gen 3:15/Gal 3:16; gospels) the seed of the woman against the seed of the serpent; "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed...that is Christ."

Chapter Seven: Jesus bears God's judgment on creation's brokenness and sin (Gal 3:13,14) "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law...in order that, in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles...."

Chapter Eight: Jesus forms a new people to carry out God's mission to bless all creation (Acts 1:1 – Rev 20:15).

Conclusion: a redeemed, rescued, restored people in a renewed creation where God's purposes are fulfilled in eternity! (Rev 21,22) a sequel is planned!

So where does Philippians fall?



PHILIPPIANS

So where do we as 21st century Christians fall?

God calls us to find our place in his story, in all that He's done and all He's doing, to find and embrace our place in God's great story of rescue and redemption.

Paul's letters don't simply contain instructions on how to live a good and moral Christian life, or how to share your faith, how to get people into heaven. Philippians provides instruction and encouragement from God regarding how to live as active participants in his great story, his one unchanging mission of redemption and reconciliation. Unless we read the book in that way, we'll miss a great deal of what it has to say to us.

The church Paul planted in Philippi is the first congregation in Europe, a church most likely made up – at its very beginning – of only women. You can read all about it, and I encourage you to, in Acts 16. There you'll find a night time vision, a fast sea voyage, a demonized fortune teller, an enraged population, prison and torture, an earthquake, a repentant jailer, nervous civic authorities and a powerful gospel.

Now, it's several years later and Paul writes a letter back to this church. He's writing from prison, quite possibly his first Roman imprisonment, He's chained to Roman soldiers 24/7, a fact that will gain prominence later in chapter one, then again in the final sentences of his letter.

Philippians 1:1 From Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons. **1:2** Grace and peace to you

from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although in prison, doesn't call himself a prisoner of the LORD, as he does elsewhere. Rather, he refers to himself as a slave, a bond-servant. As we get further into this letter, we'll discover the significance of the servant's posture, not simply to Christian living but to carrying out our calling as co-laborers with Christ in God's plan to redeem, rescue his fallen, broken creation.

Joy found in placing ourselves in a servant's posture and not in serving ourselves, placing ourselves at the head of the line. The **life of Christ** in us flows through the servant's posture rather than in service to ourselves.

When we place ourselves in a servant's posture, the result is that the life of Christ flows from us to others while joy bubbles up in our own lives and in the lives of those who've invested in us (beginning w/ God). Written to individuals/ community, not leaders/pastor. ALL participate!

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