

Philippians - September Class

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- [0 : 0 0] Let's pray, shall we? We are grateful, Father, for a new day and a new opportunity to be here together and to focus upon that which you've provided for us. We pray for a facility for understanding the truth and the implications thereof.
- Thank you for the presence of each one here today. Thank you for the meal we'll be enjoying shortly and the day that lies ahead. We give our time to you with thanksgiving in Christ's name. Amen.
- Well, I want to thank all of you for your expressions of congratulations for my recent marriage. I'm coming up on two weeks now of being an old married man.
- Not long ago, I wrote to an old friend, an old missionary friend of mine, with whom I go back a long time, back into the 60s, with WEEC.
- And I emailed him and I told him, I can't say that I have ever experienced what it means to be spaced out, but I sure do know what it means to be graced out.
- [1 : 1 1] Because in my first wife, Barbara, to whom I was married for almost 50 years, I was just the most incredibly blessed man that ever walked the face of the earth, to be married to a woman like that.
- And to be very honest with you, the thoughts of the possibility of finding someone in that same mold never really occurred to me.
- I just figured it would be too much to ask. But grace tends to exceed abundantly beyond what we can ask or think.
- So, I have been granted an incredible woman number two. And her husband Dave has been gone about five years, and Barbara has been gone about six years.
- And Dave was one of my key elders and one of my favorite people, personally. Like an older brother to me and a mentor to me, spiritually.
- [2 : 2 0] And interestingly enough, Marie was one of Barbara's favorite people. So, the mesh and the chemistry was just incredible.
- And here we have just come off our honeymoon and had a wonderful time down south, visiting the charming old cities of Charleston and Savannah and taking in all the scenery and all of the wonderful southern cooking and all that good stuff.
- And got to visit with my sister and brother-in-law near Asheville. And we just had a fantastic time. Wonderful time. So, thanks again to all of you for your congratulations.
- And I'm looking forward to, well, I guess I won't say nearly 50 years upcoming, but whatever years the Lord is pleased to give us will be more than I deserve.
- So, I'm already an incredibly blessed man. So, thank you all for your good wishes. I appreciate that. Let's turn, if we may, to our chapter 8 beginning.
- [3 : 2 9] And by the way, this is our September 20 class. It's hard to believe, but tomorrow the calendar says it's the first day of autumn. So, it won't be long and we'll be wondering about what the weather is going to do.

And by the way, just to give you a heads up, even though it's far in advance and we're not expecting snow, but I forgot, again, I forgot, to bring our roster of the guys who are on it.

But we need an update because there have been some new guys added and some others that are no longer with us. And on the roster will be included my cell phone number so that in the future, anytime there is any question as to the weather, etc., as to whether we'll be having a class or not, you can always call my cell phone number and we'll be happy to talk with you about that.

Let's look at chapter 8. Before we do, any questions about chapter 7? I think we've concluded that. This was the stoning of Stephen. And any questions about that?

Dan? When they stoned, did Sanhedrin do it or did anybody walk by just pick up a rock and throw it at him? You know, he's a bat, goes against us, and was it kind of a communal thing?

[4 : 46] Well, in this particular case, I think the text makes it quite clear that these men themselves participated in the physical stoning of Stephen.

And they took the responsibility for doing that and they carried it out. Ordinarily, when someone was sentenced to death by stoning, and this, by the way, was the principal means of capital punishment in the Jewish community.

They would stone you to death. And sometimes there would be like a stoning pit, which was nothing but a large hole in the ground leveled off and the person would be put down in there and then they would rain the stones down on them.

And sometimes these stones would be the size of your fist. Sometimes the stones would be the size of a human head so that a person would just hurtle the stone down and it would, of course, crush the body, bones, skull, everything else.

And the person would be just pummeled with stones of all sizes from all directions. And it wouldn't be long until the individual would be reduced to a lump of massive broken bones and contusions and bleeding and, of course, death.

[6 : 03] That was the typical kind of stoning. And in most settings where an individual was sentenced to death by stoning, it would be the nearest relative of the individual who was, in most cases, killed by the person being stoned because that was considered a capital crime, murder.

And it would be the nearest relatives of the person who was murdered that would cast the first stone. And you'll recall the woman who was taken in adultery, Christ challenged them, He who was without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.

And that, of course, set the process in motion. And then once the first stone was cast, then everybody chimed in with a raining of stones. And the more stones, the more merciful it was considered to be because the more quickly it would hasten death with the multiple stones being thrown.

So sometimes this was an agonizing thing that went on for several minutes and the person just died by inches. It was a horrible way to die, but not as horrible as crucifixion, which was even far worse.

So as far as we know, it was the Sanhedrin themselves who actually carried out the stoning. And we will see when we get into chapter 8 here that a young man, probably in his mid to late 20s, by the name of Saul of Tarsus, was there on the scene.

[7 : 42] And these who were going to stone him took off their outer garments. This was a heavy-like robe, the external garment that they wore.

And they would have a sash around the garment like a wide cloth belt that would wrap around three or four times. And they would use that belt to sometimes go under their legs like this with that belt and tighten it up so as to remove the material from the bottom from being a hindrance.

If you were going into battle or something like that, it's called girding up your loins. And they would put this sash through their thighs like that and around the bait.

And it would make your legs much more free for movement. And when you were going to do some extra heavy kind of work or you need more agility or movement, you would gird up your loins.

Well, in this case, we're going to see here in chapter 8 where these men will take off their outer robes and underneath they wore like a one-piece tunic, it was called.

[8 : 56] And it was usually down to about thigh length and shoulder. It was just kind of like cover the torso. And that's what you would wear for freedom of movement.

This is what... When Peter and the others were out in the boat and they recognized that it was the Lord who was on shore fixing breakfast for them with the fried fish that morning after He was resurrected, when Peter saw that it was the Lord, he took off that outer garment that would be heavy and weigh him down.

And he went sloshing off through the water that was perhaps as deep as chest high, but he didn't want to be encumbered by that heavy outer garment. And he took it off and left it in the boat and ran in his tunic into the shore where the Lord was.

So this is largely a cultural thing, but it gives you an appreciation for what they had to contend with when they had strenuous work to accomplish. So let's get into chapter 8 now.

Yeah. Roger. I'm sorry? I've got a couple questions. Okay. Any significance, you may have went over this, of Jesus standing at the right hand of God in verse 55?

[10 : 08] Yeah, I think there is real significance there. We touched on that a little bit. And the writer of Hebrews makes it very clear that when Christ ascended, He sat down by the right hand of the Majesty on high.

and He took His position there beside His Father. And here, in this text, we read that Stephen looked up and, well, where's the text I'm looking at?

Yeah, verse 56. He said, Behold, I see heavens opened and the Son of Man, which is a very frequent name in reference to Christ.

In fact, it's the name that Christ most often used in reference to Himself. The Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. and that, of course, was reminiscent to these Jews that when Christ used that title, the Son of Man, and others used it of Him, is reminiscent of the term that was used in the book of Daniel hundreds of years before Christ was born in Bethlehem.

And the designation Son of Man is given in Daniel and there it is deliberately speaking of the Messiah who, of course, was yet to come.

[11 : 37] And when Christ came on the scene, He constantly referred to Himself in the third person as the Son of Man. In other words, instead of Jesus saying, I came to seek and to save that which was lost, He said, For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

And speaking of Himself in the third person, referring to the Messiah and, of course, claiming to be that Messiah. So here, as a number have pointed out, that even though Christ sat down by the right hand of the Majesty on high, when Stephen looked up, he saw Jesus standing.

And it is not a stretch, I believe, to say that it appears that the Son of God rose to His feet to honor the first martyr in His name.

And that makes sense to me. We have no other reason to see why He would be standing when the Scriptures and other places make it clear that He sat down by the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Yeah? The last words that Stephen said, would we attribute that to the Holy Ghost and overcome with the Holy Ghost for it? Lay not this sin against their charge?

[12 : 59] Yeah, well, I think all Stephen was doing here was mimicking, was replicating the attitude of Christ from the cross when He cried out, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

I think the fact that Christ said that was made known to all of the contemporaries that this is what He said and these were some of His dying words. And I suspect that that was well registered with Stephen.

And Stephen wanted to imitate his Lord in his attitude by asking that this crime that was being committed against him by these people would not be held against them.

Because actually, they crucified the Lord of glory in their ignorance. Maybe they should have recognized Him as the Messiah, but they didn't.

And they crucified Him. And here, they are doing actually the same thing. It is ignorance. You know, Hosea wrote hundreds of years before Christ was born that my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

[14 : 18] And knowledge, of course, is information. And sometimes when people get information, they turn a deaf ear to it, but sometimes they absorb it. And information is everything.

As the old saying goes, if you think education is expensive, try ignorance. It's a lot more so. So, they crucified the Lord out of their evil and out of their ignorance.

And here, this same crowd, this same crowd, this same body that was instrumental in handing Jesus over to Pontius Pilate so that he could pronounce the death sentence, they are now carrying out the death sentence on Stephen.

And actually, they weren't allowed to do this. The reason that they handed Christ over to Pontius Pilate was because when Rome occupied Jerusalem and the Jews were under the thumb of the Roman army, one of the rights that was taken from the Jewish people was the right to exercise capital punishment.

They were not allowed to do that. The Jewish establishment was allowed to punish their own lawbreakers within the Jewish community, but they were not allowed to put anybody to death.

[15 : 47] And that's the only reason that they brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate was because Rome had the power to exercise the death penalty and they wanted him executed.

And of course, we know what happened before Pilate and how he reluctantly granted the decree for execution. But in this case, this is nothing but mob rule and these people are simply out of control.

Their frenzy and fanaticism had overtaken them and they are about to carry out a sentence stoning Stephen the death and they do not have the right to do that.

They had not, you can be sure, they had not secured Roman permission to do that at all. So, I suspect that they probably thought, hey, you know, we're going to be in hot water with the Romans because we did this.

But at the same time, the high priest, Annas or Caiaphas, whichever one it was, was already in bed with the Roman authorities and it was a good old boy system and he probably thought he could talk his way out of it or that they could bribe somebody and that Rome would look the other way and ignore it and probably that's what happened.

[17 : 00] But at any rate, Stephen becomes the first martyr and we read that Saul in verse 1 of chapter 8, Saul was consenting to his death.

Others translated it, and Rhames says he was taking pleasure with them in his death. And Berkeley renders it he was altogether agreed to his murder or in hearty agreement with putting him to death.

And at that time, and this Saul, of course, is going to turn out to be Paul the Apostle, and at that time, there was a great persecution. The word that's used in the Greek here is mega.

We have anglicized that word and we have mega church and mega ton bombs and mega this and mega that, but this great persecution was a mega persecution.

The Bible talks about the tribulation, the great one, and that's a mega persecution or mega tribulation. This great persecution against the church.

[18 : 03] And here again, people say, well now Marv, if you say that the church, which is the body of Christ, did not exist at this time and had not yet come into fruition, how is it that there can be persecution against the church if the church didn't exist?

And again, I would just emphasize what was said earlier. All the word means in the original, in the Greek, is the word ekklesia and it means a called out assembly, a group.

In fact, some denominations even use the term assembly in their names such as the assembly of God and so on. So, it means an assembly, a called out group, a body, and it could also be a church and it's the word ekklesia and these simply were people who comprised that group, that distinct group of believers in Jesus Christ and they were an assembly.

But the church, which is the body of Christ, and this is really important, guys, I believe, did not come into existence in Acts chapter 2, which is the standard party line in which I believed and taught for years and years and years until I came to a different conviction.

But the thing that really makes the church, the body of Christ, the church, is the fact that Jew and Gentile are comprised into one new body.

[19 : 37] The twain become one, making one new man. And Ephesians makes this so clear. That does not happen here and it has not happened yet.

It will not occur until later on in the book of Acts when the gospel goes to the Gentiles and the first one in that will be Cornelius in Acts chapter 10 and it raised a lot of hackles.

So we'll see that when we get to it. But here is Saul of Tarsus consenting unto the death of Stephen and this great persecution against the church which the assembly, the called out ones, which were at Jerusalem and they were all scattered abroad.

Who? Well, the church of verse 1, the assembly. They were scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.

And this is a really important verse, guys, and it is so often overlooked as well as the implications thereof. When Christ ascended, he said, you will receive power after that the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth.

[21 : 03] Now, if you take what he said and draw circles, Jerusalem is the bullseye. The next circle is Judea. That's the area that surrounds Jerusalem.

And then Samaria. That's a bigger circle. And that is farther away from Jerusalem. And then the uttermost parts of the earth is the big circle around.

So, think of it in those terms. That's the areas to which they were to become ministers. But I want you to notice what the text says here. This is really important.

And by the way, to whom did he say that when he ascended? You shall be witnesses unto me, Jerusalem. To whom was he speaking? The twelve. Acts one, and the record of the ascension makes it clear he was talking to the twelve apostles, and they stood there probably in a circle, and watched him bodily ascend into heaven until he was out of sight.

As far as we know, they were the only ones who witnessed the ascension. It doesn't appear to be a great crowd. It was the apostles. And he said he would come again. And the angel stood there and said, You men of Judea, why are you standing here gazing up into heaven?

- [22 : 19] This Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come again in like manner as you have seen him go. And they were the twelve. And then after that they dispersed. But I want you to notice what this verse says.

The balance of verse one. They were all, that is, those in the previous statement, the church, scattered abroad, throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.

And the reason they were scattered abroad was because it was too hot in Jerusalem. The heat was on. And these people, these people feared that the religious establishment was going to come after them next.

Because of the stoning of Stephen, it just lit up the whole area. And everyone who was a believer in Jesus as the Messiah, Messiah sensed the immediate danger.

If they did this to Stephen, what are they going to do to us? So, they light out. They take off. They head for regions beyond. And they are just fleeing their homes, picking up whatever possessions they can carry, and get out of town.

- [23 : 32] And by the way, it's really interesting, guys, that the Jewish people, as an ethnic group, have suffered more persecution, more vilification, more injury, more damage, than any other ethnic group of people in the entire world.

They have been persecuted in Africa, persecuted in Asia, persecuted in Europe, persecuted in the United States, persecuted everywhere. And we all know what Adolf Hitler did to the Jew during World War II.

and isn't it ironic, however, that some of the very first persecution that we read in the Bible is by the Jew.

And it is Jew on Jew. These are their own people, their own countrymen. And yet, they are doing this persecution, again, out of ignorance.

one of the things that Christ said to his apostles on the night that he was betrayed, with his arrest being just a few hours away when they were going to arrest him in the middle of the night and take him upon his pilot.

- [24 : 49] One of the things that Jesus said was, fellas, the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are doing God a service.

And that's exactly what these men think. This Sanhedrin who is responsible for the death of Christ, now they're going to be responsible for the death of Stephen.

They are convinced they are the keepers of the faith. They are the protectors of the faith. And that these people of whom Stephen is one and a leader, they are a cancer growing on Judaism.

And they've got to be cut out. And God has appointed us, the leaders of Israel, He has appointed us as the surgeons.

And we are going to cut this cancer out and do away with these people. They were coming from a position of gross ignorance. And you know something? We've got the very same thing going on today, only it isn't Judaism, it's Islam.

- [26 : 05] It is Islam. And those who kill the infidel, who are the infidels? An infidel is any human being who is not a Muslim.

He is an infidel. And if you want to serve Allah and please Allah, kill the infidel. Kill them! Strap bombs on yourself and go in and blow them up.

Crash your airplanes into buildings and blow them up. They are coming from the same kind of mindset. It is amazing what ignorant fanaticism can accomplish.

And history is replete with these kind of activities. Now I want you to notice the last three words of this verse. Accept the apostles.

apostles. What does that mean? It means just what it says. It means everybody else who was a believer in Jesus as the Messiah lit out for parts unknown.

[27 : 10] They are scattered into Judea and Samaria, the surrounding. Get out of Dodge! Your life is at stake. But there was one group that did not leave town.

And that's the apostles. apostles. And the question is, what are they doing in Jerusalem? They had already been giving marching orders, haven't they?

You will be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the uttermost part of the earth. Go into all the world proclaiming the gospel. That's the message that is referred to as the Great Commission in Matthew 28.

Go into all the world. Well, they haven't even gotten out of Jerusalem. Now, everybody else has gotten out of Jerusalem who is a believer in Christ, but the apostles.

And it is amazing how these three words are overlooked by our Christian establishment. I think there is great significance there.

[28 : 13] And some would say, well, these guys are lazy, they're disobedient, they've already been told to go into all the world, and they haven't obeyed the Great Commission.

they're still here in Jerusalem. What's holding them back? Are they cowards? Are they afraid to go? No, no, fellas, listen. These men are not cowards.

These are really brave individuals. You've got to give them credit for staying in Jerusalem where the heat was on. This is the hot spot.

It would have been very easy to rationalize and say, hey, fellas, it's getting too hot around here. We've got to get out. Because if something happens to us, we won't be around to proclaim the gospel.

We better get out of town and run away so we can live the fight another day and let's get out of here. But they didn't. They stayed in Jerusalem. And I am convinced that the reason is very, very important and it is this.

[29 : 20] The job wasn't finished. in Jerusalem. They had no business leaving Jerusalem until they had successfully proclaimed that message and brought Jerusalem to the feet of the Messiah.

That had not happened. And it wasn't going to happen. But they were intent on making it happen. And I am convinced that it was a really difficult thing for them to stay there.

Because all common knowledge would have said, get out of here. Fast. And go proclaim the gospel. After all, you've been told to go. Yes. But they've been told to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria.

And the implication is they are to proclaim this gospel in these different venues. Jews. But here is where they began. And interestingly enough, they are not going to those other areas.

That's very significant. Richard. Who are these devout men that buried Stephen? Were they the apostles? They could have been the apostles.

[30 : 34] They could have been just some other individuals who were obviously believers. Yeah, obviously believers and sympathetic to Stephen and his message. Because I don't think the text requires that everybody who is a believer except the apostles left.

But I think it means the vast majority of them left. And there were some who stayed back. Particularly the women. The women would not be required to flee because the women were not regarded as a threat to the establishment.

And that's partly due to the mindset that they had regarding femininity in these days. And that's another subject. Any other comments or questions?

Yeah, Raj? When you mentioned that Stephen was following in the footsteps of Jesus and the martyrs, the last words that he said, they not descend to your charge, Jesus said, forgive them for they know not what they do.

Is that not a good argument to the replace the people that God has not done to these Jewish people? Yeah, I would agree. And that's an excellent point. And I think it is a good argument, but unfortunately it's one that the replacement theologians seem to ignore.

[31 : 51] But I think it is a good argument. And you know, when Christ said, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do, I think implied in that statement is the opportunity for Israel to yet embrace him as the Messiah, even though he was there on the cross, was still a possibility.

And that's what the prayer was about. And when Stephen is stoned, and he says, lay not this sin to their charge, I think that Stephen is actually praying that God will not close the door of opportunity for Israel to embrace Jesus as their Messiah and see that kingdom restored.

And we know, alas, that's not going to happen. But other comments or questions? Richard? Richard? When you see all these times spots all over the Middle East, all these uprisings, Europe lost concerns, time, all this together, it's very confusing.

I just kind of wonder if you're watching. Well, I guess my thoughts are quite mixed. In connection with all of the turmoil that's taking place in the Middle East countries, just about all of them, and they're all anti-American, I simply do not know whether all of this unrest is a harbinger of what is to come, but I do strongly suspect that it may very well play into an end time kind of situation.

That's entirely possible. I'm not ready to make any predictions. I'm not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but these things could weigh very heavily into a scenario for the end times that may be upon us, and we just cannot say for sure, but as these events unfold, I think the picture will become more and more clear.

[34 : 06] And if this is true, and I'm not saying that it is true, but if this is true, then the rapture could be a whole lot closer than any of us could imagine.

So all of that may come into play too. Thank you for being here this morning.