

RUF Bible Study – Philippians: The Odyssey of the Heart  
Doug Serven, RUF Campus Minister<sup>1</sup>  
August 24, 2010  
Philippians 1:1-2

*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,  
To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:  
2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

What brings you joy? What is your ultimate happiness? What makes you just absolutely giddy?

Right now I can only think of one thing and it goes like this – Double Rainbow all the way!! So intense!! It's almost a triple rainbow!! In my front yard!! What does it even mean? Whoooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!!! <<crying>> Double rainbow.

If you've been around youtube this summer, you've seen this video along with, as of the end of August 2010, almost 12 million others. It's infectious. Search for it on youtube and watch it a few times. There are songs people have made up for it, which are also equally as catchy and great.

Sure we're jaded and cynical. Yosemitebear must have been on drugs or something. But he says he wasn't. He was honestly overcome with emotion at the double rainbows. (The lesson here – be careful what you say and do on film). That's why we like it so much. It's just so awfully cheesy that it is endearing and real. We're used to couching our terms, blunting our expressions and qualifying our opinions so we don't have to endure any criticism if we're wrong.

What is your double rainbow all the way?

We'll be talking about the journey of our hearts this semester, looking through Philippians to guide us. We go to an ancient text to see if has something to say to us, to see if God's word is relevant to us today. We believe that Paul wrote this text, and that it is inspired by God. We hold it up and want to put ourselves underneath it to learn from it and even commit ourselves to it. That's our goal here at RUF – to teach the Bible. We'll work through this whole book section by section, drawing out principles and application for us today. You may not be there quite yet, and that's okay. You're invited to listen to learn, and I hope you will change through this study. Philippians is for all of us. It was written a long time ago to a specific people, but it is for all of us even today. We'll get to know Paul better as we go along, so we'll save his information for another time. Right now we need to know that Paul has his good buddy Timothy with him, and they call themselves servants of Christ Jesus. Paul doesn't boast in his apostleship, but he starts off with what will become a theme of this book – servanthood. He's a leader, but he's a servant under the orders and mastery of Jesus, his Messiah and Savior.

What does Paul want us to know? Can we have joy from being someone's servant?

### ***The Saints***

We can learn a lot in an introduction. I would guess most of us skip over book introduction because we're in a hurry to get to the real part of the book. But we really shouldn't do that if we want to know everything we can about the book. Introductions help set the stage for us. They give us an extra insight into the author. The author usually says something about his or her intentions in writing the book. Or someone else writes and gives insights into the how or why a book was written.

Philippians really starts in verse 3, but there is a lot packed into these first two introductory verses.

Paul says he is writing to the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi. The Saints won the Super Bowl last year. When the saints go marching in. For all the saints. We throw this term around some but do we think about what it means?

What is a saint? When we hear someone say, "He's such a saint" what do we think of? Some of us grow up in a tradition where people are inducted into sainthood, a different category of person, someone who is much, much better than normal people.

And many of us have this belief that Christians are supposed to be saints like this. Christians and the church are supposed to be good people doing good things. We then get really disappointed when we see such abysmal failure. We see Christians doing idiotic things all the time. They get in trouble. They cheat on their spouses. They lie and steal. They kill others. They lie. They hurt us, and they hurt the name of Christ.

Some of you don't want to have anything to do with the church or Christianity or maybe even RUF because of the ways you've been hurt by people in your church or your family or this very group. This is understandable and even natural.

But it's not what the word "saint" means. We need to figure this out.

---

<sup>1</sup> © Doug Serven, 2010 You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you do not make more than 500 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be explicitly approved by Doug Serven.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Doug Serven, © Doug Serven, 2010, website: [www.ouruf.org](http://www.ouruf.org). For this series, I used commentaries by Boice, O'Brian, Thielman, Hanson Motyer and listened to sermons by as many people as I can find, especially Redeemer Presbyterian Church New York (various pastors) and Jeff Ferguson. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

A saint isn't someone who is better than someone else, or someone who is put into a whole different holiness or goodness category. The Bible talks about how a saint is someone who has been chosen by God, who has been set apart by God, who has been loved by God with a special love of God.

Saints aren't better people. They are just as messed up as all of the rest of us. The difference is that saints are loved by God and set apart by him. Do you understand that? Do you know that?

In this sense, we're all in the same boat. We are all fubar in our hearts, if I can be almost graphic and almost rude. That's the real status of our real lives. We may look pretty on the outside. We get gussied up to join a sorority, or we pad our resumes and style our hair to get a job, we pick out our outfits for the first day of school, we try to join the right group so we can be in the in crowd, we work hard for achievements, we want to be picked near the top for pickup basketball, we want to be a hipster or an artist or a non nerdy National Merit, or a cool Christian fraternity guy.

We are proud of whatever we're into. Our high school careers. Our parents. Our church attendance. Our virginity. Our summer vacations. Our GPAs. Our extra-curriculars.

And we do have reason to be proud because those are good things; they give a shape and an identity to our lives. They're just not the real status of our hearts. Our hearts are more confused, more broken, more questioning, less stable, less sure, less confident, less – nice. Our hearts bear our pains and sufferings.

What makes a Christian isn't how great we are. We're not trying to attain some sort of sainthood. Paul says the everyone in the church is a saint. Have you ever seen a saint before? A real, live saint? Well you're looking at a ton of them. Not because of the good things we've done, but because of Christ Jesus. He is the one who makes saints. He's the one who loves and changes people, not because of the good things they've done, but because of the good things he's done.

We want you to join our little band of saints here at RUF. We aren't the perfect people. You will be disappointed by our group. You'll be disappointed by me. That's just the deal. We're not trying to do that. We're not planning the next way we can disappoint you. But you need to be ready for it. We're a community of broken people who are trying to learn about Jesus and follow his teachings as we love and serve each other. But it's really hard. There is a distinctive beauty in it, a real gospel joy in it, a hope of something much better, a taste of something real that we long for when we get it – but it's hard. I don't want to bait and switch you. I don't want you to think this is the best thing since sliced bread.

We'd love to have you join us, but I want you to know what you're getting. We have a ton of fun things planned, things we think are going to great for you in many different ways. But it's going to be us. And it's going to be you. And that means that we're going to fail. If we think we've gathered all the "good" people on campus, then we are in big trouble. First, the leader of this group is a huge failure himself. I am not a good person, and those who have been around awhile can testify to that. Natalie, our intern, and Ben, who was an intern last year are neither one good people. I'm sure they will tell you that very thing. Next, the student leaders of the group aren't good people. I'll tell you about them. First we have.... I'll just blog about them some other time (just kidding).

But we are walking together with Jesus. We're pursuing a long obedience in the same direction as Eugene Peterson puts it. We'd love to have you walk with us, in all of your particular brokenness and frailties.

### ***Grace***

I'm not sure if that's a very encouraging picture. I'm afraid I've just given the anti-rousing halftime speech. That I just squelched all enthusiasm for what appears to be a great thing and none of you will return next week. That maybe you think we have a collection of ax murderers and sex offenders here. We might, but I doubt it.

We do have a collection of broken people of all types and that's what we want. That's what the church is. It's the saints. We're saints because of what God has done for us. What has he done?

In Paul's greeting, he mentions two words – grace and peace. *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

This is the real reason we are able to have any hope at all. Yes, we want to serve each other, and to promote good friendships and relationships. We want to be actively involved in and on our campus. We want to go overseas to the other nations of the world. We want to raise up interns, campus ministers, grad students, business owners, artists, politicians, teachers, scientists and so much more with a Biblical worldview and set them free to minister to our world. We want to pray. We want to gather in groups to read, study and discuss the Bible. We want to be members of great churches.

None of that is possible without the grace of Christ alone. It's all about grace. It hinges on grace. Grace is the thing.

Grace is God's undeserved favor through Jesus on those who deserve wrath. Grace is the understanding that you are more broken, wicked, hateful and weak than you have ever believed – yet you are more loved, cherished, forgiven and cared for than you ever could have imagined. This is only true because of the love of Christ for you. He took your brokenness and sin on the cross and gives you hope and joy instead. He took the wrath that you deserve and gives you life and a place in the family.

Do you see this? Do you know this joy of the love of Christ?

Maybe you don't. Maybe it's grown cold for you over the past few years. Maybe you've drifted away. You started off all excited. You went to Falls Creek and walked down the aisle. You were a frequent member at youth group, and you had Christian cds and went on retreats. But somewhere along the way it got a little boring and you've just faded off.

Maybe you have some reason to be done with it all. Your parents divorced and you can't figure out why God would do that. One of your friends committed suicide or died in a wreck. Why would God let that happen? Maybe you're up to speed on various philosophical debates and you've read the internet on why the Bible isn't trustworthy and Jesus isn't who Christians claim to be.

I want you to know that you're invited to come along with us. RUF isn't a place where we have everything figured out by any means. We don't have all the answers, but we're interested in exploring them and the journey of the heart along the way.

I want you to know that we're committed to grace and to having a real relationship with God based on grace alone. That's what you're going to hear about every week from me, because that's what the Bible talks about and it's what we all need. I hope being around this particular collection of saints won't be too annoying, but will be instead more intriguing as we sing old songs with strange words that call us to believe and trust in something different, something more.

For those of you who are excited, I'm glad. Really understanding grace and embracing it is something that never gets old. It should enflame our hearts and thrill us to know just how loved in Christ we are. God demonstrates his own love for us in this – while we were still sinners Christ died for us. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

There is grace for sinners through Christ.

### ***Peace – a Vision***

Back in 2000, there were a lot of people around the metro area that wanted to see an RUF chapter here at OU. So they prayed and they planned and they raised money and through the providence of God I was finishing up at Covenant Seminary and it all worked out that Julie and I moved here in June 2001 to start the work. I was ordained in September 2001 and we began just the way we started this year – we put up a table, we passed out flyer, we met students, we sang some songs (that no one knew) and I taught the Bible.

The big difference is that we were gathered in my living room and there were about 15 students there, a number I thought was incredibly high and I was thrilled about. Wow, we've grown since then. It's because God has been gracious to his work of the gospel at OU, and he has built up students who love other students and want to see OU reached for Christ and equipped to serve the church and the world. I'm not doing this alone. Neither is Natalie. There are a whole lot of others who make it all happen, and we want you to be a part of that work, by coming, by inviting others to come and by serving and leading when the time is right for you.

Because of grace, we can have peace. It's not a perfect peace yet – we aren't in heaven. You might feel like it when you're at the first football game. I know I tear up every time because of the just sheer beauty of it all. But even that is just a taste of the peace we will have in the new heavens and the new earth some day, in full restoration of all that is as it should be someday with Jesus ruling and reigning.

Until that time, we work for peace here, built on grace.

I want to share with you our vision for how that grace might look and what we want God to do. This is my prayer for RUF.

We are asking, pleading, begging God that he might give us by his grace:

1. A group that cares deeply about relationships, not just having the right religion. People feel welcomed and that their stories and questions are listened to, taken seriously and understood.
2. A group that is culturally, socio-economically, racially, and major-ly diverse, just like our campus. All types of students are invited and welcomed to our group.
3. A group where students live in deep and rich community. Although this is extremely difficult, it is valued and cared about, and it provides hope in the redemptive nature of the gospel.
4. A group that is not surprised by sin, but welcomes sinners and invites them to know the love of Christ. This group does pray for, hope for and expect gospel change in peoples' lives, rejoicing in shared victories as we cry together in shared defeats.
5. A group that measures success through transformation and influence, not attendance or popularity.
6. A group that is characterized by grace and known by love and service. We want to repent early and often, asking frequent forgiveness for our failures.
7. A group where acts of generosity are the norm, not the exception. People regularly give up comforts, time and money to serve those around them.
8. A group where the Bible is taught clearly, regularly, wholly, compellingly and is applied to life. This is done consistently in large group bible study, and also in student-led small group Bible studies.
9. A group that cares for its campus and wants to see it transformed. We are *for* OU and love it and want to see it succeed.
10. A group that regularly meets to worship on campus, being refreshed and encouraged by the Word of God and especially caring to sing robust, insightful profound theological hymns to and with each other, including a rich expression of gifts and talents.

11. A group that cares about what is God is doing in the world and invests our time, talent, resources and leaders across the globe.
12. A group that attracts, equips and supports leaders to make a difference for Christ in groups, businesses, schools, hospitals, science labs, courtrooms, art centers, concert halls, and city stages, carrying a Biblical worldview into all spheres of life. We seek to equip students and free them to minister the gospel their areas of influence.
13. A group that encourages healthy friendships and dating relationships, and that helps build strong marriages.
14. A group that cares for the under-resourced, the oppressed and the disenfranchised of our city and world.
15. A group that sees itself as a part of the wider, broader body of Christ on our campus and in our city.
16. A group full of committed Christ-followers who are discipling others and passing down the truth.
17. A group that is committed to and loves the church, encouraging each other to regularly participate in the means of grace and to join a grace-filled, Bible-preaching, truth-committed local church.
18. A group that doesn't take itself too seriously, but can laugh at itself, admit its weaknesses and do so graciously, humbly and confidently in walking with Christ in his righteousness and not our own.
19. A group that leads people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and equips them to give their lives away for the cause of Christ and the glory of God.

That is only going to come about through grace and a real, true community.

Double rainbows are really cool, especially when they are all the way double rainbows, almost triple rainbows!!! But they won't last. They fade away pretty quickly, don't they?

Grace lasts. You forget about it. You sometimes walk away from grace. Your heart gets cold and you may even get angry with God. But grace is there for you today. It is here. You may be brought into sainthood by the love of Christ. We want you to join our community of saints, walking in the humility and confidence of the gospel. That is real joy.

*For all the saints, who from their labors rest,  
who thee by faith before the world confessed,  
thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*Thou wast their rock, their fortress, and their might;  
thou Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;  
thou in the darkness drear, their one true light.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*O may thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold,  
fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,  
and win with them the victor's crown of gold.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*O blest communion, fellowship divine!  
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;  
yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,  
steals on the ear the distant triumph song,  
and hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,  
through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,  
singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost:  
Alleluia, Alleluia!*