



## A Clash of Kingdoms Session 2 Ray Vander Laan

### Ephesians 4:11–16

#### WHY LEARNING COMMUNITIES?

To develop spiritual character and strength to face *anything* by...

1. Learning anchored in Biblical truth but addressing cultural issues
2. Relationships that connect and blossom even outside the meetings

**Remember... it's all about putting God's truth into action in everyday lives**

#### INTRODUCTION

From the Discovery Guide, pp. 63-64

There is more to the gospel than 'Jesus saves.' From the beginning, God's salvation has been about redeeming and restoring "shalom" – the harmony, beauty and perfection He originally created – to a world broken by sin. Thus the gospel message encompasses:

- the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus which will lead to
- the restoration of God's creation
- the truth that God reigns over all.

God's called out people throughout history are called to be His witnesses, a light to those around them – to put God on display and make Him known... a Kingdom of priests by their lives and words. They were not simply to *bring* God's message to a broken world; they were to *be* that message of redemption and restoration.

The Apostle Paul understood that from his theological training and his call from Jesus – that he was to speak and be the message that Jesus had come to redeem and restore all things to Himself.

Paul taught those who believed that they had a mission, too: to *become* God's message, to *be* a community of people whose lives proclaimed that the Lord is taking charge and this is what it looks like!

Whenever the gospel is lived out, it has a significant impact – a fact that followers of Jesus today would do well to remember. The small community of believers in Philippi became a community deeply committed to living out what they believed.

#### SESSION 2, "The Believers"

##### ➔ The father's house, a picture of redemption

4<sup>th</sup> century reconstructed house in N. Israel/ how people lived in Jesus' day – extended families, 15 rooms built around a common courtyard in an extended family called "The father's house," a beth ab in Hebrew. Jesus said, "in My Father's house are many rooms," using it as a metaphor to illustrate a truth to understand. This living style gave people an opportunity to use their resources to care for the needs of the extended family. Resources of extended family were even used to bring those outside the family back, such as Prodigal Son in Luke 15.

That fit in well with God's mission for Israel from the beginning – to redeem a broken world, which involved restoring peoples' relationship with Him in what we call salvation. But it involved more than that – in that salvation God wanted to restore people to His family, to the community of faith. It worked well when people lived like this – the widow, orphan, alien. One festival was Pentecost – celebration of harvest and told them that when harvest wheat, leave the corners for poor and in that way they can be part of the family of God.

In book of Acts on one of those Pentecost celebrations God sent His Spirit with power and their immediate reaction was: ***to have everything in common and give to each as he had a need. They caught the mission to share resources and bring the lost back into God's family.***

Going to Philippi – very different culture, Hellenism. It's about me, about mine, about taking from others what I need to enrich myself, it's about power and pleasure and leisure. It's very different from this idea of using resources to bring in hurting people.

Apostle Paul came to city of Philippi and presented the message that Jesus the Messiah has come to redeem a broken world. How will that message be received in that Greek world.

#### **APPLICATION/ TAKEAWAYS:**

- ✓ Contrast God's original intent of community with Hellenistic (our) culture.  
In what ways is it different from our culture... our congregation?

#### ➔ **The good news comes to Philippi**

Down off the Acropolis, just outside the city along Gangitis River

Paul came 49-50 AD – intriguing that this was Roman colony, one of few put here by Rome (Augustus) as a miniature Rome so when here was as if you were in Rome

#### ➔ **A place of prayer**

**Acts 16:14-15**

First thing Paul did was go to river to a place of prayer – either spot outdoors or a synagogue by the river – but by a river so could ceremonially cleanse to be in God's Presence

#### ➔ **Lydia, the God-fearer**

1 a woman of independent wealth - unusual – a dealer in purple makes her a somebody b/c it was imperial color, laws about dealing in purple, had learned trade to deal in important vocation

2. she was a "God-fearer" which meant she was not a Jew, a Gentile but somehow discovered the God of the Hebrews and bowed the knee – God had been reaching people before heard message of Jesus and exactly in the mission God had given Israel – somehow saw God in these people – in some way for some reason had bowed to God of Israel even before heard the message of Jesus – because the Jewish people had put God on display.

Contrast between kingdoms: 1. the one that uses power and forces people to do what they want or  
2. the one that simply invites

Lord opened her heart (restored to path of righteousness) – her reaction is to believe Paul's account and accept along with household.

The PROOF that the Kingdom had arrived: they instantly act "Shalom" – opened her house to welcome them in. Paul resisted for some reason, but finally accepted. The proof is not that the first ones to hear it didn't just simply believe and leave a life of immorality, but that they instantly threw open their doors

In fact, story ends in Acts 16 - Paul and Silas went back to Lydia's house, met with Lydia and others

#### **APPLICATION/ TAKEAWAYS:**

#### ➔ **God's kingdom comes!**

How did the story open? Arrived at the Roman colony – same laws, privileges, act the same

**"You're a colony, too! Your citizenship is in Heaven."**

Paul will later write a letter to Philippi – ch. 3 – citizenship is in Heaven = "you're a colony, too". Wrote it to them b/c they understood what that meant. "you're here in Philippi, but you are a citizen of Heaven." Used to think that meant that we will go to Heaven someday, what Paul means is,

**"Act like you're in Heaven already"** It's already here. It's a beach head. God lives here and Heaven is spreading. All of a sudden the Pentecost story where God comes out of the Temple and into a community, it breaks out here. The Bible idea of God being the Father and the Father's house and welcoming lost children – "the Father's house is here!"

### ► Citizens of a colony of Heaven

APPL: You are a colony. *Go back to your house, your community and realize that your mission as a community of faith is to be a beach head, a tiny colony of Heaven itself.* And my guess... when people hear what that God is like – that this colony is demonstrating in its community, its love, its outreach, its compassion, people will be drawn to that colony.

I want to dance (but I can't) when I hear that my citizenship is in Heaven in Philippi b/c I understand that we now become God's colony – one place says "you are a colony of Heaven." Notice how the colony came: Paul speaking of Jesus, putting Him on display to a woman and her household who already knew something about the God of Israel. There's a difference in how those two kingdoms come.

I'd like to show you that difference in stone...

### APPLICATION/ TAKEAWAYS:

✓ When a person today accepts the gospel message that Jesus is Savior, Lord and King, what do we expect will happen?

✓ To what extent does our understanding of salvation – restoration to God's family – encompass the practical aspects of our daily lives and relationships?

How does that contrast with the people in Philippi?

### ► "Contend" for the faith

In the letters he wrote to Christian communities, Paul often used metaphors from the culture to illustrate his teaching. Since he continually emphasizes the importance to the Philippians that they must walk as Jesus walked because their citizenship is in Heaven, they are God's colony right in the middle of the Roman colony, we want to find a metaphor that illustrates the importance of being that kind of colony. So went through the ruins to the cultural heart of the city of Philippi.

When see bricks you know it's Roman – Greeks didn't do that.

Come to the theater built by Alexander the Great's father, Philip II.

Emotional, religious experience by citizens.

Romans turned theater into Gladiator arena for animals and gladiators. Romans enjoyed exotic animals. In morning the animals would fight each other. Then move to gladiators fighting animals. Then come gladiators fight criminals (helpless people, defenseless), slowly slice them to death. Then in afternoon the gladiators would fight one another, sometimes individually, sometimes in teams.

### APPLICATION/ TAKEAWAYS:

✓ Ray Vander Laan observes that our culture seems to enjoy the same kind of bloodshed. What parts of cultural entertainment have we adopted that might not be appropriate for Christ followers?

### Philippians 4:2–3

ANALOGY: The gladiator arena fights is behind Paul's lesson that he gives in Philippians. Remember he's creating a community to BE the message. So we assume that one of the things he's doing in the letter to this community is to encourage them to BE the message. Well, we've got a problem in this community – two ladies, two prominent, passionate women – Phil. 4. The two were creating tension and that distorts the message. "I'm trying to tell people this is the Kingdom of Heaven, this is what it looks like when Jesus is Lord and you two don't get along." God isn't happy and it is a sin, but that's not Paul's only motive – it's also that you're distorting the message. Paul puts it in the email, but he copies the whole congregation so that everyone knows Paul's instructions.

"Help me loyal yokefellow" is probably the congregation.

"contended at my side" "sullambanou" = to fight, to struggle side by side

is the word used for two or three gladiators in a team who are fighting as a team against animals or people. Gives picture of gladiators turning on one another when lions are coming after them

**POINT:** a whole arena watching it – it would be a joke, the audience would laugh

Paul is saying, “Listen! We contended side by side. We struggled for Jesus. You’re fighting each other. The whole city of Philippi is laughing at us saying, “This Jesus stuff is a joke. There’s no shalom. There’s no peace in that. Look at them.” And you can hear the laughter of the crowd.

Ray Vander Laan - I think sometimes to my own faith community experience doing the same – exposing each other to the lions around, the dangers around, but worse the whole world looking on saying, “Don’t give me this Christian stuff. It doesn’t work. Look!”

And Paul uses that gladiatorial metaphor to say,

***“You’ve got to BE the message. Yes, you speak the message but if the message is not in flesh they will never truly know and experience the reality of Jesus.”***

What is the message? That Jesus Christ is Savior, Lord and King. If they **become** that message we have the interesting reality that there is another Gospel in this city. And those two are going to experience each other. What will happen when this message that Jesus Christ is Savior, King and Lord meets the message that says Caesar is Lord?

#### **APPLICATION/ TAKEAWAYS:**

✓ What do we need to remember or change in response to the previous teachings?

#### **➔ Don’t distort the message**

It’s remarkable how similar the message and mission God is giving through Paul to Philippi is to Israel. At Sinai, God told them to be a Kingdom of Priests. Jesus gave similar message. Lydia and people there experienced the same message.

Put God on display so that the world will know Who God is and what He is like.

That’s why Paul will not tolerate anything that compromises the mission. You cannot have dissension b/c it will give the wrong message to this warped world. And it will waste energy that we need to fight the battles against the enemy in this world.

#### **APPLICATION/ TAKEAWAYS:**

✓ How does this teaching make sense of the Bible’s fierce standards of forgiveness, refusal to compromise, etc?

**Ephesians 6:19 (ESV)** and also (pray) for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,

#### **TAKEAWAYS...**



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**NOTICE THE "IMPORTANT" PLACES IN THE ROMAN COLONY OF PHILIPPI—THE *VIA EGNATIA*, THE THEATER WHERE GLADIATORIAL COMBAT TOOK PLACE, THE FORUM, THE PRISON. OUTSIDE THE CITY WALLS, SOMEWHERE NEAR A TRIBUTARY OF THE GANGITIS RIVER, WAS A PLACE OF PRAYER WHERE PHILIPPIANS WHO WORSHIPED GOD GATHERED.**