

Kingdom Writer

Peter shared the ‘Introduction’ to Philippians from the Message Bible on Sunday. He saw the writer (Paul) as conveying a Kingdom message.

“This is Paul’s, happiest letter. And the happiness is infectious. Before we’ve read a dozen lines, we begin to feel the joy ourselves – the dance of words and the exclamations of delight have a way of getting inside us.

But happiness is not a word we can understand by looking it up in the dictionary: In fact, none of the qualities of the Christian life can be learned out of a book. Something more like apprenticeship is required, being around someone who out of years of devoted discipline shows us, by his or her entire behavior, what it is. Moments of verbal instruction will certainly occur; but mostly an apprentice acquires skill by daily and intimate association with a “master”, picking up subtle but absolutely essential things, such as timing and rhythm and “touch”.

When we read what Paul wrote to the Christian believers in the city of Philippi, we find ourselves in the company of just such a master. Paul doesn’t tell us that we can be happy, or how to be happy. He simply and unmistakably is happy...

But circumstances are incidental compared to the life of Jesus, the Messiah, that Paul experiences from the inside. For it is a life that not only happened at a certain point in history, but continues to happen, spilling out into the lives of those who receive him, and then continues to spill out all over the place. Christ is, among much else, the revelation that God cannot be contained or hoarded. It is this “spilling out” quality of Christ’s life that accounts for the happiness of Christians, for joy is life in excess, the overflow of what cannot be contained within any one person.”¹

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¹ – Eugene Peterson (2002) “The Message Bible” p.2135