

~ Joy in Difficult Circumstances ~

Text: Phil 1:12–30

Theme: You can know true joy despite your circumstances when you see each day and each situation as an opportunity to serve Christ and testify of His grace.

Intro:

1. Last week, we began our study on the second half of Philippians chapter 1.
 - a. In the second half of this chapter, Paul is explaining that the believers should not despair over the current circumstances, either their own suffering from persecution or Paul's imprisonment.
 - b. He goes on to explain that, although they endure trials for a time, the work of Christ was still going forward and in that they could all rejoice together.
 - c. Finally, he exhorts the believers to be faithful so that when he comes and sees them in person or hears a second-hand report of them, he might hear that they are doing well and not allowing their gospel light to be darkened due to adversity.
2. We broke down the passage into three bite sized pieces:
 - I. Joy in Preaching Christ (Vs 12-18)
 - II. Joy in Living for Christ (Vs 19-26)
 - III. Joy in Suffering for Christ (Vs 27-30)

Main:

Last week, we began by looking at Paul's **Joy in Preaching Christ**:

- I. **Joy in Preaching Christ** (Vs 12-18)
 - A. Joy in knowing my purpose (Vs 12-13)
 1. Paul could rejoice because he understood that there was a purpose in his suffering.
 - a. Paul is writing to a church that was experiencing persecution due to the hostility of Rome toward the Christians and his purpose in this passage is to encourage them that all is not lost and to exhort them not to abandon the work of the gospel.
 - When our eyes are not fixed on Christ and on his purposes being accomplished in our lives it is easy to become discouraged and think that everything is against us.
 - b. Because Paul could see a purpose in his suffering, he was able to say to the Philippians Christians, "*These things... have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.*" (Vs 12)
 2. Paul didn't just see prison chains; he saw witnessing opportunities.

- a. Paul's bonds in Christ were being talked about through all the palace and all-around town too. This was a witnessing opportunity like no other and Paul had the spiritual insight to recognise it as such.
 - i. As long as Paul could see the gospel spreading as a result of his situation, Paul knew that his suffering was not in vain.
 - ii. When we suffer for the Lord Jesus Christ, it is never in vain, it is never without purpose or plan. God wants to use you as a testimony through your suffering to be a witness for the Lord Jesus.
- B. Joy in knowing my impact (Vs 14-18)
 - 1. Paul's boldness in the gospel had inspired others to be bold in proclaiming Christ also.
 - a. Paul was rejoicing in the fact that his imprisonment had had such a positive impact on other believers.
 - b. Paul's imprisonment had also brought pretenders out of the woodwork who imitated Paul's preaching in an attempt to mock him and diminish the impact of the gospel.
 - 2. Rather than being discouraged by this Paul rejoiced that Christ was being preached (Vs 17-18)
 - a. For Paul, the only thing that mattered was that Christ was being made known to the people of Rome.
 - i. This is the kind of self-denial that we all need in order to be a truly devoted follower of Christ.

II. Joy in Living for Christ (Vs 19-26)

- A. Joy in maintaining my testimony (Vs 19-20)
 - 1. Paul has just been speaking of the reason he can rejoice while in prison and now he goes on to explain that the deliverance he is looking for is not necessarily a physical one.
 - a. Verse 20 actually gives us the description of the salvation that Paul was looking for.
 - i. Paul would not be ashamed of the gospel (Vs 20a)
 - Paul is effectively saying that his salvation would be in not being ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, but rather preaching Christ with boldness.
 - ii. Christ would be magnified through Paul (Vs 20b)
 - The second part of Paul's salvation would be that, whether he lived or died, he would remain true to the Lord Jesus Christ and magnify Christ through his life and death.

- The salvation, or deliverance, that Paul was seeking was not a physical one but a spiritual one. If this was the end, then he wanted to magnify Christ through his death. If he was released from prison, then he wanted it to be to the glory of Christ and the edification of the saints.

Now to where we pick up from last week as we see Paul's **Joy in Continuing (in) Ministry**.

B. Joy in continuing my ministry (Vs 21-26)

1. For Paul, whether he lived or died he did it for Christ.
 - a. If he lived in the flesh, it was for the glory of Christ.
 - i. This is not a reference to living in the power of the flesh but being physically alive.
 - To put it simply, Paul was saying that if he lived and continued in his ministry then Christ being magnified was all the fruit he sought from his labours.
 - For me to live, is to be all for Christ and nothing for self. Again, we see the self-denial that Paul knew as he gave himself over entirely to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - b. If he died, then he gained entrance into the presence of Christ in glory.
 - i. Paul didn't see physical death as something he sought deliverance from, but rather, as a door through which he would one day enter directly into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and receive his eternal reward for faithful service here on earth.
 - ii. To live, I live for Christ. To die, I gain Christ in his person.
2. Paul had a desire to conclude his earthly ministry so he might enter into a heavenly one, in the presence of the Saviour he loved. (Vs 22b-26)
 - a. Paul isn't literally saying that the choice was up to him but rather he is saying, "If it was up to me to choose, I'm not sure what my choice would be."
 - i. As Paul thought about the possible outcomes of his imprisonment, execution was still a possibility. And as he thinks on it, he realises that he would actually rather be with Christ than continue on this earth.
 - How many of you have had that sense at one time or another that you just can hardly wait to get to heaven and leave this old world with its sin, grief, and pain behind you?

- **Romans 8:22-23** *“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”*
- Paul almost sounds wistful here as he thinks of how joyful an occasion it will be to reach heaven and see the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ii. He then goes on to explain his dilemma by saying he is locked between these two possible paths.
 - He had a strong desire to die and go to be with Christ which is far better for him personally.
 - But he understood that the believers in the churches still needed him and that for their sakes it was more needful that he remains alive to minister to them.
 - Paul saw that the local churches still needed to be strengthened and that it was his ministry, as the Apostle to the gentiles, to carry on that work. For that reason, he said it was needful for him to remain.
- b. This reasoning led Paul to conclude that he was confident he would live and would be released from prison, not because it was a nice thing for him, but because there was still work that Christ would have him to do. His race was not yet over.
 - i. Paul knew that if he remained alive it would be for the benefit and joy of others toward the end that they would be built up in the faith.
 - Once again, we see the selflessness of the Apostle Paul as he was willing to delay his personal gain of heaven for the spiritual wellbeing of the believers in the local churches.
 - Paul desire for the believers was that they would advance in their faith, with joyfulness.
 - ii. Paul knew that they would rejoice even more abundantly in Christ when the Apostle Paul himself was finally able to come and visit them in person.

III. Joy in Suffering for Christ (Vs 27-30)

A. Joy in striving together (Vs 27)

1. Finally, Paul exhorts the believers to be faithful so that when he comes and sees them in person or hears a second-hand report of

them, he might hear that they are doing well and not allowing their gospel light to be darkened due to adversity.

- a. Paul's immediate concern was that they should maintain a godly testimony.
 - i. That word "*conversation*" means, your conduct or way of living as a citizen.
 - ii. Paul now exhorts the believers to make sure that they maintain good Christian conduct despite the persecution they are facing.
 - "If all Christians were under the influence of the gospel, there would be *something* in their dress, temper, conversation, and aims, which would distinguish them from others.¹"
 - iii. Persecution has a way of either quenching the fire of the gospel or propelling it to burn brighter.
 - I have heard of Christians in countries where they suffer persecution who would pray for the Christians in the West to be persecuted because that is what it would take for most Christian to get real about their faith and decide what is most important in life for them.
- b. Paul wanted two things to be evident in their lives.
 - i. Standing fast in one spirit and one mind
 - Paul's desire was that the church would remain unified. Being of one spirit and of one mind means to think the same thing and speak the same thing.
 - ii. Striving together from the gospel
 - This is the sphere of their unity. Their unity was to be in the proclamation of the gospel and in their standing for the faith.
 - Amos 3:3 asks, "*Can two walk together except they be agreed?*" It is a rhetorical question to which the obvious answer is, no.
 - We must be of one mind and of one faith if we are going to stand together in the work of the gospel ministry.

B. Joy in suffering together (Vs 28-30)

1. Paul goes on to explain that, although they endure trials for a time, the work of Christ was still going forward and in that they could all

¹ Albert Barnes, [*Notes on the New Testament: Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians*](#), ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885), 160.

rejoice together and continue to be a good testimony for the Saviour.

- a. Persecution, by its nature, is intended to crush the individuals being targeted.
 - i. It is quite reasonable that Paul would assume that there were those in the church at Philippi who had been intimidated into silence by the opposition and persecution the church was facing.
 - ii. “It is evident from this passage, as well as from some other parts of the epistle, that the Philippians were at this time experiencing some form of severe suffering. But in what way, or why, the opposition to them was excited, is nowhere stated. The meaning here is, “do not be alarmed at anything which they can do. Maintain your Christian integrity, notwithstanding all the opposition which they can make. They will, in the end, certainly be destroyed, and you will be saved.”²”
 - b. Paul says that the persecution they were suffering was being taken by their adversaries as evidence of their soon destruction.
 - i. Even the Apostle Paul himself, before his conversion, had persecuted the church and sought its destruction. It is no wonder that Paul understands the minds of the adversaries of the Christians.
 - ii. Paul goes on to explain that the persecution they were facing was actually evidence of their salvation and that they would be victorious over their enemies in the same way Paul desired to be victorious, whether in life or death.
2. They could know the same joy he knew through suffering.
- a. Finally, Paul instructs the believers that it is our lot, as believers in Jesus Christ, to suffer for his sake.
 - i. The Lord Jesus predicted the persecution that his followers would face.
 - **John 15:20-21** *“Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.”*

² Albert Barnes, [*Notes on the New Testament: Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians*](#), ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885), 161.

- ii. In the letter to the church at Smyrna the Lord said:
Revelation 2:10 *“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”*
 - It has been given unto us as both a privilege and a duty to suffer the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - *“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim 3:12)*
- b. They also had the same conflicts Paul had in that they were being pressure to give up on their faith.
 - i. Paul himself desired that the brethren would pray for him and that he would have the help of the Holy Spirit so that he would not be ashamed of the gospel and we still need both those things today.
 - Pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ that they would not be ashamed to be a witness for Christ.
 - Pray that we would have the ministry of the Holy Spirit in enabling us to be faithful proclaimers of the gospel.

Conclusion:

1. So, in this passage we have seen that we can have:
 - I. Joy in Preaching Christ (Vs 12-18)
 - II. Joy in Living for Christ (Vs 19-26)
 - III. Joy in Suffering for Christ (Vs 27-30)