

~ 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. A fortnight ago, we looked at Paul's *Joy in Christian Fellowship*.
 - a. We considered Paul's joyful greeting at the outset of the passage and his thankfulness for the love and fellowship of the Philippian Christians.
 - b. The we noted Paul's confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of the gospel to change lives for the better.
 - c. Finally, we saw Paul's prayer for the Philippian Christians, that they would grow in love toward one another and in purity of faith, so that they would be found faithful, without compromise at the judgement seat of Christ.
2. Next, we are going to look at the remainder of the chapter from verse 12 onward.
 - a. In the second half of the chapter, Paul begins to explain that the believers should not despair over the current circumstances, either their own suffering from persecution or Paul's imprisonment.
 - b. 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 rejoice together.
 - c. 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.
3. We will take the passage in 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:

- 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. In the second half of the chapter, Paul begins to explain that the believers should not despair over the current circumstances,

either their own suffering from persecution or Paul's imprisonment.

- i. Remember that Paul is writing to a church that was experiencing persecution due to the hostility of Rome toward the Christians.
 - ii. Take as a rule that, when a government becomes hostile toward Christian, it doesn't take long for that hostility to filter down through the rest of society and cause grief from persecution and anxiety over the future.
 - iii. Secondly, the beloved Apostle Paul was in prison and could not come to them and strengthen them through his personal ministry. This left them feeling like everything was against them, and Paul write this passage to encourage them that all is not lost and to exhort them not to abandon the work of the gospel.
- b. 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.
- i. You know, we are predisposed to thinking, "If only God would elevate me in my social status, or if only God would give me a promotion at work, then I would be a somebody and people would have to respect me and then I could be a better witness for Christ, because people would notice me more."
 - ii. In reality, what God does is he allows us to be pushed down to the bottom rung, treated unfairly, passed over for promotion, mocked for our faith in Christ, looked down upon and more. Why? So, people can see the light of a good testimony shining through despite the circumstances. And that is exactly what Paul was saying to the Philippians, when he said, "*These things... have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.*" (Vs 12)
- c. You say, "how can that be Paul? You're not able to go to the synagogue and preach anymore. You can't come down to the local church and teach anymore. How can this be better than that?" Thanks for asking, now look at the next verse...
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.
 - i. This was a witnessing opportunity like no other and Paul has the spiritual insight to recognise it as such and not allow his feelings about the prison diminish his enthusiasm for Christ and his Word.

- ii. Notice that Paul makes it clear that his imprisonment was not because of any wrongdoing on his part, but it was for the cause of Christ.
 - If you suffer for wrongdoing, then you are no different from the next criminal, but if you suffer for Christ's sake, then you know you are suffering for the right reason.
 - iii. Paul's imprisonment had obviously drawn a lot of attention because he says that it was being talked about in all the palace as well as in all other places.
 - In other words, Paul's imprisonment was getting people's attention onto the Saviour whom Paul was suffering for and he saw that as a win.
 - b. The reason why Paul could rejoice while he was under house arrest and chained to a Roman soldier is because Paul recognised that there was a purpose to it all and that purpose was to proclaim Christ in every place.
 - 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 rejoiced to have inspired boldness in others
 - a. Paul's boldness in the gospel had inspired others to be bold in proclaiming Christ also.
 - i. It seems that Paul's imprisonment stirred up other preachers of the gospel to be bolder in their public ministry, in a way, stepping up to fill the gap in a way they otherwise would not have.
 - ii. In some ways you can think of the effect it has on the workplace when someone leaves and everyone else has to step up to carry the workload. With Paul in prison, others stepped up and filled the public ministry of preaching the gospel and 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.

- i. Paul's take on these imitation preachers was that, while they sought to be a burden to the imprisoned Apostle, they were actually getting the name of Christ into houses that it might not have otherwise come, and in that Paul rejoiced.
- 2. Paul rejoiced that Christ was being preached (Vs 17-18)
 - a. Paul was set for the defence of the gospel, and nothing would diminish his joy in proclaiming Christ.
 - i. The phrase "set for the defence of the gospel" means, "I am laid down in place, set in position. The purpose in my imprisonment is that I should give a defence of the gospel of Jesus Christ and that is the course of action I am committed to."
 - ii. The idea is that the Christians who were preaching the gospel out of love (vs 17a) were doing so to aid Paul in his calling which was to give a defence of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and this was a joy and consolation to him while he was imprisoned.
 - b. 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.
 - Paul was in prison, but he said, "I rejoice because the gospel is being discussed in all places, including the palace.
 - Paul was being mocked but he said, "I rejoice because people are hearing about Christ even through my antagonists."
 - The only way to have that sort of joy through suffering is to see Christ as being everything and myself as nothing more than his servant who he may choose to use in whatever way honours him most. Death to self is the key.

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

A. Joy in maintaining my testimony (Vs 19-20)

- 1. These verses, particularly verse 19, have been misunderstood by many of the commentators.
 - a. Many of them say that Paul's "salvation" here refers to his confidence that he would soon be released from prison.

- i. However, this clearly was not a certainty as he mentions at the end of verse 20 that the outcome could still be either life or death.
 - ii. While the word “salvation” means “rescue, safety, or deliverance,” it seems that physical deliverance from prison was not what Paul had in mind.
 - iii. In fact, verses 21-23 make it clear that Paul saw death, not as defeat, but as a victory which would place him in the immediate presence of the Lord.
2. What, then, is this salvation that Paul is referring to? Let’s break it down a bit.

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. What would bring about his salvation?
 - i. The prayers of the believers (Vs 19b)
 - Paul knew that if he was to obtain the kind of salvation, or deliverance that he was looking for, it was imperative that the believers would uphold him in prayer.
 - We’ve already looked at what Paul was focused on during his imprisonment, which was the fact that the gospel of Christ was being preached everywhere with more boldness. Bear that in mind as we continue.
 - ii. The supply of the Holy Spirit (Vs 19c)
 - Paul knew that he needed an extra measure of the Holy Spirit’s working in him if he was going to obtain the salvation that he was looking for.
 - Again, Paul’s focus remains, not on personal deliverance, but on the preaching of Christ.
- b. What would be the effect of these two things?

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’s earnest hope and expectation was that, through the prayers of the saints and the strengthening of the Spirit, he would maintain a good testimony and give a good defence of the gospel and not be ashamed.

- 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.
 - Think back to the previous verse where Paul mentioned the need for the prayers of the believers and for the power of the Holy Spirit.
Paul was saying that, the only way he was going to be bold in testifying of Christ and then magnify Christ even in his death, was by the obtaining spiritual help and strengthening through all the prayers of God's people and the power of the Holy Spirit upon him.
 - The salvation, or deliverance, that Paul was seeking was not a physical one but a spiritual one. It was a deliverance from what he described in **1 Corinthians 9:27** *"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."*
 - In other words, Paul wanted to finish his race well. 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.
- 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.

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

- 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 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.

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

- 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."*
 - 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)