

(Joy of Purpose - Philippians 1:12-30)

I invite you to open your Bibles to this morning's scripture text, which can be found in the book of Philippians, Chapter 1 verses 12-30. This can be found on page 830 in your pew Bibles. We continue in our new series today "The Joy of Unity." Scripture reveals the Joy of Purpose is spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our Fathers Word

Php 1:12-30

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? *The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.* Yes, and I will continue to rejoice for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!

I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved — and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

This is the Word of God for the people of God

There was once a farmer who began to look at his farm through critical eyes. Every place he looked on his farm he saw something wrong. So, he decided to sell and move somewhere else. He contracted a realtor who came out to look things over. Then the realtor called to get the farmer's approval for an ad for the newspaper. The ad spoke of a good location, a well-maintained house, sturdy barns, lush pasture, a beautiful pond, fertile soil and a great view. The farmer listened carefully then he asked the realtor to read it again. Finally the farmer responded, "Don't put the ad in the newspaper. I've always wanted a place like that. I think I'll stay right where I am."

Our attitude makes a huge difference in terms of what we experience in life. We can see the depth of this statement and its truth through Apostle Paul's witness to us. In this message, our second exploring the nature of Christian joy found in our life united with Christ, from the letter to the Philippians, where we pick up the text in 1:12 with Paul commenting about his imprisonment because of his faith. Outwardly his circumstances were difficult. But as we're going to see, Paul had this amazing ability to live above his circumstances. He experiences joy in a remarkable way.

Php 1:12-14 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

The reference to "palace guard" is literally "praetorian guard." These were ten thousand handpicked soldiers first commissioned by Caesar Augustus.

They were strategically dispersed around Rome to keep the peace and to protect the emperor. Paul's reference to the praetorian guard indicates he wrote Philippians while he was guarded by them while he was in Rome.

The chains Paul refers to in verse 14 were about eighteen inches long. One end was attached to the prisoner's wrist and the other to the guard. The chain was not removed from the prisoner as long as he was in custody. This made both escape and privacy impossible. According to Acts 28:30, Paul lived under house arrest for two years in Rome. The entire time he was chained to a series of soldiers.

Now here's the remarkable part: instead of seeing the soldier as an inconvenience, Paul looked at him as a captive audience. What a great example of letting our joy triumph, of turning lemons into lemonade! For two years one soldier after another was chained to Paul giving him a chance to share the gospel. Those soldiers would then take the message back to their barracks and repeat it to their comrades. In the end, the whole palace guard heard about Christ! Not only that...but, according to verse 14, the way God used Paul while he was in chains also encouraged the rest of the believers to be bolder about their faith.

Paul demonstrates for us here another great example of what I call Romans 8:28 thinking. This thinking allowed Paul to trust God even when his circumstances were less than ideal. Do you remember Romans 8:28? "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." This means if we love God and if we're called according to his purpose, God will weave everything we experience into our good.

Thus, being in chains for two years wasn't a horrible loss of Paul's time and freedom. God was bigger than those circumstances. God worked the negatives into good. As we've just seen, because of Paul's chains, the palace guard heard about Christ and the believers were encouraged. God also used the imprisonment to give Paul time to write four NT letters: Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon.

Romans 8:28 thinking requires having eyes of faith to see beyond our circumstances. Typically, we only look at things from one perspective. We only see the obvious. But the Bible assures us there is always more that's going on than we can see with our eyes.

I love the story in 2 Kings 6 about Elisha and the Assyrian army. During the night, the Assyrians surrounded the city in order to capture Elisha. Early in the morning, Elisha's servant went out of the house and panicked when he saw the enemy surrounding the city. But Elisha said, "Don't be afraid, those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And he prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes so he may see." Then God opened the servant's eyes and he saw the hills above the enemy were full of horses and chariots of fire. In other words, the angelic forces greatly outnumbered the Assyrian army.

Romans 8:28 thinking allows us to see with eyes of faith. We begin seeing our challenges from God's perspective. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." In other words, there's more going on than what we can see with our physical eyes. God is working behind every circumstance. He weaves everything that happens to us into the tapestry of his perfect plan for our lives.

Thus, Romans 8:28 thinking allows us to remain joyful even when things appear to be falling apart.

Let me share a story about an 8-year-old boy named Frank. Frank had a date with his father to go fishing one Saturday. On Friday night Frank laid everything out and was ready to go. But on Saturday morning he awoke to discover it was raining and they couldn't go fishing. So, 8-year-old Frank grumbled and griped and complained all morning. He kicked the furniture, the dog and the cat. Nothing was right. His father tried to explain that the farmers needed the rain. But that didn't satisfy Frank. Over and over again he complained, "Why does it have to rain today?"

About noon the clouds broke and the sun came out. His dad said, "We can't go fishing all day, but at least we can fish this afternoon. Let's go!" So, they jumped into the truck and went to the lake. They stayed all afternoon and caught more fish than ever before. They had the time of their lives!

When they came home, they cooked some of the fish for supper. As they were sitting down to eat, Frank's dad asked him to say the blessing. 8-year-old Frank prayed this prayer. "God, if I sounded a little grumpy earlier today, it was because I couldn't see far enough ahead."

That's the problem isn't it? Most of the time, we just can't see far enough ahead. That's where Romans 8:28 thinking helps. It helps us to see our challenges from God's perspective. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Paul demonstrates a gracious attitude, which expands our Joy. Php 1:15-18

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Have you ever noticed critical and judgmental attitudes among Christians? For as long as I've been a Christ-follower I've listened to believers' bash one group after another. The root of this criticism is often pride. One group thinks they have a corner on the spiritual market; their way to do church is the only way. Sadly enough, these battles also play out *within* congregations all over. Everyone else who's different is not just different, but they're wrong. Different approaches to ministry, then, become issues of right and wrong instead of being what they are: simply different ways to celebrate our faith, or to give glory to God.

As the years have gone by, I've listened to chorus after chorus of this criticism. When I was first saved in the 1970's, Christians were criticizing the new forms of worship being pioneered by Maranatha Music. Maranatha music is a Christian Record Label that connects the top worship, praise, and gospel songs of faith with today's church. Classic songs, modern worship songs and hymns are all presented in ways the church can sing effectively.

Then the seeker movement appeared and people lobbed scathing criticisms on Bill Hybels and Willow Creek. Then the purpose driven movement arrived and some folks all but crucified Rick Warren.

When Rick's book *The Purpose Driven Life* became a best-seller touching millions with the Gospel, the only thing those shrill critics could say is that Rick never mentions hell in the book.

Frankly, friends, it's the easiest thing in the world to be a critic of other Christians. And it's also the farthest thing from God's heart. Look at what Paul says. He says, sure some folks are preaching Christ for goofy reasons. In fact, some were even trying to hurt Paul by their preaching. But in verse 18 he says, "What does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice." Paul takes the high road regarding Christians who oppose him. He rejoices. He doesn't criticize.

Now, the next time you hear someone on Christian radio or in person bashing another Christian leader or another Bible believing church for doing things differently than they do, I want you to remember this passage. Paul's example teaches us to be gracious toward other believers, even though we may not agree with how they do things. So what if they do things differently than us? That's between them and God. It's not our business. Paul says, "What does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached." Christ is the unity that binds us all together.

When the Gospel was preached by anyone, even with poor motives, Paul rejoiced. I think the overarching principle might be stated like this: **A critical attitude shrinks joy, but a gracious attitude expands joy.** Paul wasn't soured by those who preached Christ out of selfish ambition. He had a gracious spirit that focused on the bright side—at least Christ was being preached! At some point being joyful comes back to thinking in a positive way; not being critical; being gracious.

The overriding theme in this text is God-confidence that *expands joy*. Paul expresses his supreme confidence that *God is in control*. He has absolute confidence in God. Whether he lives or dies is okay because either way God is in control, and this confidence leads to an amazing supernatural level of joy.

Notice four reasons for Paul's confidence: In verse 19 prayer is mentioned. Paul is confident because he knows the Philippians are praying for him and he knows that God listens to prayer.

Also in verse 19 Paul expresses confidence in the Holy Spirit's ability to help. What happened to him—in other words imprisonment—will ultimately turn into something positive because of “the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”

In verse 20 Paul expresses confidence in God's empowerment. The same God who sustained him when he was flogged five times by the Jews and the same God who helped him survive three shipwrecks would continue to give him courage and strength. The term “eagerly expect” in verse 20 is a compound word that means to stretch the neck. It was used figuratively of an eager expectation. Like a chick stretching its neck eagerly awaiting nourishment from its mother, Paul was confident in God's ability to provide courage and power to endure.

Finally, in verses 21-26, Paul writes about his confidence in God's plan for his life. If Paul lives he knows it means God has more for him to do on earth. If he dies he knows it means being personally with Christ. It's the ultimate win-win situation. Paul would rather die and be with Christ. For him that would be far better. But he knows there's still more work to do. So he writes in verse 25, “Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith...”

God-confidence has an amazing way of expanding joy. In this entire passage there's not one hint of discouragement; not a hint of negativity. Even though he's chained to a Roman soldier and even though he possibly was about to be executed for his faith, Paul is completely confident because he knows that God is ultimately in control, and his joy prevails.

The level of our confidence in God has a dramatic impact on how joyfully we go through the trials of life. Adoniram Judson was among the first overseas missionaries sent out from the United States. In the early 1800's Judson and his first wife went to Burma where he labored for nearly forty years. After 14 years of hard work the only things he had to show for it were a handful of converts and a Burmese grammar. During those 14 years he suffered a horrible imprisonment for one and a half years and he lost his wife and children to disease.

In the face of these obstacles, Judson prayed that God would allow him to live long enough to translate the entire Bible into Burmese and to establish a church with at least 100 believers. God granted that request over the ensuing 20+ years. And at the end of his life, Judson wrote, "If I had not felt certain that every trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have survived my accumulated sufferings." In other words, if he wasn't supremely confident that God was in total control—sovereign over even terribly painful things—Judson would not have prevailed.

This God-confidence is captured well in verse 21. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." You might write down and memorize verse 21 from our scripture text. It's key. (Repeat) This verse basically declares that my primary focus in life is a settled issue.

Jesus Christ is the hub and all the other spokes of my life revolve around him. Whether I live or die Jesus is the center of everything I am and do. It reminds me of a statement written by a young African pastor who was martyred for his faith in Zimbabwe.

*I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of His and I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away or be still. My past is redeemed. My present makes sense. My future is secure. I'm finished with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals.*

*I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, or first, or tops, or recognized, or praised, or rewarded. I live by faith, lean on his presence, walk by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by Holy Spirit power.*

*I won't give up, shut up, or let up until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up and preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must give until I drop, preach until all know, and work until he comes. And when he does come for his own, he'll have no problems recognizing me. My colors will be clear!*

Thus, in today's scripture text we see three principles that will help us experience ever expanding joy: (1) Maintain Romans 8:28 thinking. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (2) Have a gracious attitude...especially with those who view things differently than us.

(3) Keep our God-confidence strong. “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Nothing can ever happen to us that’s not first filtered through his loving hands. Whether we live or whether we die...let’s choose to keep Christ at the center of our lives and live lives of Joy.

Up to this point Paul has been talking mostly about himself. But in verse 27 Paul shifts the focus to the Philippians. Because of Paul’s example...this is how the Philippians are expected to live in order that they may experience the Joy of Purpose, lived in Christ. (Read 1:27-30) I’d like you to notice these three statements in today’s text:

In verse 27, “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel...” Also in verse 27, “Stand firm in one spirit...” In verse 29, “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him....”

For us to experience the ever expanding, *Joy of Purpose* in our Christian lives, we must: Live worthy. Stand firm. Suffer for Christ. I’d like to close today by having us bow our head and focus on those three exhortations. With your eyes closed, I’d like to read those three statements slowly. Hear them, think about them, let them settle into your heart. Let the Holy Spirit bring to mind the ways he may want to apply them to your life. Bow your heads, and close your eyes,

Live worthy. Stand firm. Suffer for Christ.

Let us Pray,

Heavenly Father,

We lift up our hearts to you in *love*, with overflowing, expanding Joy from experiencing the love of Christ in our lives, as we live in Him.

By your power give us the strength to live lives worthy of our calling,  
equipping us to complete the tasks you have for us each day.

By your presence in our life through your Holy Spirit,  
help us to stand firm in one spirit, in Christ Jesus.

By your grace keep expanding our Joy through the challenges in life,  
so that we may we all rejoice together through our suffering for Christ,  
keeping our confidence in God's plan strong, believing only in His truths.

Let the Joy that prevails in our witness to the world, give you all the glory.

AMEN