

Joy In Spite of Circumstances

Philippians 1

Pastor John Miller

Why should we study the book of Philippians? I believe that any Christian who is facing problems or difficulties or who might be discouraged should open the book of Philippians. Open the Bible anywhere, and it is the living, active, powerful Word of God. But especially the book of Philippians. John Wahlberg said, "The book of Philippians breathes the rare perfume of Christian joy in the context of suffering."

Paul was actually writing the book of Philippians from a prison. He was falsely accused, thrown into prison, locked up in chains and awaiting trial before Nero, yet he had overflowing joy. The theme of Philippians is joy in Jesus. It's not just joy, but it's actually joy in Jesus. Our joy is not in government. Our joy is not in man, is not in things, is not in other things that don't last. Our joy is in the unchanging, immutable love of God, in the grace of God, in the mercy of God and in our relationship to God in the person of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let me give you an outline of where we will be going through the book of Philippians, chapter by chapter. In chapter 1, we are going to see joy in spite of our circumstances. Our circumstances need not rob us of our joy, if we have a single mind and we want Christ to be glorified, either by life or whether by death.

In chapter 2, we are going to see joy in spite of people. Sometimes people can rob us of our joy. You've seen videos clips, or maybe you've been there, of people fighting over toilet paper in the stores. I encourage us, as believers, to have the joy of the Lord and let your light shine when you're standing in line waiting to get into Costco. You might just be passing out tracts and telling people about Jesus during this difficult time.

In chapter 3, we are going to see joy in spite of things. And that includes toilet paper, as well. Also joy in spite of the lack of things that we want but can't get. We can still have joy in Jesus; it's that artesian well that keeps supplying our joy.

Then in chapter 4, we are going to see the great chapter of the joy that defeats worry. Paul says, "Don't worry about anything, but pray about everything." Tell God your needs and don't forget to thank Him for His answers. And if you do this, Paul says that "The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

The book of Philippians is what is known as a "prison epistle." It is grouped along with Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. It means that Paul wrote this during his first imprisonment. He was in prison twice, and he was put in prison the first time for political reasons. He stood trial before Nero, but he was released. He was put in prison the second time for religious reasons. He was also arrested for being the leader of the Christian movement, which was under attack by the Roman government. Paul was then tried before Nero, found guilty, taken outside the city and was executed, because of his commitment to

Jesus Christ. So Philippians was written during the time of Paul's first imprisonment, when he also wrote Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon.

So joy in spite of circumstances is the theme of chapter 1. I want to note the opening greeting or salutation, in verses 1-2. "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul is the human author of this epistle, but as we know, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

The church at Philippi, as mentioned in verse 1, was started during Paul's second missionary journey. It is recorded in Acts 16, when Paul got "the Macedonian call." So Paul crossed over the Aegean Sea, he came to Philippi to the river there. Lydia was a woman there who had opened her heart and believed in Jesus. There was a slave girl who was converted. Paul and Silas were arrested and thrown into jail, and the jailer was converted. That's how the church at Philippi got started. Lydia, a wealthy business woman, the slave girl, who was demon possessed, and the Philippian jailer, a blue-collar worker, made up the foundation of this church.

This church was very near and dear to the heart of Paul. Just as Revival Christian Fellowship is near and dear to my heart. I want to use this epistle to knit our hearts together in love. The church at Philippi loved Paul, and Paul loved and appreciated them. This letter is really an appreciation and thank-you letter. It thanks the church for their support, their prayers and their love. Paul was separated from them by many miles, yet the book of Philippians showed they were knit together, as Paul sent this message of encouragement to them.

In verse 1, we see it is Paul, joined together with Timothy, whose name means "one who honors God." Paul says they are "bondservants of Jesus Christ." "Bondservants" is the word "doulos" or "slaves by choice." Paul here doesn't mention his apostleship, because he's not writing to a church that is questioning his authority or his apostleship; there is no apostleship that is under attack here. So he is writing to a church that is very near and dear to him. Instead, he labels himself and Timothy as "bondservants of Jesus Christ." You and I are slaves of Jesus Christ, as well.

Then Paul writes "to all the saints." So they are servants writing "to all the saints in Christ Jesus." "The saints" here is a reference to all Christians. If you don't understand that, you need to. Every single believer is a saint. It's like the old saying, "You're either a saint, or you ain't." Everyone who has been born again positionally has this status as a saint. And they're saints because they are "in Christ Jesus," verse 1. The moment you are saved, you are translated out of Adam and placed into Christ. You are taken out of darkness and placed into the light. You are set free in Christ, and you are also declared to be saints. It means that you are set apart in Christ Jesus and made holy positionally. They are in the city of Philippi, but their citizenship is actually in heaven.

Then Paul addresses two groups: the bishops and deacons. Another thing we need to understand is that the bishops mentioned here is a reference to pastors and elders. Bishops, pastors and elders are terms that are used interchangeably for the same office. There are only two offices in the church: that of the pastor and that of the deacon. In 1 Timothy 3, the qualifications are given for both pastors and deacons. So the word “bishop” here has the idea of an overseer. The word “elder,” that would be used as a synonym, would mean “one of spiritual maturity.” And the word “pastor” conveys one’s ministry of “shepherding” and “feeding” the flock.

The concept of shepherding actually conveys the idea of feeding. That’s why the word “pasturing” means “to shepherd” and involves feeding the sheep. I believe the pastor’s primary responsibility is to feed the sheep by teaching the Word of God.

Then the “deacons” is a reference to those who serve alongside the pastor, or the elders or the bishop, and who do the menial tasks and servanthood in the church. It is recorded in Acts 6 that the leaders of the church said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” It was the business of taking care of the widows and distributing the food. It could be a reference to them appointing deacons in the church.

In verse 2, in the greeting, Paul says, “Grace...and peace.” “Grace” is the “charis” greeting, the unmerited favor and mercy of God. “Peace” is the “shalom.” It is always in that order; grace coming before peace. The source of those two comes “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” If you want God’s grace and if you want God’s peace, it comes to us through the Person and work and a relationship with Jesus Christ.

A new section begins in verse 3 and runs through verse 11. There are three things that kept Paul thankful and joyful, in spite of his circumstances. The first is that the circumstances that Paul was in strengthened his fellowship with other believers in the Gospel. In spite of the circumstances that Paul—and we—are going through, those circumstances can strengthen our fellowship, or our “koinonia,” with one another.

In verses 3-11, Paul says, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy.” Paul was thankful and prayerful for the believers in Philippi, and notice the “joy” mentioned in this verse. I’ll point out to you what he was thankful for as we go along. Paul was thankful “...for your fellowship in the Gospel,” verse 5.

That’s what we can be thankful for today. In spite of what is going on with this corona virus in America, we can be thankful for the fellowship that we have with one another. I want to encourage you to pray for one another, to call one another, to text one another, to FaceTime with one another or with whatever means you use to connect with one another. Do that and stay connected.

So in spite of the circumstances in which Paul is in prison, separated from his beloved church in Philippi, he says that he was thankful for the “fellowship in the Gospel...”—in the “koinonia,” in their joint participation or in their pulling together in fellowship—“...from the first day...”—when Paul arrived in Philippi back in Acts 16—“...until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

There are three things here that I want to point out showing Paul's relationship to the believers. First, he was thankful and thoughtful of others, verses 3-6. During this time of difficulty and adversity, Paul was actually thankful. A thankful heart will go a long way at a time like this.

Instead of griping and complaining—and I must confess, I haven't really responded in the way I should to this crisis we are having. The idea of not meeting in the church is the last thing a preacher wants to hear about. But we need to have thankful hearts, because God is still in control. Nothing has caught God by surprise. God knows what's going on. God knows “the end from the beginning.” So we can be thankful that God is on the throne, that God is in control.

Verses 3-6 say, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” Isn't that great? Don't you want people to thank God when they think of you? I hope that when people think about me they thank God rather than curse God. I hope when people think about you they give thanks to God for your life. So he's saying in verse 3, “I have you on my mind.” And we need to have each other on our hearts and on our minds.

Then Paul prayed for them: “...always in every prayer of mine...”—he doesn't get to the prayer until we get down to verse 9—“...making request for you all with joy.” Paul was a man of prayer, and that's where the power came into Paul's ministry, because he spent time in God's Word and in prayer.

I want you to know that we're praying for you, for the people of this church, for our nation, for our world, for our leaders.

In verse 5, Paul was thankful “for your fellowship...”—or “koinonia,” which means “our joint participation together”—“...in the Gospel from the first day until now.” What Paul is referring to here is not just the fact that they fellowshiped and talked in their Christian relationship, but they also supported Paul's ministry.

Paul was a tent maker, and everywhere Paul traveled, he worked making tents to support his ministry. It's very interesting that there is only one church that Paul allowed to financially

support him. That was this one church, the church at Philippi. That's why, in chapter 4, we'll see he said he was not asking for anything, "for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound." Then Paul said, "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Paul was thanking them, because they had sent an offering to him. It came by way of a man named Epaphroditus. He brought the offering to Paul and then was sent back to Philippi. Paul was thankful for their joint participation, that they were supporting him in ministry and praying for him.

Then in verse 6, Paul makes this confident statement: "Being confident..."—and his confidence was in God—"...of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." This one verse is so amazing. Paul was confident in God. And we can be confident in God, as well.

The same thing is true of us: God intervened in our lives, He began a work and that work is a good work. It will be brought to completion on "the day of Jesus Christ." It is my belief that "the day of Jesus Christ" refers to the rapture of the church. That is when "The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." When we are "caught up...to meet the Lord," we will be complete or finished. That will lead to our glorification. We've been justified, we're being sanctified and on that day, we will be glorified. We will stand before Christ's bema seat and will be rewarded for our service.

So God, who started the work in your heart, will complete it. He doesn't start and stop. When God starts a work, He finishes the work.

Now in verses 7-8, he moves from being thankful and thoughtful of others to being loving and caring of others. In verse 3, Paul said that he had them in his mind, and in verse 7, he said, "I have you in my heart." He said, "Just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart..."—so Paul was thinking about them and caring for them—"...inasmuch as both in my chains..."—that's a reference to Paul being in prison—"...and in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection..."—or "with all his heart"—"...of Jesus Christ." Paul is thankful and thoughtful, loving and caring, and we should be, too.

I love verse 9, where he says that he is prayerful for others, verses 9-11. He is thoughtful, loving and caring and prayerful. I want you to note the things that Paul prayed for. We can use this as a pattern to use in praying for one another in these next few weeks, as we go through this time.

He first prays for them to have an abounding love. He said, "And for this I pray, that your love

may abound.” The imagery here is of a river overflowing its banks. He wants an overflowing, abounding love, that they may love one another overflowingly.

Secondly, he prayed that they would have a discerning approval. He said, “...that you may approve the things that are excellent.” Notice that: he wanted them to have an overflowing love, in knowledge, discernment and judgment. But he wanted them also to “approve the things that are excellent.”

He also wanted them to have a blameless character, verse 10. “...that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ.” The word “sincere” means “unadulterated” or “unmixed.” It has the idea of “without hypocrisy,” “without duplicity” or “without phoniness.” Paul is saying he wanted them to be genuine and authentic. It has the idea of “without wax,” because when they would create a sculpture out of stone, if they made a mistake, they would fill it in with wax. So he wanted them to be real.

Then he said he wanted them to be “without offense...”—not causing anyone to stumble—“...till the day of Christ” or “until the Lord returns.”

In verse 11, he says he wants them to bear spiritual fruit; “...being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

So these are the four things we should pray for one another: number one, abounding in our love; number two, discerning in approval or knowing the most important things. In a time like what we are going through right now, we need to prioritize our lives—what is the most valuable or important. Number three, we should pray for a blameless character. In spite of what is going on around us, we should live blameless before a watching world. Number four, bear spiritual fruit==that your life might bear fruit for the glory of God.

Notice that it is Christ Who brings us His glory and His fruit. It's His power, verse 11, and His praise that we are living for “to the glory and praise of God.”

Now in the section from verses 12-26, we have our theme: joy in spite of circumstances. Paul says, secondly, not only am I thankful in spite of my circumstances, because what is going on strengthens our fellowship, our koinonia in the Gospel, but also it helps to further the Gospel.

As much as we are discouraged right now—we can't meet as a group corporately—God can use this time, this opportunity, to further the Gospel. It could be that God knows what He is doing—and I think He does—so God is going to use this to reach more people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. More than we could ever imagine.

Verses 12-26 say, “But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the Gospel.” That's the statement I want you to mark. First there was the fellowship of the Gospel, and now there is “the furtherance of the Gospel.” Paul is saying, “What is happening in my life, my circumstances, God has used to further the Gospel. He has used it to strengthen our fellowship, and He used it to get the

Gospel out.”

Verse 13, “...so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard...”—which refers to the Praetorian, the palace where Caesar Nero lived—“...and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the Word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the Gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached.” That’s what gave Paul joy. No matter what was going on in the world or in his circumstances, as long as Christ was being preached, that brought Paul joy.

Verse 18, “And in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance...”—he’s referring to his release from prison—“...through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” Paul says that he wants them to know and understand that the things which happened to him—his arrest and imprisonment. Not only that, but Paul was put on a ship and sent to Rome in chains, and during the journey, they encountered a storm and were shipwrecked. He was gathering sticks on a beach when a snake bit him. It’s bad enough to have all these things happen to him, but then he was bitten by a snake, too! He shook the snake off in the fire and even God used that; he didn’t die, and the natives said he was a god. But many people turned to the Lord, because he was a witness of God’s power to deliver.

Paul finally arrived in Rome and was taken prisoner under house arrest. When we talk about Paul’s first imprisonment, it wasn’t in a dungeon or in a cell; it was in a rented house. It’s called “house arrest.” People could come to visit him and be with him, but he was chained to a Roman soldier. He wasn’t free to go anywhere.

Talk about being chained in your house! People say, “I’m locked in here at home!” Just thank God you don’t have a soldier chained to your wrist. You’re free to turn on the Internet and watch church from home.

So Paul said that in spite of all that has happened to him, he wanted them to know that it has been used to further the Gospel. The word “furtherance” means “pioneer advance.”

I was thinking this morning when I woke up I remember before multiple-service days in the church. When your church would grow, you would need a bigger building and then another bigger building. No one would ever think to have multiple services. I remember how revolutionary that was, that we could actually have one building, use it several times over, multiply the number of people who would be coming without building bigger facilities. I thought that was pretty great.

Then we had radio and television outreaches and the Internet. I go all the way back to cassette

tapes. They are little tapes that people used to listen to sermons on. Now God is using the Internet, and people are watching from all over the world. Last Sunday we actually had more people watching via the Internet than we did here in church. More people watching via the Internet than we normally would have on a regular Sunday. So I encourage you to tell people about our services online, so they can log on and check it out and hear the Gospel.

Paul says that it is a “pioneer advance”; it was used of cutting your way through the jungle or making a road through a dense jungle. The Gospel is being advanced in this situation. Paul believed Romans 8:28, which says, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

So Paul was saying, “I want you to know that God used my chains,” verses 13-14, “so that my chains are in Christ.” Notice that Paul didn’t say, “These lousy, stinkin’, Roman chains!” Rather, he said they are “in Christ.” Everything is “in Christ” for Paul. In other words, Paul is saying that God is in control. He’s saying, “If I’m in chains, God knows about it, and God allows it.” God has a sovereign purpose. God has a providential plan. So his chains are not outside of God’s purpose and plan.

God’s using his bonds in Christ so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard. The Praetorian guard, the soldiers, were hearing about Jesus. A whole new group of people were hearing about Jesus, because of Paul’s difficult circumstances.

Then Paul says, “And most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the Word without fear.” So not only did God use Paul’s chains to put him in contact with sinners; He also used Paul’s chains to give courage to the saints. Many of the believers are now becoming more courageous. We need to do the same thing; we need to get bolder to tell others about Jesus, in spite of our circumstances.

There were different motives for some of Paul’s critics, verses 15-18. “Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill.” Verse 16, some were preaching Christ out of contention, not sincerely. They weren’t authentic or genuine. They were supposing to add affliction to Paul’s bonds; they were doing it to actually spite Paul. Since Paul was the leader, but he was in prison, they thought it time to get attention and be in the forefront. But Paul said that he didn’t really care what their motive was, as long as they were preaching Christ. He said, “And in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.”

So Paul had this single mindset, which we also need to have. Paul said, “No matter what happens to me, no matter what is going on in the world, what’s important is that Jesus Christ is preached.” As long as Jesus is glorified, we can have joy.

God used Paul’s chains, and God even used his critics and his crisis. In verse 19, he said, “For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance...”—or his release from prison—“...through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will

be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." What a glorious truth that is!

The idea is that others would see Christ in Paul. It's like a telescope that takes something very far away and brings it very near. Some feel that God is far away, but our lives should bring God near, as they see Christ in us.

He said, "whether by life or by death." Paul is demonstrating here in this passage that we don't have to worry about life or death. God is with us in life, and He takes us to heaven in death. I'm not saying that we'll all die right now; it's very unlikely. But if we do, we go to heaven. Remember, that is our home; that's the place that Jesus prepared for us. So whether we live or die, the number one thing, in all of life's circumstances, is that Christ be magnified.

Then Paul wraps it up, in verse 21, by saying, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." The Bible says, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." What a glorious truth that is! Paul doesn't say that to die is to be forgotten; to die is to be in a place of sleep or gain. The Bible says, "In His presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

So it's all about Christ being known through Paul's chains, Christ being preached through Paul's critics and Christ being magnified in Paul's crisis. Someone put this in a poem:

"The things that happen to me
Are not by chance, I know,
But because my Father's wisdom
Has willed it to be so.
For the furtherance of the Gospel,
As part of His great plan,
God can use our disappointments
And the weaknesses of man."

Notice, beginning in verse 22, Paul says, "But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart..."—he's referring to his death—"...and be with Christ, which is far better." This is a great reference to knowing that when a Christian dies, they exodus and they depart. Where do they go? To be with Christ.

In what is going on in the world today, this is the closest we'll get to hell. But for the world, this

is the closest they'll get to heaven. So we need to remember that heaven is our final destination.

Verse 24, "Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you." What Paul is doing is selflessly saying, "I need to stay here to encourage you, to minister to you and to help you."

It reminded me that as believers, during this time of crisis in our nation, we're here for a purpose. We're here to be a blessing, to magnify God, to reach out to others, to help others; not just to think about ourselves and to hoard what we can, but to glorify God and to be a blessing to others.

Verse 25 says, "And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress..."—or "furtherance"—"...and joy of faith, that your rejoicing..."—the theme of Philippians—"...for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again."

The words "joy" or "rejoicing" are repeated about 19 times in the book of Philippians. But more often repeated than that—about 70 times—is the term "in Christ" or "in Christ Jesus" or "Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ is the source of our joy.

So in spite of our circumstances, we have joy, because joy strengthens our fellowship. In spite of our circumstances, we have joy, because God uses it to advance the Gospel, to further the good news of Jesus Christ.

And, thirdly, in spite of our circumstances, verses 27-30, we have an opportunity to defend the faith of the Gospel and to stand strong in our faith of the Gospel. "Only let your conduct be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel."

Note Paul says to "stand fast...striving together." We don't stand for our individual, subjective faith but "for the faith." We need to encourage one another not to just trust in God but to stand on His immutable Word. At a time like this, we don't give up our faith in God.

Starting at verse 28, "...and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me..."—when Paul first came to Philippi, in Acts 16, and he was arrested and put in prison—"...and now hear is in me."

It's interesting that when Paul first arrived in Philippi, he was thrown into prison. When Paul was writing to the Philippians a few years later, he was again in prison. It's kind of like, "Our pastor's in jail again!" So the Philippians saw what happened to Paul, and now they hear what happened to Paul. And Paul is basically saying that this is part and parcel of the Christian life; Christians suffer. And sometimes we suffer along with what's going on in the world.

I want you to notice that Paul is telling them here that they had an opportunity to “stand fast... striving together.” We do, as a church, as well. Right now, we have an opportunity to stand fast in the faith and to strive together in the faith of the Gospel; that we can be of “one spirit,” verse 27, and be of “one mind...for the faith of the Gospel.”

What is “the faith of the Gospel”? It is the truth that is revealed in God’s Word, when Jude wrote and said, “Contend earnestly for the faith, which was once for all delivered to the saints.” In this time of difficulty, we hang on to that faith that has been delivered to us once and for all, and we defend it.

So Paul tells them he wants them to do three things. He wants them to live consistently. Verse 27, “Let your conduct be worthy...”—or “is fitting”—“...of the Gospel of Christ.” In the midst of the storm, live consistently for Christ.

Secondly, he tells them to work cooperatively. He wanted them “striving together for the faith of the Gospel,” which is the third category.

Then he tells them to stand courageously; “and not in any way terrified by your adversaries.” There is no need for fear. The Bible says that God’s “perfect love casts out fear.” It says, “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” So live courageously and don’t be afraid.

He says, verse 29, “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” Now we like the believing part. “It’s great; I believe in Jesus and trust in Jesus.” But it also “has been granted” to us. In other words, this is a gift from God; it is a blessing from God that we can suffer for His sake. What a glorious truth that is; that we can be identified with Christ in His sufferings. Paul says, verse 30, “...having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.”

So Paul says to live consistently, work cooperatively and stand courageously. Those are words we need to hang on to at this time.

Paul had joy and a quiet confidence in the worst of circumstances. And I believe that, as Christians, we can have the joy of the Lord. When you’re standing in line waiting to get into the market to buy your supplies, let the joy of the Lord radiate from your life. You can see the fear on people’s faces. Let them see your light shining in this darkness. The darker the world gets, the brighter our light shines. So we need to shine for Jesus Christ.

How? Paul knew that his circumstances were being used by God to do these three things—let me repeat them: number one, to strengthen the believers’ fellowship in the Gospel, verse 5. And may God use our circumstances to strengthen our fellowship in the Gospel.

I’m actually quite excited to do a lot of the things I plan to do on our homepage in sharing God’s Word with you. So check out our website and tap into those.

Secondly, Paul used his circumstances to help further the Gospel. Let's get the word out that church is online, that you can tap into that. Encourage people to check that out, furthering the Gospel. Share the Gospel, as we go about our daily business.

Thirdly, Paul gave the church the opportunity to stand for the faith of the Gospel. When we say "the Gospel," it's the Gospel of Christ. It's the Gospel that says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." How glorious is that! So it is believing in Jesus Christ and trusting in Him, and in Him alone. It's turning from your sins and believing Christ, Who died on the Cross to save you from sin. So we are to get the Gospel out.

The reason Paul had joy was because he knew God was in control. Paul refers to his bonds as to those that are "in Christ." In verses 20-21, he said that "Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." The same thing is true of us.

The reason Paul had joy, in spite of his circumstances, is because Paul had his mind set on Jesus Christ. May God help us to set our hearts, our minds and our thoughts on Jesus Christ.