

Joy In Spite Of Circumstances

Philippians 1:12-21

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We're going to read Philippians 1:12 to get us started tonight. Paul says, "But I would ye should understand, brethren," an endearing term for the believers in Philippi, "that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." Paul is writing to the Philippians, and he's experiencing very difficult circumstances. Paul is actually writing with chains on his wrists. In case you didn't remember or know, the book of Philippians is one of the prison epistles of Paul—Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon are known as the prison epistles of Paul.

In that time of imprisonment was what's called his first imprisonment. Paul had two imprisonments. At the end of the book of Acts was the very first time that Paul was in prison, and I'll talk more about it in just a moment. He was under house arrest writing these words to them in jail or in prison. He's under his own hired house but has chains on his wrists and is chained to Roman soldiers, yet his heart is overflowing with joy. I want you to peek at it real quick, we'll get there in verse 18, he says, "What then? notwithstanding," or nevertheless, "every way, whether in pretence, or in truth," notice this, "Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

There's that theme of the book of Philippians, and that's really what Paul is going to say in this section. He wants them to know what is going on in his life. They're worried and concerned about him. He's in jail and says, verse 12, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel," the pioneer advance of the gospel and that Christ is preached; and since Christ is preached, I rejoice and will continue to rejoice.

I like what James Montgomery Boice said, "This passage needs to be understood by emotions as well as by the mind." In so many of the verses in Philippians, I would agree with that. It's not just studying the Greek, the grammar, or the text, it's feeling emotionally and putting yourself in Paul's prison and the emotion that he had between him and the Philippians that he loved, their love for him, and the things that Paul says. This is one of the passages that you have to feel as well as understand, and understanding gives us great insight to the person of Paul.

Paul knew, Romans 8:28, "...that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." How? Jump down again for a little peek. We're going to go back to verse 12, but notice in verses 20-21, "According to my earnest expectation," we all have expectations in our circumstances, "and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now," even in prison, in jail, "also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." That's what Paul had, a single mindset that no matter what was happening to him in his circumstances, as long as Christ was preached and Christ was glorified, it brought him great joy. When we have the same mental outlook or attitude as Christ

is preached, Christ is glorified, then we can rejoice no matter what our circumstances or how difficult they may be.

Paul's prison not only became a place for prayer, but it also becomes a pulpit for the furtherance of the gospel. Let's go back to verse 12, which kind of themes our section, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me," notice, in my King James Bible at least, that phrase "which happened" are italicized. I think it's good to have them in there, but it's not really in the manuscript. He just says, "...the things unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." What he's trying to relate there, he says, "I want you to know that my circumstances, my situation, my arrest, my imprisonment," and, by the way, Paul has now been in chains (again, you've got to feel this) for four long years. He's probably toward the end of that fourth year—two years in Jerusalem in Caesarea, sent to Rome as a prisoner by ship, and then two years languishing under house arrest in chains to be brought before Caesar Nero—and there were really no legal issues, it's just because he was a Christian and the Jews hated him. He was arrested in Jerusalem, sent to Rome, appealed to Caesar, and he's been in jail for four long years.

I don't know about you, but if I were Paul, I would be freaking out. I wouldn't be writing about the joy of the Lord, I would be writing about woe is me. I would probably start like, "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Pray for me. Help me. Deliver me. Do something for me, in Jesus' name. Amen. God bless you, you Philippians." This section is one of the most convicting, not only in the book Philippians for me personally but in all the Bible. Why? Because Paul didn't gripe, complain, get critical, didn't blame anybody, "I'm in here because of Christ. I'm here to glorify Christ. I'm here to preach Christ. It doesn't matter what happens to me as long as Christ is preached." That attitude is so hard to arrive at, that humble, complete self-forgetfulness—Christ alone, focusing on Christ.

If we can come to that same mentality, then we could actually have joy when we run out of money or our health goes bad, we struggle in other areas or things aren't what we expected or hoped to be. We all deal with false expectations—we expected to be living here or doing this or making this much money or having this many children or kids that obey and things like that. When things don't go the way we want, then, too, we lose our joy because we're looking at our circumstances rather than focusing on Christ. The mentality that Paul had is what we need if we're going to have joy in spite of our circumstances. Paul convicts me that he didn't gripe or complain.

A little footnote, we've been away from Philippians for a couple of weeks, the first eleven verses of this epistle Paul doesn't say anything about his plight; I would have started in verse 1. It takes him 12 verses to start talking about his problems. The only reason he does that is because the Philippians, who loved him, were worried and sent Epaphroditus to him with an offering, and he was supposed to bring back word on how Paul was doing. They couldn't pick up a phone and they didn't know what was going on, they couldn't FaceTime with Paul to know he was okay, so they were worried and concerned. Paul is basically writing to them about his circumstances and wants them not to be sad but to be glad because even though he's in

prison, Christ is being preached and glorified, and Paul says, "That's all that really matters."

In verse 12, Paul says, "But I would ye should understand," he's wanting to inform them about his circumstances, "that the things which happened unto me," that phrase "which happened," as I said is italicized, but he's trying to convey the idea about his circumstances, "have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel," God has used my circumstances to get the good news of Jesus Christ out to many others. The Philippians were worried about Paul and his circumstances, that's the background, so Paul says, "I want you to understand that my circumstances helped to further the gospel."

In the first eleven verses, Paul was joyful because he had fellowship with the believers in the gospel, now he's rejoicing because he sees the furtherance of the gospel, and, at the end of chapter 1, he talks about the faith of the gospel. Paul was all about the gospel, the gospel, the gospel, the gospel, the gospel. It's all about the good news of Jesus Christ, not about my comfort, my ease, or my circumstances.

Notice in verse 12, "...the things which happened," so what happened to Paul? Let me summarize it as quickly as I can. We can kind of get into it very deeply, but basically Paul had taken up an offering in the churches of Macedonia, at the end of the book of Acts, which were Gentile churches, and he collected an offering to take to Jerusalem to give to the Jewish believers there. He wanted to knit the hearts of the Gentile believers together with the Jewish believers. On his way to Jerusalem, through different prophets and prophecies over his life, God said that chains and bonds await him. The believers would weep and cry and say, "Paul, don't go. It's too dangerous. You're going to be arrested. It's going to be terrible. They hate you. The Jews are going to be hostile," and I love Paul saying, "What mean ye to weep and to cry and to try to hinder me," he said, "I'm willing not only to be bound in Jerusalem, I'm willing to die in Jerusalem."

Bible students argue over whether Paul was in the will of God by going to Jerusalem knowing that chains awaited him or whether he was out of the will of God. I personally believe that he was in the will of God and that this whole section reinforces the concept that you can be in the will of God, doing the work of God, for the glory of God, and suffer because of the world's opposition to the gospel. This is a great passage, and I'm not going to hone in too much on that theme that even godly men and women, doing God's work, can suffer persecution. The Bible says, "...all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." There's no guarantees that being in the will of God, doing the work of God, is going to immune you from the trials and tribulations and the sufferings that come into this world. Jesus said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Now, He's not talking about the great tribulation that happens after the rapture, He's not talking eschatologically, but He's talking about when we are believers in this world that's hostile to us, that we're going to be persecuted for our faith when we live godly in Christ Jesus, so the things that have happened to him.

Paul finally gets to Jerusalem, and the Jews there that were believers say, "Look, the Jews are real upset with you. They understand you've been going to Gentiles and preaching the gospel.

They're really, really bent out of shape over this," (I'm paraphrasing the text), "so if you would take a vow—shave your head, take a vow, go into the temple, do this little Jewish thing—they might be compensated or happy with what you're doing." Why Paul did that, I don't know. He knew better, but he did do that. He shaved his head, took a vow, and went into the temple.

When Paul was in the temple, someone saw him and said, "This is Paul who is preaching the gospel to the Gentiles," and started screaming and yelling. They grabbed him and started beating him causing a riot. Paul, quite often, wherever he went there was either a revival or a riot. This time it was a riot. They start tearing him apart and take him out of the temple. Paul was then rescued by the Roman soldiers. Paul, of course, tried to appeal to them, and they went crazy when he mentioned that God called him to go to the Gentiles. He was arrested by the Roman authorities, put in jail, and there was a threat against his life. They shipped him up to Caesarea, he languished there for two years, and then he made an appeal to Caesar.

Now, Paul was a Roman citizen. He was a Jew but had Roman citizenship, so he had a right to appeal to Caesar. He appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar he went. They put him on a ship. Paul's desire, Paul's expectation, Paul's dream, Paul's prayer...we' all have dreams and desires about what we want to do for God, how we want to be used by God, how we want to serve the Lord. Paul wanted to go to Rome, and from there he wanted to go to Spain and push as far west as he could in the Roman Empire before he was martyred. He didn't know the day of his martyrdom, this is still his first duress and he would be released, but he had plans, desires, ambitions, and wishes so he appealed to Caesar. He was sent to Caesar, not as a free and foot-loose, fancy-free evangelist, but as a prisoner with chains on his wrists on a ship to Rome. That's kind of interesting. You're praying, "God, send me to Rome. I want to go to Rome. I have a desire to go to Rome," and God says, "Okay, I'll have you arrested." "Well, can we fly there on an airline? Can we go a different way? Do I have to get arrested?"

Isn't it funny the ways of the Lord? His ways are not our ways, right? His ways are beyond ours. His ways are past our finding out, so God has him arrested. "Do you want to go to Rome? Okay, you're going to go to Rome. You're going to get arrested. It's gong to take two years before you're shipped there." On the way, there's a storm, and they get in a shipwreck. If it's not bad enough to be falsely accused, arrested, and in chains, the ship crashes on the island of Malta—it even gets worse, it goes from bad to worse. They finally make it to land. They're gathering sticks for a fire, and a snake jumped out of the sticks that Paul was gathering on the island there and fastened to his hand. It was a poisonous viper, and the story goes that Paul shook the snake back into the fire, which I think is pretty cool, and I think he just went on gathering sticks. The natives of the island were watching him, waiting for him to begin to go into convulsions, get sick, and die. God protected Paul, and he didn't die, so they came to the Lord and received Christ. There was a little mini revival there on the island of Malta. Again, I think that it's interesting that Paul is suffering.

Paul finally gets to Rome, makes his way to Rome, and is allowed to have his own rented home under house arrest. He wasn't in the Mamertine dungeon, as he would be for his second arrest, he's in his own hired house. Luke makes it clear in the book of Acts that he could

receive people, people could come to him, he could preach to them and interact with them, and share the good news of Jesus Christ with them. He's there in Rome preaching the gospel. That's what happened, verse 12, "...that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel."

Billy Graham said, "Comfort and prosperity have never enriched the world as adversity has done. Out of pain and problems have come the sweetest songs, the most poignant poems, the most gripping stories. Out of suffering and tears have come the greatest spirits and the most blessed lives." That's such a great statement. By the way, that statement is from a book by Billy Graham called Till Armageddon. It's a perspective on suffering. A lot of people don't know about that book, but it's an entire book written by Billy Graham on the subject of suffering with a lot of good information there. The righteous do suffer, but God is able to use it for our good, for His glory, and for the furtherance of the gospel.

Before we move on, the word "furtherance" literally means pioneer advance. It was actually used for those who would chop down the woods of the forest to create roads for the Roman armies to walk over. Rome was famous in battle for being able to get Roman soldiers from one place to another because they built the Roman roads. The word "furtherance" actually has the idea of pioneer advance. It's kind of a concept of chopping your way through the jungle to make a way to be able to move forward. Paul was talking about the advancement of the gospel. The reason he had joy in spite of his arrest in all his circumstances was because, even in his chains, God was using it to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ.

God used three tools to further the gospel, if you're taking notes. The first is Paul's chains. God used his chains, his imprisonment, to further the gospel. Let's look at verses 13-14. He says, "I want you to understand something, that what has happened has furthered the gospel," and then explains in what way, "So that my bonds in Christ," now notice, not "my bonds in Rome," but "my bonds in Christ;" not, "my bonds because of the Jewish people," but "...my bonds in Christ," God was in control, "are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; 14 And many of the brethren," here's the second reason Paul was joyful, "in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds," in my chains, in my imprisonment, "are much more bold to speak the word without fear."

This is what we call imposed restrictions. Have you ever had imposed restrictions? If you want to go somewhere or do something and you lose your job or lose your health or the door is shut, it's not opened, and you wonder what God is doing, why God isn't using you? Many times God restricts us to prepare or to use us for greater spheres of ministry. Someone said, "God used Moses' rod, God used Gideon's pitcher, God used David's sling, God used Balaam's donkey, and God used Paul's chains. Isn't that great? Especially, if God can use Balaam's donkey, there's hope for you and me. Amen? God isn't looking for great ability, He's looking for availability. God will use you if you surrender fully to Him and say, "God, I'll go where You want me to go, I'll do what You want me to do, I'll be what You want me to be, I'll say what You want me to say." Then, when He says, "Go ye northward to Barstow," you say, "Yes, Lord." You don't argue with Him and say, "I was thinking Tahiti or Bora Bora, maybe Honolulu, Hawaii. There's a real need over there." No. "I'll go wherever You want me to go. I'll do whatever You want me to

do,” then you’ll see God use you in such a marvelous and wonderful way.

Paul could’ve complained about his chains. He could’ve said, “It’s not fair.” He could’ve got angry with the Roman government, with the Jewish authorities; instead, Paul consecrated himself and his chains to God. I love that! He asked God to use them for a pioneer advance of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that’s why in verse 13 he refers to them as “my bonds,” that are in Christ. Write down 2 Timothy 2:9 where Paul says, “Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.”

How did God use Paul’s chains? Let me point out the two reasons from the text. First of all, his chains gave him contact with sinners; secondly, verse 14, his chains gave courage to the saints. The two things God did to use his chains: It gave him contact with sinners and gave courage to the saints. Look at verse 13, “So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places.” Paul wanted to go to Rome, and God sent him to Rome, under arrest as a prisoner, but God opened the door for him to be able to reach Roman soldiers and others as well that would come to Paul, in a way that he probably never even imagined. God has plans and purposes that we can never even imagine.

In Acts 28:30-31, it says that during this time, “Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,” and he was, “Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.” The soldiers were chained to Paul.

The Praetorian soldiers, this reference here to “...in all the palace, and in all other places,” is a reference to what are called the Praetorian Guard or soldiers. They were an elite group of Roman soldiers, ten thousand of them hand-picked by Nero himself. They were like the Green Beret or the Navy Seals of that time. They were highly paid and well provided for. They were the elite of the elite. Paul was chained, and every six hours they would chain a new soldier to Paul. They would rotate and work in shifts of six hours, 24/7. At that period of time that Paul was in prison, he could’ve easily at least been chained to three thousand different soldiers.

Now, think about this. You’re a Roman soldier, and you’re chained to the apostle Paul for six hours. Wow! You talk about a captive audience. “Hi! My name is Paul. Do you know Jesus?” And the soldier responds, “Oh great! Chained to a Jesus freak for six hours!” Now, I say that jokingly, they didn’t know who Jesus was. They heard about it. They heard about Christianity and the spread of Christianity, so many of them, no doubt, would have been curious.

I think another interesting thing is that Paul, chained to the Roman soldiers, also had Christians coming to meet him and he would talk to them. Guess who would listen to the conversations—the Roman soldiers. And, Paul dictated his epistles. You’re chained to this dude, and he’s writing to the Ephesians, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.” His amanuensis was writing it down, and the Roman soldier was going, “What do you mean, ‘saved by the grace of God through faith,’ can you explain that to me?” What was happening is that Roman soldiers were

getting saved.

Later in Philippians 4:21-22, Paul mentions that all those in Caesar's household send their greeting. How did these people in Caesar's household—this isn't Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas—how are they getting saved? They've been chained to the apostle Paul for six hours, so they had bumper stickers on their chariots. They were having Bible studies in Caesar's palace. All these Roman soldiers are becoming Christians, God was doing a marvelous work, and Paul saw the hand of God even in his chains. God brought him into contact with sinners.

The lesson for us is perhaps you are chained in some way and feel unable to be used by God. Maybe it's a sickbed in a hospital; maybe, just maybe, God sends you to the hospital bed because the nurse that comes in to take care of you needs to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. You say, "I can go witness to them without being in the hospital. I don't need to do that." Again, God has ways that are beyond our ways. So, instead of griping and complaining, we need to be a witness to share the good news in whatever circumstance we might be in. A door may have slammed shut; whenever God shuts a door, He opens another door. We are to be patient and wait for Him to make it clear His purpose and plan for us.

Maybe you're at home raising young children and, diaper after diaper, the world is passing you by. You think, I want to go out and serve the Lord. You are serving the Lord. God has given you your calling, your task, your job. Maybe God has set you in a cubicle somewhere in an office or a construction site and you're thinking, Why am I here? God placed you there to spread the gospel, to be a witness to Jesus Christ—the light shines brightest in the darkest places. Even though you might feel restricted or chained or your expectations haven't been fulfilled, God knows what He's doing. You need to trust Him.

The story is told of Susanna Wesley. She was the mother of John and Charles Wesley, but she also raised 19 children. Think about that. Her two sons Charles and John became great evangelists and a hymn writer, and God used her in such a wonderful way. Fanny Crosby, who has written so many marvelous hymns for the church was blinded at birth by a physician's mistake. Instead of growing bitter, she grew better, and God used her, that restriction, that unexpected situation, for the gospel to go out and for Christ to be glorified. The key is having a single mind.

Not only did Paul's chains bring him into contact with sinners, but they also gave courage and emboldened the saints when they saw Paul, verse 14. "And many of the brethren in the Lord," I didn't say how many, but that "many" is in the plural. It's in two categories, and we'll break it down. These two groups of people are, "...waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." His suffering was emboldening the carnal Christians to go out and be more evangelistic. Again, this is how God works. Persecution and suffering has never hindered the spread of the gospel. Jesus said, "...I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." We don't want to invite persecution or opposition, but we don't want to be afraid of it either because it's always been used by God to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. All the opposition that Satan brings against the church, God only turns it to use it for the

advancement and the furtherance of the gospel. They were saying, "If Paul can be emboldened in his chains, so can we be emboldened in our freedom and preach the gospel as well."

In Ephesians 6, during the same time of Paul's imprisonment, Paul asked them to pray for him. This is what he said in Ephesians 6:19-20, "And for me," pray for me, "that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." No doubt, they were praying for Paul; and Paul, in his chains, was preaching boldly and other believers were inspired by his example and started going out witnessing, preaching, and getting emboldened because Paul was suffering and preaching the gospel. We can do the same.

The Bible says in 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." In Romans 1:16, Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation." God was using Paul's suffering and his zeal for the gospel to embolden other believers. We need to think about the example that we set for others to be bold in preaching the gospel so that others can follow our example.

Notice, secondly, how Paul really had critics and opposition, yet God used that, verses 15-18, Paul's critics, so God used his chains and his enemies. Verse 15, "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife," now he talks about those that are emboldened, verse 14, to preach the gospel, but he says there's a group of "some." This is the group that I mentioned that fall into two categories. "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife," and the other group preach "...of good will," so, two groups, same gospel, truth of the gospel, but two different motives. Verse 16, "The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: 17 But the other," group, "of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel."

Verse 18, "What then? notwithstanding," nevertheless, "every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." Go back to verse 14. The "many" were divided into two groups indicated by the double usage of the word "some." Both preached the same message, but each group had different motives. What you need to understand is, he describes them here, that those who had the wrong motives had the right message, and even though they preached with the wrong motives, Paul rejoiced because they preached the right message. Listen to me very carefully. Had they preached the wrong message, Paul would not have been rejoicing. This is not the same as critiquing the doctrinal content of a false teacher and saying they're wrong, they're not preaching the truth; and the difference of somebody who is preaching the truth and maybe their motives are not right. By the way, it's pretty hard to know someone's motive because we can't read their heart. How Paul knew, I don't know. Evidently, they were people who were opposing him, but their doctrine was right, their motives were wrong.

Does that mean that we should preach the gospel with wrong motives? No. That's not what Paul is promoting. What it does say is we should preach the gospel, and we should ideally preach the gospel for the right reasons and for the right motives. Amen? Paul was focusing on

the fact that the content of their message was the gospel.

Notice those who preach with the wrong motives, verse 15, envy. It's the work of the flesh. We would translate that jealousy. Evidently, these were preachers that were threatened by Paul's popularity and they saw it as an opportunity, "Paul's in prison, so now I can get the limelight." That's a wrong motive. "Paul's in prison, so now I can be the man of the hour," and they got aggressive and went out and began to preach. Notice also, they preach out of strife, as mentioned in verse 15. It means wrangling or contention. Envy is the inward emotion, whereas strife is the outward expression.

Then they preached out of contention, verse 16. The word "contention" means to canvas for office. The actual word that's used for "contention" actually has the idea of politics. We get our word politician from it, so it means to strive for office. They were wanting the people's support. Notice also, "...not sincerely," mentioned in verse 16. In other words, their motives were not pure, authentic, or genuine, and notice they intended to aggravate Paul, verse 16, "...supposing to add affliction to my bonds."

That to me is mind blowing. "Paul's in jail! We're going to be the men of the hour. We're going to go out and take the limelight. We're going to preach and get Paul all upset at us. We're going to get Paul angry at us." Paul says, "Look, I don't really care. It doesn't matter what happens to me; as long as you preach the gospel, I'll be happy. You preach the gospel, I'm glad. I rejoice." They were thinking that they would add affliction to Paul's bonds. They weren't false teachers, but they had wrong motives. Again, this doesn't justify preaching with the wrong motives, we should preach the right message with the right motives.

Notice the preachers who had the right motives, verse 15, they preached out "...of good will." In other words, that which seems to be good. Their motives were good and, verse 17, "...of love," love for Paul, love for the lost, love for the Lord. They had the right motives. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul said, "For the love of Christ constraineth us," so when you're preaching, witnessing, or sharing, you want to do it for the right motive and out of truth, verse 18. Both the content and the motivation of their message was true, so they weren't false teachers.

What was Paul's attitude, verse 18? "...and I therein do rejoice," why? Because Christ was preached. That's the key. The key is not that I get the limelight or that I get what I want or that it goes the way I want it to go or that I get the right circumstances, the key is Christ is preached. Would to God that we as Christians had the same attitude or outlook. It doesn't matter who gets the attention, it doesn't matter who takes the lead, as long as Christ is preached. We should pray for that, work together, and rejoice in that when Christ is being preached—not get jealous, not get envious, not play politics. There is no place in the church for jockeying for position or authority. That kind of political jockeying, "Well, I want to take that ministry. I want to have that place of position." That is not only very dangerous and detrimental, it's dishonoring to God. The Bible says, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he," that is, God, "may exalt you in due time," will lift you up. There's no self-promotion or self-advancing, do all for the glory of God. Because Christ was preached, Christ was

glorified, Paul says, "...and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

The story is told about the two great evangelists, John Wesley and George Whitfield. They were British evangelists. John Wesley preached mostly in America in the early settling of America. George Whitfield preached in England. God was using them both at the same time mightily, but they didn't agree with each other theologically. They came from two different theological camps, but they both supported each other for the getting out of the gospel. Someone asked John Wesley if he expected to see George Whitfield, with whom he theologically, doctrinally disagreed with, in Heaven. John Wesley said, "No." And they said, "Why? Well, I guess you don't believe George Whitfield is a saved man." He answered, "No. I believe he's saved, but when we get to Heaven, he's going to be so close to the throne of God and I'm going to be so far away, I don't think I'll ever get a chance to see him." That's the kind of attitude that we should have about the proclamation and the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In closing, verses 19-21, God used Paul's chains, verses 13-14; God used Paul's critics, verses 15-18; and then, God used Paul's crisis, verses 19-21. These verses are so amazing. He says, "For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. 20 According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death." Paul is saying this because he's going to come before Nero and could be executed and put to death. Verse 21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain," or for me to live, Christ, and to die, gain. Paul had chains and Christ was known; Paul had critics, Christ was preached; Paul had a crisis, and Christ was magnified.

I think that verse 21 summarizes the Christian life. What is the Christian life? To live for Christ, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Go back to verse 19 for just a moment. When Paul says, "For I know that this shall turn to my salvation," he's not talking about salvation from sin. The word is used in different contexts sometimes for physical deliverance or safety. He's talking about his release. He's actually talking about, "I'm going to get out of prison," and says, "How is that going to happen? You pray for me," God answers prayer, "...and the supply of the Spirit," so in our suffering, we need to solicit the prayers of God's people, and we need to pray for those who are suffering, "...and the supply of the Spirit," I love that! Paul, in his suffering and sorrow and chains, needed their love and prayers, and he needed a dose of the Holy Ghost, "...the supply of the Spirit." Amen? Don't we need the same thing when we're "in chains" so to speak, when we're restricted, when we're hemmed in, when we're shut down. When we don't see our expectations happening, we need the prayers of God's people, and we need "...the supply of," the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

The supplication of the saints and the Spirit's supply of strength, and then he says, "According to my earnest expectation." What is it you want, Paul? What are you expecting? "...my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." When we can say the same thing, "Whether by life or whether by death, as

long as Christ is glorified," then we can rejoice in spite of our circumstances. It's not easy to get to, right? No matter what our circumstances, if Christ can be glorified.

Let me say this, and it's so very important. No matter what circumstances we may experience in life, God can and will be glorified in them. No matter what happens in your life, God can and will and wants to be glorified. Are you willing to go through the fire? Are you willing to be put in chains, to be thrown into prison, to suffer for His name? Are you willing to face the persecution and opposition of the world that God be glorified? Whatever restrictions, whatever expectations, whatever hope you have, can you narrow that down to Christ be glorified, Christ be preached? If you can, then you say, "I will rejoice," so I love that when he says, "For to me to live is Christ."

Now, if you change that, "For me to live is money, for me to die is great loss, so leave it all behind," or "For me to live is popularity, for me to die is to be forgotten," or "For me to live is possessions, I gather as much as I can, for me to die is to leave it all behind," right? "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" It profits him nothing. Paul's suffering allowed him to see that Jesus Christ is the one thing worthwhile in his life. How bout you? Sometimes God has to strip us of all the earthly props. Sometimes He has to take away our health and our wealth, sometimes even our family and our friends so that we can come to Him in utter dependence for His strength—to live for Christ, to die is gain.

Someone put it in a poem: The things that happen unto 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. Let's pray.