

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Philippians - Session 8

June 17, 2001

Chapter 1:12-18

12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. ¹⁵ It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸ 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,.

OBSERVATION - Summary of Passage

In this part of the letter, Paul is encouraging these believers by giving them a proper perspective on what has happened to him. In verse 18 he is rejoicing about his situation - not the chains - not the imprisonment, but what God is accomplishing through his situation. Specifically, Paul sees that the gospel is being advanced. Everyone he has come in contact with, including the whole palace guard, has heard about Christ. In addition, Paul's situation had also encouraged others to be bold and more outspoken in proclaiming Christ. Paul said some were even preaching Christ to stir up more trouble for him - but he was rejoicing because Christ was being proclaimed, even though not always for the right motive.

Now let's look a little closer at some of the verses and dig a little deeper. In verse 12, Paul says that his imprisonment had served to advance the gospel.

1. INTERPRETATION - What is advancing the gospel?

The word translated "advance" is the greek word "prokepe", which literally means "cut forward". It carries the idea of clearing a path of brush and weeds in order to go forward; cutting a trail. If you have ever hiked in an area with thick underbrush, you sometimes have to take a machete and literally cut your way forward. This word picture helps us to see that the going forth of the gospel is hard work, and meets resistance, and that God uses the circumstances of life to cause His agenda, the advancement of the gospel, to occur. The great commission given to us in Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus told us to *go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* As followers of Christ, this is the primary agenda in our lives. The events of our lives are designed by God to cut a path for the purpose of reaching others to make them disciples. In verse 14, Paul equates the advancement of the gospel as the courageous and fearless speaking God's word. In verse 15, he equates it with preaching Christ.

2. APPLICATION - What are events that you have experienced, or may be even experiencing now, that God may be using to advance the gospel? What are present day examples you have seen where God has used circumstances to advance the gospel? (Missionaries that were shot down). How should this principle change the way we view the circumstances of our lives?

It really becomes a question of our heart's desire. If we understand and believe that God is sovereign, and that nothing comes into our lives except by His hand and purpose, then we search for God's agenda and plan in all of life's circumstances. We should see the events of our lives as orchestrated by God to advance the gospel. The things that happen to believers are to set the stage for the proclamation of Christ in our lives. If this is our deep desire in life, to see Christ proclaimed, then we will rejoice and continue to rejoice, even in times of difficulty, loss, pain, and conflict. The loss of a job; a difficult family situation, financial loss, sickness and disease, those who oppose us; All of these things are not "good" by themselves, but all of these things can set the stage and provide the background for an effective presentation of Christ. The light of the gospel that we have as believers shines the brightest in darkness. In hard times, that is when others will see the great hope that we have because and through Christ. Our weakness emphasizes Christ's sufficiency. Also, we should see "good" times as an opportunity to advance the message of Christ. That job promotion could very well be a way God desires to fund a mission project. God gives us stability, health, and strength so that we can better serve Him and others. Whatever God is doing in your life, you should ask Him to help you see how your situation can serve to advance the gospel.

Verse 12 speaks of the advancement of the gospel.

3. INTERPRETATION What is the gospel?

The word means "good news". The gospel is all about Christ. It is the proclamation of who He is, His earthly work, His atonement and His supremacy and Lordship. The proclamation of the gospel is not merely inviting people to church, or trying to get people to live better lives, or even about what God is doing in my life. It is the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ, and is centered on His person and work. As God designs our lives to give opportunity, we need to be ready to speak this message, which means we need to know the message. We need to also make it priority to help others carry the message where we can't personally go. Remember, Paul had been rejoicing with the Philippians because of their partnership with him in taking the gospel to other peoples and places.

READ Chapter 1:19-26

19 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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² 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! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 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, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

OBSERVATION - Restate the passage

Paul again expresses his confidence that through the prayers of the Philippians and the help of the Spirit that things were working for his deliverance, either through release or through his death! Paul's desire, whether through being released, or by being martyred, is that Christ would be exalted. He then compares the two options - If he dies, he will be with Christ, and that is his desire. If he stays, he can further encourage and build up the Philippians and bring them along in their spiritual growth. This option would also bring Paul great joy. Between the two choices, he would chose to stay alive and be a help to the Philippians.

4. APPLICATION - What is our purpose for living?

We now look at what Paul's reason for living was, and seek to understand how his example should affect our thinking. Paul did not want to live a little longer so he could selfishly get a little more pleasure or satisfaction out of this life. His reason for wanting to continue to live was to see Christ exalted, and this is why he knew

he could face his adversity with great courage. The key words we have seen thus far are courage, boldness, confidence, and fearlessness. When we are living for the right reasons, we can face life with confidence and hope, knowing that God is using us for His purposes and glory. Paul saw a need to remain alive to bring along the believers in their spiritual growth and faith. That raises a question. Do we see the purpose of our lives as ministry to others? For us to be full of confidence, joy, and boldness, we need to be focused on the right purpose for our life and existence. The key is to understand that "to live is Christ, and die is gain." When our focus is outward, we are fulfilled and joyful in our lives. In contrast, self-focused lives lead to depression and discouragement. Paul was consumed with the desire to see Christ formed in those he ministered to - and as this occurred, it brought him great joy. As those Paul ministered to saw the grace of God sustaining and upholding Paul, it in turn brought them great joy. Think about it! Here is a man who in the midst of severe adversity is experiencing great joy, and causing others to experience great joy. This is what true fellowship is all about. If we sense of a lack of joy and fulfillment in life, we need to look at our focus and goal - the things that we strive for and long to see accomplished. For Paul, it was to see Christ and His message advanced in the lives of others.

5. APPLICATION - How do we view death? Do we welcome it or dread it?

Paul said in verse 23 that to depart and be with Christ is far better than living on in this life. How do we view life and our death. Is death something we welcome, or dread?

In Paul's mind, the ultimate joy was to be found in the Lord's presence. He really got excited at the prospect of being with his Savior. He had such an intimate relationship with Christ, that he could hardly wait to be with Him. Here is a statement for our consideration: If the thought of leaving this life pains us, we really need to get to know our Savior better. Our hearts should long for heaven - to be with the one who died for us - to be with the one who loved us from eternity past. I think we desperately need the Lord to do a work in our hearts concerning our affections. We need to ask God to be merciful to us for our lack of love for Jesus, and to cultivate anew that passion for Christ and His glory. We need to learn to walk more and more by faith, and less by sight; to have our eyes fixed on our future hope. *1 Cor 15:19 says "19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."* Our hope is in the Lord - and one day we will see Him as He is, in all His splendor and glory. We will fall to our knees and love and worship Him like never before! What a day that will be, when my Jesus I will see! We need to let the Spirit of God stir our hearts to long for the Savior, for that longing will compel us to do His bidding now. *Colossians 3:1-4 says it this way: Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.* Oh that God would work in our hearts that we would say with Paul, to die is gain, and that to depart and be with Christ is far better than anything or anyone in this life.

READ Chapter 1:27-30

27 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 28 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. 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for

him, ³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

OBSERVATION - Summarize the passage

Even though in verse 25, Paul indicated that he was convinced that his life would be spared, and that he would remain and continue with them, he understood that he was not omniscient. Paul is saying whether he gets to see them again or not, that they need to boldly live a life that glorifies God. He also encourages them that when they suffer for their faith, that is an honor and a gift, and a sign of God's blessing on them, and sign of God's coming judgment on the persecutors.

Verse 27 says to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ"

6. INTERPRETATION - What does it mean to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel? The Greek word for the "conduct" means live as a citizen. This carries the idea that we need to view ourselves as citizens of heaven, and live in light of our heavenly citizenship. Citizenship carries great privileges, but great responsibility as well. As we will learn in chapter 2, because our citizenship is in heaven, our responsibility is to live unselfish lives. Living a life worthy of the gospel carries the following implications: First, to live a life worthy of the gospel, we need to understand the gospel: the gospel is that Jesus Christ came to this earth, and laid aside His glory and divine privilege, and assumed the role of a servant. He came not for Himself, but to give Himself as a ransom to purchase a people chosen by His Father. He humbled Himself to the point of ultimate sacrifice, namely, death on the cross. That death paid for the penalty due us for our sins, and removed our guilt and punishment. God then raised Him from the dead, and He ascended to heaven, and now reigns as the King of the universe. Second, to live a life worthy of the gospel, we need to understand the word worthy: the word worthy means to live a life reflective, or equal to, or the with the same weight as the gospel. If we bear Christ's name, we should live a life worthy, or comparable to His name. To live a life worthy of Christ is to live unselfish lives fully committed to our Savior and one another. It is living lives where we lay aside our desires in preference to God and one another. It is doing for Christ and others what Christ did for us.

Verse 27 also talks about standing in unity, as one person.

7. APPLICATION - Why should we seek to live in harmony and unity in the body of Christ? If we live that way, there will be harmony and unity in the body of Christ, and such unity is essential because of the battle. The gospel always has been and always will be under attack. The scriptures present the Christian life as war. And we are not called to fight alone, but as a unit. To prevail, we must stand as one, contending for the faith once delivered to the saints. We need to work together as we stand unmovable as one person for the truth of the gospel. If we live selfishly and only look to ourselves, we will stand alone, and cannot stand firm; But the opposite is also true: if we choose to live worthy of the gospel, giving up our selfish desires in deference to others, we will stand courageous and strong, united by a common purpose of the defense of the faith.

Read verse 28 again. *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.*

8. INTERPRETATION How are believers standing strong in persecution a sign of destruction of the wicked?

In Matthew 16, Jesus said that on the rock of the revealed truth about Himself, which is the gospel, He would build His church, and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. When believers stand strong in the midst of persecution and suffering, it is a direct fulfillment of that promise, and a sign that the gospel will prevail, and those who oppose it will perish and lose the battle. God cannot fail, and all those who stand in

opposition to God will be judged and destroyed and brought to nothing.

Read verse 29: ²⁹ *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,* The word "granted" means a favorable gift of grace.

9. INTERPRETATION Why does Paul say that suffering for Christ, as well as believing in Christ, is a gift? When a believer suffers persecution, he is blessed because he has been so identified with Christ that those who would hate Christ if He were here today hate him. There is no inherent blessing in suffering and pain. The temporal blessing is in the close associating with Christ that points to a far greater eternal blessing that will follow. Paul yearned to be so close to Christ, that he would know the fellowship of His sufferings.

10. APPLICATION How should we view suffering for Christ? Suffering for Christ is presented as a privilege. Often our thinking is that comfort and the avoidance of pain and suffering are the ultimate good. We need to ponder this question. Are we willing to suffer for Christ and the gospel, and would we view that suffering to be a privilege or a curse?

That raises another associated question.

11. APPLICATION Why don't we boldly share the gospel with those around us? Is it because we don't want to suffer embarrassment or misunderstanding. Is it because we feel that those we speak to may think we are strange, or fanatical? Was Christ misunderstood? Did anyone think that He was mentally unstable? Was Paul ever accused of being "mad"? The answer to all of those questions is yes. We need a radical change in our thinking. As we stand together for the gospel, we need to realize that there is going to be opposition. And when the opposition comes, it is not a sign of God's disfavor. Instead, it is a sign of God's blessing. Look at Matthew 5:10-12 ¹⁰ *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom*

of heaven. ¹¹ *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.* ¹² *Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Notice, again, that the rejoicing is not in the pain and suffering, but in what the suffering is evidencing. The persecution and opposition are evidence of future blessing. Even Jesus Himself endured the cross for the joy set before Him. When we suffer for the sake of Christ and the gospel, it is a blessing because people are treating us the way as they would treat Christ if He were on the earth today.

Verse 27 says ²⁷ *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.* Paul had just said that he believed that it was better for him to stay alive to help the believers, but then says in verse 27 **WHATEVER HAPPENS;**

12. APPLICATION - How should we respond to plans that go differently than we expect? Even when God seems to speak to our hearts, and we are confident that we know His plans, sometimes things go differently than we expect, and when that happens, we still need to do the right thing and be faithful to our calling. Only God knows the future for sure, and our attitude should always be "such and such will happen if the Lord wills."

READ Philippians 2:1-4

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

OBSERVATION

Summarize the passage

Paul is calling the Philippians to unity of thinking, purpose, and spirit. He says that it is possible if they will act out of humility and putting others before themselves, and that they can do that based on the intimate relationship they have with Christ Jesus. Humility is the key of unity in the church, which is in contrast to selfish ambition and vain conceit.

INTERPRETATION - What is humility?

Humility is a state of mind. It is how we view ourselves. How aware are we that we are what we are only by the grace of God?

- Humble people realize what they are: sinners saved by grace
- Humble people realize what they can do: nothing apart from Christ
- Humble people realize what they know: not much, so they are teachable
- Humble people recognize their lack of strength, so they depend on Christ and His resources.
- Humble people realize what they deserve; nothing, which makes them content and thankful.

INTERPRETATION - What is selfish ambition and vain conceit?

Selfish ambition means self-promotion to gain a following - creating factions and strife. It carries the idea of being partisan and contentious, taking sides. Vain conceit means empty pride, self-esteem, vain glory. People who want recognition and a feeling of importance do things to promote themselves and gain a following. They can many times be people pleasers and flatterers, but their motive is always to make themselves look good. In the modern vernacular, they are politicians. We saw that this is never to be our motive.

A humble person will not be self-centered. A humble person realizes that the world doesn't revolve around him. Listen to yourself when you converse with others. Does everything you say relate to you or your job or your family? Do you take a sincere interest in others and their lives and families and joys and problems? In our relationships, are we there to give as well as take? An outward demonstration of Christ-likeness is when we are sincerely interested in the well-being of others, and not just ourselves. A humble person recognizes the privilege and blessing in giving as well as receiving. Are we transparent in our relationships? A humble person will make himself vulnerable, and take the risk of being hurt for the sake of edifying another. True fellowship and unity will only thrive in an atmosphere of humility.

INTERPRETATION: What is the relationship of humility and unity in the body of Christ? Humility paves the way to fulfill the commandment in chapter 2. To be:

- Like-minded - literally means to think the same way; think the same thing

Same love - love for each one without respect of persons

- One in spirit and purpose - having the same desires, goals, and affections

We are called as members of the Lord's church, to have the same goals, affections, and desires. God has provided the means to accomplish this goal. Eph 4:11 states that God has provided apostles and prophets (their teaching through the New Testament) and evangelists, pastors, and teachers (ministry leadership) for the equipping and building up of His people - the goal being in verse 13 - unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God - the fullness of Christ.

What are the divine resources that enable us to fulfill this calling to unity? We love Him, and others, because He first loved us; The idea expressed here is that this close relationship we have with Christ constrains and compels us to love one another as we are loved. God empowers what He commands. A command in scripture is the same as a promise. We can humbly serve one another and experience unity based on the great love, fellowship, and assistance that we receive from God through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

READ Chapter 2:5-11

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In this call to humility, Paul now turns our attention to the perfect example of servant-hood and humility, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. This passage of scripture is the most complete teaching on Christ becoming man. As we meditate and think about what Christ did, it will strengthen and motivate us to be better servants and bring more glory to Him by imitating His example.

INTERPRETATION What did Christ leave to come to earth as a man?

We read Hebrews 1, John 1, John 17, and Colossians 1 and discovered the following:

Christ was:

- Heir of all things
- Made the universe
- Radiance of God's glory
- Exact representation of His being
- Sustainer of all things

- At the right hand of God
- Much superior to angels
- The Father's Son
- Worshipped by angels
- Rules from an eternal throne
- Laid the earth's foundations, heavens are works of His hands
- Eternal, not temporal like the creation
- With God - Is God
- All life from Him
- At the Father's side
- Authority over all people
- Perfect image of God
- Preeminent over all creation
- All created by Him and for Him
- Holds all things together

The Son of God in eternity past, was in perfect communion and fellowship with His Father through the Spirit. He is the full expression of the Father's radiance and glory - called the image of God, the exact substance of God - literally God Himself. All things were made by Him - all that exists came through the Son, and He also sustains, or holds all things together. He is truly the King of creation, and rightfully so, because He is the creator, and all creation was made for Him.

Then we considered Christ's humanity. When the Son of God came to earth, He did not leave His deity behind, but He certainly veiled the glory He had with His Father. He is the essence of God, which is spirit, and became the essence of man, which is flesh. He was no longer omnipresent, but limited to a body of flesh. He no longer fully expressed His authority over creation on a moment-by-moment basis, though there were many times that this glory was revealed, e.g. the stilling of the storm, the resurrection of Lazarus, the turning water to wine, the multiplication of the fish and loaves, the healing of the blind man. As He walked upon this earth, He was tired. He was tempted, with such things as hunger, and pride, and selfishness, yet without sin. He was grieved, and mourned. We also considered His humiliation: He was despised. He was mocked. He was hated. He was ridiculed. He was misunderstood. He was forsaken. He was betrayed. He was mistreated. He was spit upon. He was cursed. This One, the creator of the universe, the sustainer of all life, the One who is the exact replica of the eternal God, and perfect expression of deity, willingly suffered these things - no one forced Him to do anything. From a position of perfect authority and with the right to do anything with creation, because He owned it all, He chose to come and serve. What did He leave - the very glory and splendor of the right hand of God.

We then looked at why He did this. Why did He leave all of this, of His own choice and volition. It was love for His Father. It was to redeem the ones that His Father had chosen and given to Him. It was to purchase a

people for the expression of the glory of God. Why did Christ die? Certainly because He loved us - but that love is ultimately an expression of the love among the Father, Son, and Spirit. Our redemption is an expression of the Son's love for the Father and the Father's love for the Son in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. And for His obedience and submission to the Father's will, He will forever be the exalted and glorified One - King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the absolute Sovereign over all. Through Christ's obedience and humility, He brings even more honor and glory to God as He is given the name above every name. All creation will look on the lamb that was slain and cry Worthy is the Lamb to receive honor, and glory, and power. And all will acknowledge Him one day. The redeemed acknowledge it now; the unsaved will confess it later. Those that have bowed the knee now will bring glory to God through their salvation, and those who have not bowed in submission will bring glory to God through their judgement.

APPLICATION How can this admonition motivate us to follow Christ in humility and service? So this is the point of these verses - that we should have the same attitude that Jesus Christ had when He came to this earth. We need to set aside any privilege and rights and comforts that we may have, and become a servant - a bondsman, to one another. In so doing, we are expressing the nature of our Savior. Jesus is truly expressed in our lives when we respond and are like Him. He laid aside His rights to become a servant to bring greater glory to His Father by redeeming a people for the praise of His glory. When we lay aside our selfishness for others, we pave the way for more glory to be given to our God. To be able to walk in the service and humility that we are called to, we need a motivation stronger than human sentimentality and compassion. Jesus gave Himself because He loved us, to be sure, but it was for the joy set before Him. He saved us to bring glory and honor to His Father, and His Father gave us to His Son as an expression of His love and glory. In the same way, we need to serve others because we love them, but ultimately to bring glory to the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Only this motivation will be strong enough to carry us through the rough times when our service and sacrifice is ignored or even despised by others.