

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Philippians - Session 3

April 29, 2001

I. READ 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.

1. What is Paul communicating in this part of his 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.

2. Specifically, what does Paul see God doing as a result of his situation?

Paul sees that the gospel is being advanced. Specifically, 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.

3. In the circumstances of life that come our way, both "good" and "bad", what can we learn from Paul's example and apply to 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.

4. In verse 12, what does "advance the gospel" mean?

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. The great commission given to us in Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus says ¹⁸ *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* 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.

5. 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 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.

6. What difficulties was Paul facing and what was his attitude?

He was imprisoned. He had those who were envious of him and trying to cause trouble for him. He was glad that the gospel was being preached, even for wrong motives. This passage teaches us that it is possible to do an outwardly good thing for the wrong motive. The two motives that are given for preaching are love vs. selfish ambition. Verse 18 shows that Paul chose to rejoice in these adverse circumstances, based on his perspective that God had appointed these things for His own purposes. Verse 16 teaches us that Paul saw that God had set him in this situation, actually that he had been appointed to this place to defend the gospel.

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.

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! His 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.

6. What did Paul believe was the reason to remain alive? How should his example 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 living was to see Christ exalted, and his expectation was that he would face his adversity courageously for that reason. 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 that he needed to remain alive to bring along the believers in their growth (progress) and faith. Do we see the purpose of our lives as ministry to others? For us to live a life 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." This is what Paul meant when he said ²⁰ *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*" We are legally dead to sin, e.g. we died with Christ. Consequently, we are called to die daily to a life of living selfishly, and instead, are to live our life for the glory of Christ and His message, which is the gospel. Verses 25 and 26 show us that the source of our joy is in seeing God's work of grace taking place in one another. Again, when our focus is outward, we are fulfilled and joyful in our lives. 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 brought them great joy. Think about it! Here is a man who in the midst of adversity, is experiencing great joy, and causing others to experience great joy. This is what true fellowship is all about.

7. Paul said in vs 23 that to depart and be with Christ is far better than living on in this life. Discuss how we view this life vs. dying. 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. I know for myself, that I have accepted substitutes; the things of this world, that may not be evil within themselves, can become idols. If the thought of leaving this life pains us, we really need to get to know our Savior better. Just as we pine for our sweethearts, 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. Oh beloved, 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. We need to learn to walk 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.*" No beloved, 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.

