

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

May 15, 2024

Series - The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul

The Prison Epistles

The Letter to the Philippians – The Joy of Faith

Text - Philippians 1:12 – *“The Furtherance of the Gospel”*

Congregational Reading – Philippians 1:19 - 21

Two verses from Philippians that particularly support our theme are found in Philippians 1:25 and 26. Paul states in the preceding verses that he would rather go to Heaven, but the Lord had called him to continue to serve on earth, and then he states:

*“And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and **joy of faith**; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.”* (Philippians 1:25-26)

Notice that phrase – “joy of faith” – We have taken that phrase for our title to this series of messages from Philippians.

Similar verses from Philippians:

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.” (Philippians 3:1)

“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.” (Philippians 4:4)

You get the idea from this letter that Christians should be a happy, “always rejoicing” people.

Review of Introduction to Philippians

Philippians is one of four New Testament letters that are known as “The Prison Epistles” because they were written while Paul was under a sort of house arrest, awaiting his trial at Rome. He was falsely arrested in Jerusalem basically because he was a preacher of the gospel of Christ.

Two very important historical events that occurred in Philippi were the salvation of Lydia and her family, and the Philippian jailor and his family. You might also recall that Paul spent a night in jail there in Philippi, where he and Silas were beaten, but then sang praises to the Lord from their prison cell.

This letter is unique among Paul’s letters to churches. Paul had a great relationship with this church. He loved them and they loved him. This will prove very evident as we study the epistle. There is very little correction given here, but mostly encouragement.

We introduced the letter last week by looking into the first 11 verses. There we saw that Paul extended his greeting to the church in the first two verses and expressed his gratitude to them for their faithfulness to the Lord and for their support of him personally in verses 3 - 8. He also shared his expectations for them in vs. 9 – 11.

Introduction To This Message (Philippians 1:12a)

"But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me..."

(Philippians 1:12a)

In the passage that we are dealing with this morning, Paul will explain a little bit about his present dilemma of being incarcerated in Rome.

In verse 12, Paul refers to the things that happened to him. Paul had a lot of things happen to him during his ministry. His second recorded letter to the Church at Corinth reveals just some of the bad experiences Paul had while travelling the world preaching the gospel.

"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, [Note – one of the times Paul was put in prison was in Philippi – see Acts 16] in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." (2 Corinthians 11:23-27)

In a general way, Paul could be referring to all these experiences in Philippians chapter one, but I believe that he is more likely specifically referring to his recent arrest in Jerusalem, which was followed by a couple of hearings before the governors of Judaea in Caesarea, and ultimately resulted in his transport to Rome where he was awaiting a hearing with Caesar.

Paul was accused by the religious leaders in Jerusalem of bringing a Gentile into the Temple, which was a very serious crime that even the Roman government took seriously. Paul was innocent of these charges, and eventually would be released because there was absolutely no evidence to convict him; but this ordeal cost Paul his freedom for several years while he waited for the government to sort it all out.

In this passage, Paul does not rehearse these events to the Philippians, but he will address the reasons why God allowed them to happen.

In every "bad situation" there will be good that will come out of it.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

This morning, we look at the positive side of Paul's negative situation, and perhaps we will learn some principles that will help us to see the light at the end of the tunnel of our own bad experiences.

I. God's Gospel Was Being Preached (vs. 12 – 18)

"But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;" (Philippians 1:12)

Illustration – John Witcraft – recently went home to be with the Lord after his battle with cancer. Cancer is not a good thing; sickness is not a good thing; but when “bad things” open up doors for the gospel to be preached, then the “bad thing” becomes a tool for a good thing to take place. Many people trusted Christ as Saviour because of John's sickness, and many more people were saved as a result of John's death.

I don't know what bad thing you are going through now, but maybe an opportunity to preach the gospel to a lost soul will present itself through your situation.

The word “furtherance” has the idea of taking the gospel beyond where it had previously gone.

Preaching Point – God allows “bad things” to happen in the life of his children because it is through those things that God can grow you beyond where you were previously; and through your growth, He can then take the gospel further.

Note – resist the temptation to gripe and complain about your situation, because God may just be using it to do something wonderful in your life, or perhaps in the life of someone else.

Notice v. 13:

"So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places;"
(Philippians 1:13)

The news of Paul's arrest had travelled all over the Roman Empire. The guards that were responsible for him, as well as many others in Caesar's household had heard the gospel because of Paul's imprisonment.

"All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household." (Philippians 4:22)

Had Paul not been arrested, the gospel would not have been preached to Claudius Lysius, Felix, Festus, Herod, the centurion that brought him to Rome, the shipmates and other prisoners, his guards, and all of the other people that he came in contact within Rome.

Notice also, in v. 14, that more people were emboldened to preach because of what happened to Paul:

"And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." (Philippians 1:14)

Bad things will sometimes get God's people fired up. Most Christians are asleep in complacency, but let something bad happen, and they will awake and stand for the truth. Persecution is intended to silence the gospel, but it has an opposite effect. Prosperity does far more harm to the furtherance of the gospel than persecution does. God's people wake up when persecution comes, and when they are awake, they start talking to the lost about the Lord.

Notice also that Paul's enemies were talking about his arrest:

"Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will:" (Philippians 1:15)

"The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds:" (Philippians 1:16)

"But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel." (Philippians 1:17)

"What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." (Philippians 1:18)

Whether it was Paul's enemies or friends, people were talking about Paul, and even more importantly, they were talking about Paul's Christ.

Illustration – when Harold Camping was predicting his end of the world dates, most people were laughing at him; but it did start a conversation about the Lord. Harold Camping was clearly wrong, but I suspect it got many people to think about their eternal destiny.

II. God's People Were Praying (v. 19)

"For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ," (Philippians 1:19)

Anything that gets God's people praying is not a bad thing but a good thing. Prayer is the connection or conduit between the temporal and the eternal, linking a finite man with an infinite God.

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James 5:16)

Illustrations:

When we pray, remember:

1. The love of God that wants the best for us.
2. The wisdom of God that knows what is best for us.
3. The power of God that can accomplish it.

(William Barclay – Prodigals and Those Who Love)

While very ill, John Knox, the founder of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, called to his wife and said, "Read me that Scripture where I first cast my anchor." After he listened to the beautiful prayer of Jesus recorded in John 17, he seemed to forget his weakness. He began to pray, interceding earnestly for his fellowmen. He prayed for the ungodly who had thus far rejected the gospel. He pleaded on behalf of people who had been recently converted. And he requested protection for the Lord's servants, many of whom were facing persecution. As Knox prayed, his spirit went Home to be with the Lord. The man of whom Queen Mary had said, "I fear his prayers more than I do the armies of my enemies," ministered through prayer until the moment of his death. (*Our Daily Bread*. April 11)

"I had rather stand against the cannons of the wicked than against the prayers of the righteous."
(Thomas Lye)

"The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel." (Thomas Watson)

III. God's Glory Ultimately Would Be Perceived (vs. 20 – 21)

"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." (Philippians 1:20)

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21)

Paul understood something that few of us do. He knew that his life (or death) was just a means for God to be glorified (or magnified). Too many of us have it backwards. We subconsciously think that God exists to give us our desires, and that His universe revolves around us.

If you can somehow see that your "bad situation" is ultimately going to advance God's agenda, then you will also be able to see the good in it, and even be capable of rejoicing in it.

Conclusion

Turn to Acts 16

These Philippians knew that Paul was not just “blowing smoke” here. They had witnessed first-hand his rejoicing at a “bad situation”.

In acts 16 we see that Paul and Silas had arrived in Philippi and had already witnessed God doing some wonderful things. First Lydia and her family were gloriously saved, and then a woman who was possessed with a “spirit of divination” had the devil that was in her cast out, and she too had trusted the Lord Jesus as her Saviour.

Of course, not everyone was happy at the revival that was taking place. Many of God’s enemies rose up to put a stop to it.

Look at v. 22

"And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks." (Acts 16:22-24)

This was one of those “bad situations” in Paul’s life.

But what did he and Silas do:

"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." (Acts 16:25)

They prayed

They praised

And ultimately they were given an opportunity to preach.

And if you were to continue reading the story, you would see that God was glorified, and the gospel was furthered when the jailor and his family were saved.

What “bad situation” are you going through right now? Why not, instead of complaining, look for the good thing that God is going to do through it.

Why did these things happen to Paul, and why do sometimes “bad things” happen to you and I? It is because they further the gospel, and they can be used as a marvelous tool to glorify God.