

# Christ is Preached – *Rejoice!*

Philippians 1:12-18

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The apostle Paul spent the first 11 verses of Philippians thanking God for those precious believers and letting them know how much he longed for them and how he had them in his heart. He expressed his confidence in them. He offered up a sincere prayer in vv. 9-11 for their growth in Christ. Then in verse 12 he began to tell them a little about himself. It had been four years since they had seen Paul. They had heard second-hand about some of the things that had happened to him and they were anxious for his welfare. They did not know exactly what his situation was and desperately wanted to know what was going on and whether he was all right. Was he still in prison? Had his trial come up yet? Maybe he had already become a martyr for the faith. They had no way of knowing for sure.

You can imagine how these believers felt when at last news arrived from Rome in the form of a letter written by Paul himself. They probably skimmed over the first 11 verses and hurried through them until they got to verse 12 where Paul told them about himself. He wrote to reassure them and to share his joy with them. He said:

## **READ – Philippians 1:12-18**

I believe that this portion of Scripture is also meant to reassure us today in our walk with God and to cause us to rejoice. We too face various kinds of hardship and trials. We also suffer and go through things that leave us downhearted and discouraged. God wants to lift us up in the midst of our affliction and to learn to rejoice in one thing above all others – He wants us to rejoice when Christ is preached! As we study this passage, we will look at three reasons why Paul could rejoice and why we too can rejoice in our sufferings.

Today we will look at three things that happened in Paul's situation:

1) FURTHER ADVANCE, 2) MORE BOLDNESS, 3) FRIENDLY FIRE

First:

### **I. FURTHER ADVANCE**

When we as believers undergo trials, we tend to view those trials as obstacles to a happy life. Trials are seen as hindrances to joy. And of course they are hindrances to joy – if our joy is sought in pleasant circumstances. But as Paul shows us, we can rejoice even in unpleasant circumstances if our heart is set on the kingdom of God and on the gospel of Christ. In the Christian life, joy is not something we are to seek directly. Christ taught that when you try to save your life you end up losing it. Joy comes indirectly to those who are willing to lose their lives for Christ and for the sake of the gospel. That is exactly the way the apostle Paul lived his life and the way we should live our lives too.

The Philippians were tempted to lose their joy because Paul was in prison. Paul said to them, **“I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.”** We need to remember that the things that happened to Paul were very different from what he had planned for himself. Paul had certainly planned to take the gospel to Rome, but he had definitely not planned to go as a prisoner. At the time, Paul didn't know whether he would ever become free again. But one thing he did know – that rather than hindering the preaching of the gospel, his imprisonment turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.

That word furtherance means **“to increase; to make progress.”** The gospel is furthered in two ways. It is advanced when it is proclaimed to more and more people, and it is advanced when increasing numbers respond to it with

faith. Jesus gave the command to “**go into all the world and preach the gospel.**” Also, Jesus said, “**make disciple of all nations.**” Paul had wanted to go to Rome and preach. To Rome he went and he was able to preach in Caesar’s house, which he would not have been able to do if he had not been put in prison. Disciples were being made and many of them were from the palace guard. At some time Paul must have wondered why it was taking so long for him to come to trial and to be set free. He was innocent of all charges and did not deserve to be in chains. Finally, he realized that God had brought him by way of his imprisonment for this very reason – that those who were in authority in Rome would hear the message of the good news about Christ!

The gospel made its way through the entire praetorian guard, which at that time was somewhere in the range of 9,000-16,000 men. They were assigned to the emperor’s palace. Paul said that “**the whole palace guard**” heard the truth. And “**all the rest**” – all the rest who happened to live or work in the palace. What an opportunity and what a strategic place for the gospel to take root! At the end of this epistle Paul could write in Philippians 4:22, “**All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household.**” Think of this in terms of our own day. In all our church planting strategizing today, I don’t think anyone could ever imagine targeting the White House as a place to plant a new church! And remember that in Paul’s day the soldiers and others in Caesar’s household were all pagans and had no Christian background at all.

Paul said that it was evident to the guards and all the rest that his chains were “**in Christ.**” That is, first of all, he was a prisoner for the sake of Christ. He was not really a criminal – just a preacher – a preacher of Christ. He had been arrested in the temple in Jerusalem because he preached Christ and the

resurrection there. That initial arrest led to a string of hearings and finally to his appeal to Caesar, which in the providence of God landed him in Rome. And thus the second meaning of that phrase “**chains in Christ**” has to do with the fact that Paul’s imprisonment was God’s doing. He recognized that God had *ordained his chains*. It was not the Jews and it was not the Romans who put him in prison – it was the Lord who did it.

Is that the way you look at your own trials? Can you say “**God has ordained my chains**” and that He has ordained them for my good? But here we need to ask a further question – when Romans 8:28 says that God makes “**all things work together for good**” what is the “**good**” that he refers to? In the context of that verse in Romans eight Paul is talking about our being conformed to the image of God’s Son. In context of Philippians chapter one he is talking about the furtherance of the gospel. These are the kinds of things we need to view as “**the good**” that God is working through our trials. If you look at your trials only as obstacles, then you need to put on the lenses of God’s purpose and providence and learn to see them differently. As in Paul’s case, God can use your troubles to further the gospel also. As a Christian, I am going to assume here that you do desire to further the gospel. Perhaps the furthering of the gospel needs to become much more of a central focus in your life. When it does, then you will view your trials differently.

Dr. James Boice made a great application here of our passage to those today who do not have the freedom they would like to preach the gospel. We all have hindrances and obstacles in our lives to the proclamation of the gospel. Boice said, “**Paul was chained to a prison room. You may have chains of your own. You may be tied to a desk when you would like to be out in more direct Christian service. If you are a woman, you may be tied to a home, especially when the children are young and need constant care. You may be tied to a sick bed and may never see beyond your hospital room. Or you**

**may be an invalid. This should not be a cause for discouragement. If you are in circumstances like these, this has been given you by God and can be used by Him. Dozens of people come by your desk, your kitchen sink, or your hospital bed. And you can bear a witness to them. If you do, God will bless your efforts. You will see spiritual fruit. And what is more, it will entirely change the way you look at your limitations, whatever their cause.”**

The next thing we see in Paul’s situation is:

## **II. MORE BOLDNESS**

Paul came to realize that his sufferings resulted in the furtherance of the gospel. Everyone knew that his chains were in Christ. But this also had an effect on other believers. Paul said, **“And most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”** Whether you realize it or not, the kind of life you live has an effect on other believers. Have you ever noticed that if one Christian takes liberties in a certain area, that other Christians tend to follow and take those liberties also? If one believer is slack in their walk with God or in church attendance, then it tends to give others an excuse to do the same.

On the other hand, whenever a Christian is on fire for Christ it can have a very positive effect on other believers. That is what happened with Paul. Christians around him saw that he was sold out for the Lord and was willing to suffer for Christ. He was even willing to go to prison for the sake of Christ. That fact caused others to realize that the Lord Jesus Christ must be worthy of great sacrifice. **Jesus must be a wonderful Savior if Paul was willing to suffer so much for His name’s sake.** It made them more bold to speak the word without fear. Most Christians are a bit shy or fearful when it comes to witnessing for Christ. But sometimes all it takes is a powerful example to make them bold and courageous for the Lord.

We have seen this in our own church haven't we? We've never met Mark Cahill, but we have heard his messages and read his book. He is very bold for the Lord and is willing to go anywhere and talk to anyone about Christ. His boldness is contagious. Many of us became inspired by his example to go out a witness like we had not done before. May I suggest that we are always in need of new examples for our faith? But where will we find these examples? One way is to read books about missionaries and other believers who were bold in their witness. They will inspire us to be like them. There are many great Christian biographies out there to read. And of course there are people that you and I know that are already bold for the Lord. Spend time with these people and learn from them. And, of course, strive to be such an example yourself. Step out in faith and lead the way and others will follow. Be bold for Christ!

Let's look now at the last part of Paul's situation. I call this section in vv.15-18:  
**III. FRIENDLY FIRE**

In verse 15 Paul said, **“Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will.”** There were times it seemed like everyone was against the apostle Paul. The Jews hated him and wanted him dead. The Romans held him in prison without a valid reason. Here in our passage we read about other Christians who actually wanted to add to Paul's sufferings. Verse 16 says, **“The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains.”** We often idealize the early church and we romanticize what we think were the good ole days. But everything in the early church was not rosy. There were some serious problems in the church. Other believers were trying to create more suffering for the apostle Paul.

Who would dare do such a thing? Who were these people? Some commentators have argued that they were either non-believers or Judaizers who preached another gospel. But here Paul says explicitly that they were preaching Christ. They were proclaiming the true gospel and not a false one. When the Judaizers came along in Galatia they preached another gospel – a gospel that added works to salvation. In Galatians chapter one Paul wrote, referring to them that **“if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”** It is clear that those who preached Christ in Rome were not preaching a false gospel. Otherwise Paul could not have said in verse 18 that he rejoiced that Christ was being preached by them.

If these preachers were true Christians and they were preaching the true gospel, why would they do so in order to cause Paul more trouble? The short answer is that we don't really know why they did what they did. They were not *anti-Christ*, but they were *anti-Paul*. This shows that it is possible to preach Christ or bear witness of Christ with wrong motives. Their attitude was characterized by strife and envy. They were full of selfish ambition. They were gung-ho about their faith and did not care if they shot down some of their own soldiers in battle. They were probably promoting the interests of their own party rather than the entire church of Christ.

Recently another **“friendly fire”** incident regarding our troops in Afghanistan has come up in the news. It is always a sad thing to hear about one of our own troops being shot down by a fellow soldier. It has been said that the church often shoots its wounded. There is way too much **“friendly fire”** among God's people. There are many Christians today who are jealous and envious of the gifts and prominence of others. There is much strife in many local churches

and a struggle for power. Some believers don't think they are doing God's work unless they are fighting someone else, even other Bible believing Christians. Of course there is a time to fight and to stand for the truth. There is a time to condemn heresy and false doctrine. But it is never right to let envy, strife and partisanship dominate the church.

The effects of such strife can be devastating. For example, did you know that Paul very likely lost his life as the result of the trouble caused by the troublemaking Christians in Rome? That's what Dr. James Boice thought. He said, **"There is very little information from the early Church age about the death of Paul and the things that led up to it, but such information as exists points to this conclusion: envy led some Christians to denounce Paul and, as a result of their denunciation, Paul and perhaps others also were presumably executed under Nero."**

In A.D. 90 a letter was written by Clement to believers in Corinth. In that letter Clement warned them about the negative effects of jealousy, which, he said, has always resulted in suffering and death among God's people. He brought out several examples in the Old Testament to prove his point. There was Joseph and his brothers, and also Moses, David and Saul. Then in that letter Clement spoke of the apostle Paul. He said, **"By reason of jealousy and strife Paul by his example pointed out the prize of patient endurance... and when he had borne his testimony before the rulers... he departed from the world and went to heaven."** In some way, therefore, it seems that jealousy among Christians contributed to Paul's execution.

How did Paul respond to those who stirred up trouble for him? Of course he did not hesitate to mention their sin here in this letter. In that way he was giving a subtle rebuke to these men. He also made sure to give praise to those who were preaching the gospel with sincere motives. In verse 17 he said that there were others who proclaimed Christ, **“out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.”** In any church where there is strife, it is all too easy to focus only on the troublemakers. But the ones who continue to serve Christ faithfully need to be recognized. They can easily be forgotten when there is trouble in the church. May I take the time now to thank each and every one of you who have continued to serve Christ quietly and faithfully here in this church? Sometimes problems and difficulties can be distracting, but you have stayed the course and have kept proclaiming Christ and serving Him. I am thankful for you.

Paul’s ultimate reaction to those who caused him trouble is found in verse 18. He said, **“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.”** Paul’s heart was in the right place. He saw that the kingdom of God was larger than himself and his ministry. He was thankful that even when done with wrong motives, (and who of us ever serve Christ with completely pure motives?) he could rejoice that Christ was being preached. What a large heart Paul had! **“Let me suffer and be in pain. Let them add affliction to my chains. So what! Christ is being preached and I am happy about that!”**

Paul is such an example to us. We too need to rejoice whenever Christ is truly preached. We need to rejoice, no matter what they may say about us or our church. In other words, Christ and His kingdom must come before self. God’s

sovereign purposes will often include our suffering for the gospel. He will work all these things together to build His church on earth.

Dr. C.N. Wilburn is professor of Church History and Theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. In a recent interview, he talked about what class he enjoyed teaching the most. I'll close with what he said in the interview: **“If I were forced to say which class is my favorite, I’d refuse. It is so hard to say. The Presbyterian history course is certainly dear to me. I love rehearsing our heritage and turning the students attention to some of the notable names, theological contributions, and events. From our Scottish fathers—too numerous to name here—to our American paragons, I trace the good, the bad, and the ugly. In the end, we learn all over to appreciate the sovereign purposes of our Triune God and His love for His Church, which is the only reason ‘there shall be always a Church on earth.’”**