

Joy in Spite of Trouble

Philippians 1:12-14

It's our joy this morning, in our study of God's Word, to return to Philippians chapter 1. We're going to launch into a brand-new paragraph of thought in Paul's writing, verses 12-26. The theme of this section is "The Joy of Ministry".

Paul is a wonderful example of spiritual maturity. **A person's spiritual maturity can be gauged by the breaking point of their joy.** You can find out how mature you are in the Lord, how Spirit-controlled you are by finding the breaking point where joy is lost to bitterness, negativity, and a critical spirit.

We know that Joy is a gift for the believer. God is the source of our joy, and the Spirit is the One who produces our joy according to Galatians 5. Because of this truth, we are commanded to rejoice always, at all times, in all circumstances, as the Spirit leads our lives. There should be no point in the life of a believer where joy is forfeited to bitterness, negativity, or a critical spirit because of something isn't the way we'd like them to be.

There's only one justification for the loss of joy, and that is sin. When you have fallen into sin, we cry out with the psalmist, "**Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.**" But nothing short of sin should steal our joy, certainly not circumstances.

Does this mean our lives are void of trouble? NO! We should expect trouble and we ought to expect difficult circumstances. Jesus said in **John 16:33b (ESV)** **In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.**"

James said that trouble comes in order to make you perfect. God has a divine purpose, so expect it and expect that God has a purpose for it which is good.

Paul becomes for us a larger-than-life model of this because he is a man whose joy knew no breaking point. His present circumstance as he writes this epistle of Joy is that he is a prisoner in Rome. For a number of years he had longed to go to Rome. In **Romans 1** he said, "**I am ready to come to Rome and preach the gospel.**"

However, when he arrived, it is clear that he was put in conditions which he would not have designed for himself. When he desired to go to Rome, according to **Romans 1:10**, he said, "**I hope to have a prosperous journey to come to you.**" But that's not the way it worked out. He didn't come in a prosperous way; he came as a prisoner. And the journey was not without its tremendous difficulty because the ship he was on was wrecked, and he had to swim for his life at the end.

• **Paul's Journey to Rome**

The record of this whole scenario is given to us in **Acts Chapter 21** through **Chapter 28**. The whole ordeal began in **Acts 21:17**.

Paul came back to Jerusalem from his third missionary journey and wanting still to affirm himself to the Jewish people as one who loved them and who was true to that which was true in Judaism, he went to the temple to carry out a ceremony with another man.

When he reached the temple he was immediately set upon by a **wild mob** who accused him of speaking against the Law and against the Word of God and against the temple. And they would have stoned him on the spot except that he was rescued by those who took him to prison.

He was in prison not so much as punishment for anything he had done, but as protection for what the crowd might do to him because they were so hostile against him for preaching the gospel of the very Christ that had been executed as a criminal.

We find him in Acts 22 incarcerated. The Romans are afraid to let him go due to the crowd's hostility towards Paul. They're afraid of the political backlash of having Paul let loose in their occupied territory of Israel; so they keep him incarcerated. There are a few hearings that he finally has before governors Festus and Felix, and even an audience with Herod. But nothing is ever decided in his case. **For two years Paul languishes in Caesarea as a prisoner.**

Paul became the object of unfair and cruel insults. He became the object of shame, the object of lies. There was even a plot on his life of which he was warned, and by God's grace was spared an early death.

Finally, Rome must do something with him. He appeals to Caesar to have his case heard. **After two years of languishing in that Caesarean prison he's transferred on a ship to Rome.**

When he arrives at Rome after the shipwreck, he is destined to spend another two years as a prisoner. And it is in this, his second two-year imprisonment - one in Caesarea, now one in Rome - that he writes what are known as the **prison epistles: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon & of course Philippians.**

He has been given a preliminary hearing. At his first defense, Paul spoke of the fact that he believed in Christ, and that the One whom the Jews had executed as a criminal was none other than the Son of God and the Savior of the world, and that he was called to preach that gospel and was unequivocally committed to that. So after a first hearing he is kept prisoner until Nero makes up his mind, and months are passing by while he waits to hear whether Nero is going to call for his execution or his release. **This was Paul's Journey to Rome.**

- **Paul's Imprisonment in Rome**

The conditions of his imprisonment are quite interesting. Look at Acts 28 with me.

Acts 28:16 (ESV) ¹⁶ And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him. Paul was not put in a common prison with the rest of the prisoners. And so not wanting , perhaps, to throw him in with criminals since there was no real criminal charge, but at the same time wanting to adjudicate the matter before they made any decision to release him, they let him be a private prisoner with a soldier.

Acts 28:20 (ESV) ²⁰ For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain." He was not only a prisoner in a private situation with a guard, but that guard was chained to him. In fact, he was chained to a guard twenty-four hours a day. According to the Roman custom, the guards would change every six hours. So he would have four different men chained to him over a period of a day, at all times, so he could not escape.

Acts 28:23 gives us a little more insight into his condition. It says that the people who came to him - a group of Jews – “came to him at his lodging,”. He was given a private house in which he could stay, chained to a Roman soldier. And there he would have at least the freedom of people coming to him, if indeed he could not go to them, so that he might preach and teach. **Acts 28:30-31 (ESV)** ³⁰ **He lived there two whole years at his own expense** (*This is where the financial need comes into play*), and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. **Chained to a soldier, but unhindered in preaching.**

This might not sound too bad but think about it. The freedom that he had to travel and build new churches, strengthen young churches, train leaders, and to carry that apostolic commission to its fullest was now at an end.

He did not even have the solitude that a man of God desires in which he could be private in the presence of God. Even the little tasks of life knew no privacy, as he was chained to a Roman soldier. He slept chained to a Roman soldier. He wrote chained to a Roman soldier. He ate chained to a Roman soldier.

It was years since the Philippian Church had heard word about him. The two two-year imprisonments had isolated him from them. As they received news of Paul's imprisonment in Rome, because they loved him, they send a man named Epaphroditus, from their congregation to go and bless Paul financially and relationally.

Epaphroditus brings money and friendship. They wanted him to have a companion, and they wanted him to have resources so he could continue to live. But they also wanted word back on how he was doing because **their hearts were grieving over his condition and the condition of the gospel and the fear that it was being hindered because of his imprisonment.**

Philippians is written in response to their concern of his condition and the condition of the Gospel. **Very difficult circumstances and yet the theme is joy.** Paul wants them to know that in spite of the circumstances, he rejoices. Why? Because though his conditions are not what they want them to be, nor what he would want them to be, the gospel is going forward. **The letter is intended to confirm his joy in the ministry in spite of great affliction.**

As we turn to Philippians and study this paragraph, we'll see **Four aspects of Paul's joy in ministry.** We will notice that he **had joy in spite trouble**, as long as Christ's cause was furthered. He had **joy in spite of detractors**, as long as Christ's name is proclaimed. He had **joy in spite of death**, as long as Christ's glory is seen. And he had **joy in spite of the flesh**, as long as Christ's church was helped. This morning I want us to look just at the first point.

- **Joy in the ministry in spite of trouble.**

In spite of physical chains; Paul had joy as long as Christ's cause progressed.

Philippians 1:12-14 (ESV) ¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

He begins by saying, **12 I want you to know, brothers,** You might say to someone, "This is very important!" Paul uses a similar phrase, "I would not have you to be ignorant."

The assumption would be since Paul's a prisoner that he is in despair. He's in chains. The gospel is shut down. The ministry is debilitated. The preaching is limited. But he says, "Now, I don't want you to think that. I want you to understand this, that just the opposite is true."

He calls them "brethren," a term of endearment. **It conveys oneness, unity, and brotherhood.** **Philippians 1:12 (ESV)** **12 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel,**

The word "**advancement**" or "**progress**" is the word **prokop**. It's the idea that something is **moving forward in spite of obstacles, danger, distraction**. This is the idea of something **moving through the resistance!** The verb form, **prokoptain**, means literally **to cut down in advance**. It describes those who would go before an army, cutting down trees and hacking their way through undergrowth to make a path for the army to follow.

Paul says **the gospel is advancing against all obstacles**. The chief obstacle being his imprisonment and the hostility of Rome against the gospel. Yet the Gospel is advancing!

The gospel is on his heart. He lived to preach it, and he lived to advance it. And even though he was a prisoner, it was still being advanced. This wasn't anything new to Paul.

1 Corinthians 16:8-9 (ESV) **8 But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.**

1 Thessalonians 2:2 (ESV) **2 But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.**

Obstacles never bothered Paul. In fact I think it's pretty traditional in the advancement of God's kingdom that opposition never stops the gospel. The Lord has His way.

I think about John Bunyan. Most all of us know John Bunyan as the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Prior to the writing of *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan was known as a great preacher. His preaching was so powerful that they put him in the Bedford jail to silence him, but he preached sermons at the top of his voice and people would gather outside the jail walls to hear him preach though they couldn't see him. They finally silenced him by putting him down inside the jail where nobody could hear him preach, but that gave him the freedom in order to write *Pilgrim's Progress*.

And so they thought they could silence the preacher, but instead they gave him opportunity to write the most Gospel-Centered Book outside of the Bible which has preached to millions and millions of people, generation after generation. And that's how it is. You cannot bottle up the gospel. The servant of God may be bound, but the Word of God is never bound.

Jesus Christ was killed as a common criminal because they wanted to shut Him up, but the very death He died destroyed sin, death, and Satan, and became the means of the salvation of all who come in faith to Him.

Now Paul focuses on two things, one in verse 13 and one in verse 14. First of all, he focuses on the advance of the gospel outside the church, and secondly, inside the church.

Philippians 1:12-14 (ESV) ¹²I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to **all the rest** that my imprisonment is for Christ.

Philippians 1:13 (NASB) ¹³so that my imprisonment **in the cause of Christ**

Paul always sees himself as a prisoner because of Christ. He wasn't a prisoner because he committed a crime. He was a prisoner because he preached Christ, because he believed in Christ, because he represented Christ.

And that's what everybody else realized, too. ¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to **all the rest** that my imprisonment is for Christ. It became knowledge that this man was incarcerated for nothing more than preaching Jesus Christ.

What is the result of that? "**My imprisonment for the cause of Christ has become well known.**" How did it get "well known"? "Throughout the whole praetorian guard." **The men he was chained to spread the word!**

Now you have to understand it's one thing for Paul to be chained to a soldier, and it's a whole other point of view to realize that **a soldier was chained to Paul.** **Have you ever tried to evangelize someone who wanted to get away? Imagine being chained to Paul six hours. That could get a little heavy-duty. Boy, what an incredible missionary opportunity.**

I'm sure there were Christians in the Roman church praying, "O God, help us somehow to reach Caesar's household. Help us somehow to reach the elite imperial guard. Help us to get the gospel into the high places. Help us to reach these people." **And there was no way in. And so the Lord in His wonderful wisdom made the whole guard captive to Paul at six-hour intervals while he evangelized them all.**

This confinement for being a gospel preacher gained him great attention. Acts 28 says a multitude of Jews came. Some of them believed. And for the whole two years, [Acts 28:30-31](#) says, "Crowds were coming and coming and coming and he was preaching the gospel." People were being converted. But the message was spread most effectively by those that were closest to him, the whole guard.

- **So, the gospel was spreading outside the church.**
- **But it was also beginning to change inside the church,**

Philippians 1:14 (ESV) ¹⁴And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

The implication here is that before Paul's imprisonment the church was lacking courage. I can understand why. There was a growing hostility against Christianity. There was an antagonism against the gospel of Christ. Paul was living proof of that because he was a prisoner for preaching. You can imagine the church preachers were saying, "We want to be very careful because we don't want to end up in jail." So they lacked courage & boldness.

But, when they began to see Paul and his ministry and God providing for him and sustaining him and supporting him and keeping him and giving him this incredible outreach, and he was evangelizing Caesar's house and the Imperial Guard, and the whole city knew about it and Rome was coming to him, and people were being saved, it says, verse 14, "most of the brethren." **Now we see the majority of the believers now had courage! The Gospel was going outside the church and becoming stronger inside the church!**

Their confidence wasn't in the work of Paul, but Paul's work caused them to gain confidence in the Lord. **Philippians 1:14 (ESV)** ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, **are much more bold to speak the word without fear.**

Confidence, a verb meaning "to be certain, to be sure, to be confident, to trust." And they believe that if God could minister through him in that condition, He could minister through them in their condition.

His strength became their strength. What a tremendous truth. The example of our lives impacts those around us! Your confidence in Christ stirs up the Brethren's confidence in Christ! **One life can revolutionize the whole church.** And all these other brethren began to be strengthened! Paul says they, "**are much more bold to speak the word without fear.**" They were now fearlessly proclaiming the Gospel.

Here is Paul, chained to a Roman soldier, in what would be for most a negative situation, and yet he's a model of joy. Why? Because his joy isn't related to his comfort. His joy isn't related to his self-indulgence. His joy isn't related to his freedoms. His joy isn't related to his success. We'll find out it isn't even related to his reputation. It isn't related to any of those things. **His joy is strictly tied to the advance of the gospel, so he has joy in his ministry, in spite of trouble, as long as the gospel is advanced, as long as Christ's cause is extended.** His chains, in a sense, became an effective line of communication to these elite soldiers of the Roman Empire. And if they were converted, they would carry the message to the rest of the city and, for that matter, the rest of the world. And so he was rejoicing in the progress of the gospel.

Is that where you are? That's really the question. **As you look at your own life, is your joy in the advancement of knowing Christ and making Christ known?**

I mentioned at the beginning that **a person's spiritual maturity can be gaged by the breaking point of their joy.** Where is your breaking point? Do you break easily? Do you break often?

If you want renewed joy in your salvation, come to Christ. Don't let your joy rise and fall on your pleasure, possessions, emotions, expectations, relationships.

Let your joy be rooted in knowing Christ as Lord and making Christ known as Lord to everyone around you. You will find meaning, purpose, and courage. Most of all, you'll experience a joy that is undiminished regardless of your circumstances. That's certainly my prayer for my own life and yours as well.

Let us fix our heart on Christ and the progress of the gospel.