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Not Disappointed at All

Scripture: Philippians 1:15–20

Philippians 1:15 Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. **16** The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. **17** The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. **18** What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, **19** for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, **20** as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

Introduction

The 18th century British poet, Alexander Pope, in a letter to a friend wrote what he called the ninth beatitude. “Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed.” You've been disappointed. I've been disappointed. We all know the sting of unfulfilled dreams, the hurt of betrayal or broken promises. We know the frustrations we have even as we reflect on our own lives.

We're not the kind of people we wish we could be. We're not as popular as other individuals in our circle and we're not as advanced in our career as we'd like to be. We're not as confident or as accomplished as we wish we could be. Sometimes, we're disappointed in ourselves and we come to the conclusion it's because we are disappointments. What's the solution? Is Alexander Pope correct? That the only way to spare ourselves from the pain of disappointment in this life is to expect less, even to expect nothing.

Friends, the Bible presents a better way, and it does so in our passage where we see that Paul, he is in a dire and a dismal situation. He is in prison. And as he alludes in verse 20, and we're going to look at it more next week and the week after that as well, execution is a very real, very near possibility. So, he's imprisoned unjustly. The sentence could be death. We read in 2nd Timothy that all the friends that at one time were surrounding him, they’d left him. He's alone.

And we're also learning in this passage that people who had once professed to be on the same team as Paul are using his imprisonment to advance their own agenda, their own career. Talk about disappointing. But you don't hear a hint of that from Paul, do you? Instead, he says, "I will rejoice. Yes, indeed, I will rejoice.” Pope says to never be disappointed, you need to expect nothing. You're not going to find that from Paul. He expects big things. What does he expect? He expects deliverance.

He expects to be an instrument by which Christ will magnify himself or honor himself whether Paul lives or dies. That's what he's expecting will happen. He expects the advance of the gospel. He says, "It is my eager expectation that I will not be ashamed.” I will not be let down. So Paul would say the cure for disappointment is not to expect less but to expect more, but from the right places. It's not to hold on less tightly to this life and the things of this life. It's actually to hold on more tightly to the to the right things.

It's to have a solid foundation that's not going to give way. It's to make your heart large with love for things that can never disappoint you. And so, we can, I think, as we look at these verses, draw out three reasons that Paul has for why he is not disappointed and indeed would even suggest he cannot be disappointed no matter what happens. Three things we draw out. First is his aim, the second is the Philippians prayers, and third is God's faithfulness.

These things are the guard around Paul's joy that keep out the insidiousness and the crushing despair of disappointment. Paul's aim in life, their prayers for him, and God's faithfulness to him. And so we want to learn from that today. We want to learn that we need to set an aim or a goal in life that cannot be thwarted. We need to belong to a community or a people who will pray for us. And most importantly, we need to live for a God who will never let us down.

Let's think about those three things together.

1. Paul's Aim in Life

First, we're challenged at the outset to consider the goal we set in life, our aim in life. Why are you here? What do you live for? What's life all about to you? Why do you get up in the morning? What's your goal in life? What's your aim for life? What are you striving for? For Paul, it's very clear, and we see it in verse 18. It's that Christ would be proclaimed. That's Paul's singular purpose in life. It's his one overarching focus.

It's to get the gospel out and to make Christ known. It's as though his goal in life, Paul's goal in his own life, actually has nothing to do with himself. One wonders that if Paul were to paint a self-portrait, if he would even be in it, his life is so bound up with Jesus. That's his goal. That's his aim. Getting Christ out. Now, there is one surefire way to live a disappointing life, and that's to live a life for yourself.

If your goal in life is to be liked by everyone, well, then you'll be paralyzed when someone isn't interested in you, when somebody's not impressed with you. If your life is all about success in whatever sphere that might be, you will soon find there is no amount of success to satisfy your deepest longings. And so, you'll get stuck in this vicious cycle of restlessness and being overworked and disappointed and discouraged. But if life is about something bigger than you, well then you are set free from all of that.

And consider how Paul does that in his current condition. If you remember from last time, two weeks ago, Paul had made this astounding, remarkable claim that his imprisonment actually served to advance the gospel, that's in verse 12. And we talked about how the gospel is advancing in two specific ways. In the first instance, it was advancing within the Pretorian Guard, the emperor's personal policemen, as they were becoming converted through Paul's presence there.

In the second instance, the gospel was advancing outside of the prison. As Christians who were hearing that Paul was imprisoned and was still being faithful, they became emboldened to preach Christ all the more. And that's where we pick up in verse 15. Look at verse 15, what Paul says happens next. We learn that some of those Christians who were inspired to preach after Paul's imprisonment were doing so out of ill will. Verse 15 says they're doing it from rivalry and envy.

And then drop down to verse 17. He says, "They proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but rather thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment." What does that mean? What's going on here? What's Paul talking about? How could people be preaching Christ but doing so in order to somehow hurt Paul? Dennis Johnson suggests that perhaps they see themselves as Paul's

rival in the Christian community. And now that he's been sidelined by his legal troubles, they want to step into the vacuum, and they want to rack up a convert count that would put Paul to shame.

And in that way, they want to make his chains feel even heavier. “Look how little you're doing, Paul. Look how much we're doing.” Or perhaps part of their message is they go around and they actually say things about Paul. They're casting aspersions against Paul and his ministry. We don't know what they're saying about Paul. And do you know why we don't know? Because Paul doesn't tell us. Isn't that interesting? If Paul's goal in life was himself, if his goal was self vindication, he would have come with receipts, wouldn't he? “Hey, here's what I actually said. Here's what they did. Philippians, you can see that I'm really I'm innocent of the charges they're leveling against me. You you should pay no attention to these disruptors and these distractors. They're just trying to bring me down.”

Paul is impressively silent. What humility! And the reason is, because of the goal he has in life has nothing to do with himself but everything to do with Jesus. The goal is Christ. And so in response to being kicked while he's down by other Christians, what does he say in verse 18?

He says, "So what?" Do you see that there? “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.” It doesn't matter to Paul that they're doing this in order to make Paul look bad. By establishing a more prominent preaching ministry, Christ is still being proclaimed. And that's Paul's great goal in life. So, he's happy, and he says it's no matter.

Now, the fact that he rejoices in this, by the way, just sort of as an aside, tells us something about what these people must have been preaching. They're not false teachers. They're not Judaizers. They're not preaching heresy. Otherwise, Paul could not rejoice. They are actually preaching Christ. They're not false teachers. They're false people. They're insincere. They have a wrong motive. And when Paul says, "No matter, so what?”, we also need to be careful there. This is not an endorsement of doing whatever one could possibly imagine or think of in order to get the gospel out.

This is not an endorsement of what we call sometimes “the seeker sensitive model.” Paul is not saying here, “whatever it takes to get people into church, it’s just fine with me.” That's not what he means when he says “What then?’. It's not that the message doesn't matter. The message does matter. Christ has to be proclaimed. It's not that the method doesn't matter. It's not even that the motivation doesn't matter. What Paul is saying here is that Paul the man doesn't matter. I don't matter. So let them go ahead and do what they want.

And so friends, if your greatest goal in life is not yourself, but Christ and his unconquerable cross and his unstoppable gospel, then you'll find yourself like Paul, freed from the disappointments that are tied to comfort, that are tied to success, that are tied to personal advancement, popularity, reputation. You need to understand today that the closer you put yourself to the center of your existence, to the center of your your reason for existing, the closer you put yourself to your goal in life, the further away you push your happiness. God and happiness belong together.

And so when God is at the center of your life, joy will be too. And that's why Paul says, "I rejoice. I can rejoice even in prison." Because the goal he has set is one that can be accomplished even while he's in chains. He has made it his great purpose in life that which can never be thwarted. He rejoices because his aim in life can still be and will still be achieved even as his name and reputation becomes smaller and smaller.

And so, I want to say to you, brother and sister, very soberly this morning, that there is a way to reach the end of your life and look back and be filled with nothing but crushing disappointment. And that's to live your life for yourself. And I don't want that for you. You don't want that for you.

And so Paul presents to us a better way - to make your life about Christ. Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Make that your aim.

And you'll find this this protection from the crushing despair of disappointment.

2. The Philippians' Prayers

As we continue on in our text, we find a second hint as to how Paul is able to rejoice in the midst of profound suffering. It's not just that he has this sort of self-forgetful, despair-defeating focus in life. There's something else Paul has. Did you notice it in verse 19? Something else Paul has. He has a community, doesn't he? Let's look there.

He says, "Yes, I will rejoice." In verse 19, "for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance." So, the fact that Paul has as his sort of dominant theme in life the proclamation of Christ, doesn't mean that he ceases to exist. I mean Paul's a very real person. He's in a real prison. He's got real problems. And yet he finds personal comfort from the prayers that he knows are being offered by the Philippian church.

He's so convinced by the power of prayer that he can say he is confident that whatever happens, it will result in his deliverance. Now we want to kind of zoom in and ask, "What deliverance is he referring to?" Some have suggested and maybe as you read it you wonder, is he talking about actually being delivered from prison? There's a reason in the text to lean there, when we get to verse 25 next week, you can look there now. He says he's convinced that he will remain and continue with the Philippians.

He does not think he's going to die. But I don't think that's the deliverance Paul's speaking of in verse 19 because of what he says in verse 20. At the very end of verse 20, he says, "Whether by life or by death." I'm convinced it's going to turn out for my deliverance whether I live or die. Well, if you die, how are you delivered? What deliverance is he speaking of? He must be speaking of not just an earthly physical deliverance, but a spiritual one, even a spiritual vindication.

He's convinced that when he stands before the judgment throne of God, that he'll be delivered, his soul will be spared. And I think we can land pretty confidently on that interpretation when we recognize that the line that Paul uses, "this will turn out for my deliverance" is something that he copies and pastes verbatim from the book of Job. It's Job chapter 13 and verse 16. It's the exact wording in the Greek Old Testament.

Paul uses the exact same words here from that verse where Job is responding to his three friends who are trying to make heads or tails of all the trials he's going through. And this is what Job says. Job 13:15 and 16. "Though he slay me, I will hope in him. Yet I will argue my ways to his face, this will be my salvation." Literally, "this will turn out for my deliverance." The same exact phrase. This will be my salvation. That the godless shall not come before him. What's Job doing there?

Job acknowledges that the deadly trials he's going through are real, but he's convinced that if he gets a hearing before God, he will be vindicated. The godless will not come before the Lord. But Job can, by God's grace and mercy. In the heavenly tribunal, his earthly trials will have resulted in his salvation, in his vindication. And so Paul's drawing from that. And I think if we're to say that the deliverance he's thinking of is just deliverance from the executioner's sword, we're setting our sights a little too low. Paul's expecting big things here.

He expects that no matter what happens, he'll be delivered from the guilt of sin, the curse of God, the pains of hell. How does this divine pardon come about? Well, of course, it's it's earned by Christ at Calvary. But notice that Paul is saying that he expects the courage to stay faithful to his savior

through this immense trial by the prayers of the Philippians, that he will be faithful to his Savior until the end, because he has friends praying for him. They will sustain him so that Christ is honored. What are we learning here?

We're learning that God has ordained that His people's prayers are one of the means by which He carries us to safety and brings us to our heavenly home. The church prays, the Spirit supplies, and the Savior accomplishes the good work that He began. Don't we sometimes need to be reminded of the power of prayer? Don't you like me sometimes just need to get a bigger view of the theology that's packed into prayer?

Prayer is how we engage the Spirit of Jesus Christ, Paul says, who always comes to the aid of God's children whenever they have need, and at times in amazing and miraculous ways. The very same Spirit of God that sustained Jesus through His earth earthly ministry. The Spirit through whom Christ offered His life on the cross. The Spirit that raised Jesus up from the grave. That is the Spirit that is at work in our lives as the people of God. And we have access to that Spirit when we pray.

All we have to do to receive the power of the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is to pray. Do you pray, my friend? Do you pray? How can you not, when you catch a vision for how powerful prayer can actually be? What a comfort it ought to be even when we find it difficult to pray if we can say, “I belong to a people who pray for me.” Have you been there before where you're so low that it's as though you can't even get the words out to God?

Maybe your prayer is nothing more than “Help me”. And you feel like you have no spiritual fuel to go on, but are you able to say, "But I know I have people praying for me even when I can't pray for myself." That's what Paul has in the Philippians. He has people praying for him. That's the community he belongs to. And Paul did not think himself beyond the needs of his people's prayers.

One commentator says, "The point to note here is that even Paul's personal growth, his sanctification does not take place in isolation from the support of the church. It is indeed a sobering thought that our spiritual relationship with God is not a purely individualistic concern, but we are dependent on the Spirit's power in answer to the intercessory prayers of God's people." And Paul had those intercessory prayers from the Philippians and it's what every Christian should find they have in their church. Dear friend, I want you to know today that you cannot survive the Christian life without people praying for you.

How often I've heard from people who have walked through dark valleys something to the effect, “I don't know how I could have done it without my church.” Indeed, I think my deepest moments of pity for the world are when I feel the sweet love and encouragement of the church family and I think I feel so bad for the people in the world who don't have this. What a torturous, what a sad way to live. You need a community that will pray for you. Do you have it?

I wonder if you're visiting today and you don't belong to a church or perhaps you've been visiting for a long time. and you've yet to join yourself to this body. Do you see what is offered in the church, in the local church, this means of mutual spiritual support. Friend, do you have that kind of commitment from fellow believers?

If not, I invite you to join us, just as Brian and Ann and Andrew have done today, to make that good confession to come into a body that you can say, "These people will pray for me." Which means there's an exhortation to us members of Midway. We need to be a people of prayer. People that prays and a people that prays for one another. Because God has so wedded His people's prayer with His eternal purpose that if we're to grow in godliness, then it's going to come through our intercessions for one another.

If the church is to grow, whether in number or in godliness, it's all going to come through prayer. Take it from Charles Spurgeon. This is what he said. “Beloved, let every church learn the value of its prayer meetings in its dark hours. When the pastor is dead and when it's been difficult to find a successor. When it may be there are problems and divisions. When death falls upon honored members. When poverty comes into the church. When there is spiritual dearth. When the Holy Spirit appears to have withdrawn Himself. There is but one remedy for these and a thousand other evils. And that one remedy is contained in this short sentence, lt us pray.”

Before I came to my first church in Kalamazoo, they were vacant for four years. Four years without a pastor. And during those four years, a group of about six or maybe sometimes 10 people would meet every month to pray for the church and to pray for their next pastor. For four years they did this. When they started praying, I hadn't even entered seminary yet. When they started praying, I still wanted to be a movie maker.

If it wasn't for their prayers, not only would I not have come to be their pastor, I tell you now, friends, if it wasn't for their prayers, I would not be a pastor. They were praying for me even though they didn't know who I was. This is how God works - through His church. And the power of His people's prayers on that church, how they kept praying for me just as I've been assured by so many of you, you pray for me. Let me pray for you, tell me how I can be praying for you. Let us pray together, Wednesdays 5:45, let us pray, right? That's what Spurgeon says, let every church learn the value of its prayer meeting, the one remedy is contained contained in this short sentence, lt us pray.

So, let's be a community of prayer, a community that supports one another even through dark hours and deep troubles, so that's to defeat discouragement and deepen our joy.

3. God’s Faithfulness

And that brings us to our third and final thing. Paul is joyful in tribulation because of his self-forgetful focus, because he has these prayerful partners, but ultimately also because of the God that he trusts. We've looked at his aim. We looked at their prayers. But now God's faithfulness. This is the point without which none of the things we've said, nothing else we've said, up to this point will matter.

Paul has utter confidence in his situation because he has utter confidence in his God. Nothing else matters if God cannot be trusted. So, we want to conclude this morning with getting a bigger glimpse of the glory of our good God and Savior. Look at what Paul says there in this text in verse 19. “I know through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance. As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.”

Do you hear these terms of confidence he has? He has eager expectation. He has hope. He has full courage that what? That I will not be ashamed he says. “Ashamed” in the Bible doesn't mean embarrassed. It means disappointed. It means let down. He says, "I have eager expectation that I will not be let down." Why? What's the reason? It's because he has Jesus.

He says it twice. Paul says, “I have eager expectations, going to turn out for my deliverance, full courage, I'm not going to be disappointed.” Why, Paul? Not because of anything that Paul is going to do or can do. He says, because I have the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And then he says in verse 20, and I'm convinced that Jesus will be honored. And that word “honored” in the ESV literally means magnified. Jesus will magnify Himself. Again, Paul can't do it, but Jesus will do it.

He will magnify Himself in my body whether I live or die. If Paul is acquitted, then he gets to keep preaching Christ. If he's executed, he gets to die for Christ. Christ will make it so that His servant's life is not wasted, but actually the means by which His name and glory and fame go forth. It is Christ that makes Paul confident. Paul is not worried because he has Jesus. We're talking about the faithfulness of God here, friends. How could our Savior do anything less than come to His servant's rescue?

Sometimes people like to get pastors in theological knots. They ask questions like, "Can God create a rock that's too heavy for Himself to lift?" If that's the kind of question you're planning to ask tonight, please don't. Let me tell you this. There is something that God cannot do. There is something that God cannot do. God cannot let you down. God cannot disappoint you. And Paul says he will not be disappointed. And he shares his testimony with King David.

Psalm 25:3, "None who wait for you shall be put to shame." And the Lord says it through Isaiah in Isaiah 49:23, "Those who wait for me shall not be disappointed." And some of you might be here and you're struggling to hear this because you're thinking, "Well, pastor, I kind of already am disappointed in God. My life is really hard right now. He's already letting me down." And again, remember Paul's writing this from prison. This is not one of those easy for you to say moments. This isn't easy for Paul to say, but he must say it. Why?

Because it's true. His God is faithful and He will not let him down. He cannot let him down. And when we struggle to agree with that, it's because we lack the wisdom of God. We don't know everything God knows. Friends, when we're in a dark valley and we think there's no way out and we're prone to get angry at God for putting us there, we're thinking, "What are you up to? You're failing your promises." We need to remember we do not know everything that God knows.

John Newton in one of his pastoral letters wrote, in my opinion, one of the most soul-piercing, insightful lines. He says this, "When you get to heaven, you will not complain by the way the Lord brought you there." Because then you'll know and you'll say, "It makes perfect sense. He's never done me wrong. He's never let me down." And we're talking about the faithfulness of God. He never fails His people.

He never falls short of getting us where we need to go. He never forgets to keep a promise. He never lets us down. Every other god will do just that. Money, marriage, ministry, if you make those things an idol, they will put you to shame. Success, fame, status, your stuff, all of it will in the end put you to shame.

And when you come to the end of your life, you will say, "What a waste." But friends, there is no one in all of human history who has stepped out in faith upon the Lord Jesus Christ, who has placed their hearts in the hands of Almighty God, who has ever been disappointed, who's ever been let down, no one in all of human history. You won't be disappointed either. And so, you come to Him in faith today. How could you not? How could you not trust a God like this? A God who would go to death for you on the cross.

Let that be the test by which you measure His faithfulness and engender trust in Him. If He would do that for you, then no matter what you are facing, can't you say with Paul, it is my eager expectation. It is my hope that I will not be put to shame, because He loved me so much, He bore a cross for me. And so, it must only be because He still loves me so much that He's calling me to bear a cross for him.

And I might not know why. I can't see through all the details of my scenario, but I know in the end He will magnify Himself. He will use me. He will deliver me. And in that I rejoice. Alexander Pope's beatitude was "blessed is he who expects nothing for he will not be disappointed." What a miserable

way to live. Friends, expect great things, but only expect them from a great God, one who is worthy of your trust. Indeed, as the Scriptures teach us, blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord, for he shall never be disappointed.