

# Paul

## Apostle of Sovereign Joy

### Various Scripture

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (Rom. 15:13)

LTS: Acts 26:1-18

If you are a Christian, you are certainly no stranger to the Apostle Paul. Aside from Jesus himself I think it can be safely argued that no human being in history has impacted the world like this one solitary life. After the devastating experience of coming face to face with the resurrected Christ, Paul, the great persecutor of the church, became the most zealous servant of Christ the church would ever know.

In the wake of the Damascus Rd. experience, Paul's whole life was motivated by one single passion: IN his words... "that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Phil 1:20-21). This is Paul's way of saying that he exists to proclaim the excellencies of Christ in all things to the glory of God..."

As he labored to show the world that Jesus is the long-awaited Son of God and only Savior, his life and teaching exploded upon world with an impact that continues to reverberate today, some twenty-one hundred years later. Think about it...

- His inspired theology transformed western thought.
- His biblical ethic transformed western morality.
- His Scriptural anthropology brought major reforms to civil government, the workplace, and the family.
- His writings were the grounds for the eventual abolition of the slave trade, the dignity and value of women, and the protection of children, just to name a few.
- But more than anything, Paul's God-besotted, Gospel-saturated Christology brought eternal hope and everlasting life to a lost world of Jews and Gentiles alike.

This morning for our annual Biographical Sermon I want to offer you a life of Paul, Apostle of Sovereign Joy. I use the word Sovereign because, as we will see, Paul believed everything in creation and every experience in life exists under the Sovereign rule of Christ who is Creator and King of all.

Furthermore, I say he is the apostle of sovereign Joy because whenever the gospel finds fertile soil in the heart, the immediate and lasting fruit is joy. Hence, Jesus says (Jn. 15), “These things I have spoken unto you that my Joy may be in you and that your joy might be full.”<sup>1</sup> This is gospel language. And everyone who receives the gospel receives fulness of joy in Christ.

As we read the N.T., we don’t actually meet Paul until Acts chapter seven. So, take your bibles and turn with me to the book of Acts and in a few minutes, we will look at chapters 6-7.

Here we find ourselves in Jerusalem before an angry mob preparing to stone Stephen to death. Luke’s account mentions - as kind of an off-handed side note – that “the [official] witnesses [to the stoning] laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.” Two verses later he records, “And Saul approved of his execution.” But who, exactly, is this young man, Saul? To begin answering that question we would do well to consider...

## I. Paul’s Providential Pedigree

1. In Rom. 15:16 Paul says that God called him to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. What I want you to see here at the beginning is that generations before Saul of Tarsus was born, God was at work orchestrating history to ensure that this boy would be uniquely situated and equipped to become the Apostle to the Gentiles.

2. Now If you are new to the life of Paul it may come as a surprise to learn that he did NOT grow up in Israel. Born in eastern Turkey to Jewish parents approximately two years after the birth of Jesus Christ, Saul (also known by his Greek name, Paul) was born and raised in a community of Jews who lived

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the context of this statement in Jesus’ teaching of the Vine and the branches and abiding in Christ. This is gospel language.

outside of Israel. Tarsus was a principle city<sup>2</sup> of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Unlike Jerusalem, it was a cosmopolitan city densely populated with Gentiles from all over the known world.

3. You see, back in 170 BC King Antiochus IV was dividing up and separating all his conquered peoples and, in the process, settled a colony of Jews there in Tarsus. Paul's ancestors were probably among this group. His Father was likely a master tentmaker whose craftsmen would have worked in leather and in Cilicium, a cloth woven from the hair of the large long-haired black goats that that grazed (and still do) on the slopes of the Tarsus mountains.<sup>3</sup>

4. Paul's parents were apparently rather wealthy property owners who had inherited from their fathers, Roman citizenship.<sup>4</sup> This is NO insignificant fact in Paul's story because most of the people who lived in the Roman empire were NOT citizens, and hardly ANY Jews were citizens of Rome. Citizenship was a coveted privilege carrying certain legal rights that hardly anyone had.<sup>5</sup> For example,

A. A roman citizen could not be condemned or punished without a fair hearing. Nor could they be legally scourged.<sup>6</sup> And under the reign of Claudius those who falsely claimed citizenship were executed.<sup>7</sup>

B. If Paul had not been born a Roman citizen, he probably would have suffered an untimely death. But God had sovereignly orchestrated the timing and circumstance of Pau's birth to preserve his future life in service to Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 21:39

<sup>3</sup> John Pollock, *The Apostle: A Life of Paul*, (Colorado Springs, David C. Cook, 2012), 17

<sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdman's Publishing Co. 2000), 35-36. One needed to be a property owner to attain citizenship.

<sup>5</sup> Picirilli, 25

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 25,

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 25

5. By a strategically sovereign providence, Paul's formative years played out in a veritable sea of gentiles from many lands. And because of that unique upbringing, he knew their language - their customs; He was literate and well-read in Greek philosophy, poetry, law, and was very much acquainted with their pagan religions because he lived among them and spoke their language. Witness the fact that in Acts 21 the Roman Tribune, who was about to flog Paul as an uncultured criminal, voiced surprise that Paul could speak in the language of educated people; namely, Greek.<sup>8</sup>

6. Paul's mastery of the Greek language was especially important when he wrote his 13 letters to the churches. They were all Gentile churches and he was able to pen those epistles with perfect fluidity in their mother tongue, Greek.

My point here is that Paul was uniquely familiar and comfortable among Gentiles long before he became an apostle. God had sovereignly orchestrated his life and lineage to equip him to take the message of Jesus to the gentiles. And BTW: he knew it! Paul knew that God had singled him out to be the apostle to the gentiles. In Gal. 1:15 he speaks of himself in the words of the prophet Jeremiah saying, "God set me apart before I was born, and called me by His grace." Paul's life and influence among the gentiles of the First Century was no accident. It was designed to the very last detail by a sovereign God who was on mission to deliver the gospel to the Gentiles.

This was Paul's Providential Pedigree. Second, we should consider...

## II. Paul's Joy-dispersing Tyranny.

1. What I want us to see here is that though Paul became the foremost persecutor of the church, God in his magnificent sovereignty actually used the rage of unbelieving Saul of Tarsus to impel his people to obey the great commission; namely, to take the message of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

2. If what we know about Jewish boys from wealthy families is true, Paul's parents would have sent him by boat from Tarsus to Jerusalem for higher education sometime after his thirteenth birthday.<sup>9</sup> We know that he did indeed

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<sup>8</sup> MacArthur, 344

<sup>9</sup> Picirilli, 40

receive instruction from Gamaliel, grandson of Hillel, the supreme teacher of the Law in Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> Under Gamaliel's tutelage Paul would have learned to teach, expound on the texts of Scripture and tradition, and become expert in debate, "for (as they say) every rabbi was expected to be not only part preacher but part lawyer."<sup>11</sup>

3. As a young man Paul had a powerful mind. His own testimony (Gal. 1:14) was "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people."

4. It is said that before a gifted young man like Saul could become a master teacher in Israel, "he had to master a trade. For, as F.F. Bruce explains, "every Jew was bred to a trade, and in theory no rabbi took fees but rather supported himself by his trade."<sup>12</sup>

5. Sometime probably before he turned 20, therefore, Saul would have completed his formal studies in Jerusalem and returned home to Tarsus to learn his father's tent-making trade. In all probability, he remained in Tarsus with his family until a year or so after Jesus' resurrection; which explains why there is NO record that suggests these two notable young men, Jesus and Saul, ever met.

6. When Paul finally returned to take up residence in Israel in his mid 30's<sup>13</sup> he encountered in person what he likely had heard of from a distance; that a false teacher by the name of Jesus had declared himself to be the promised Messiah – the Son of God, and had started a religious sect that threatened the integrity of Judaism. Paul was infuriated.

7. When He arrived on the scene, he discovered that this new sect had gained more of a following than he suspected. Luke says, "The word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Acts 22:3

<sup>11</sup> Picirilli, p. 19

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 20

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 48

<sup>14</sup> Acts 6:7

Even such gifted young educated Jews like Stephen had seemingly fallen prey to this heresy.

8. In fact, Stephen had earned an impressive reputation In Israel. We tend to think of him merely as a deacon in the church. But in Verse 8 of Acts 6 (Look at this with me) we learn that that “Stephen, “full of grace and power was doing great wonders and signs among the people.”

😊 This description doesn't match any deacon I have ever known!

9. As is always the case with signs and wonders, Stephen's miracles were intended by God to authenticate his message; namely, that Messiah had come, had been killed by his own people and had risen from the grave according to the Scriptures. Furthermore, his name was Jesus.

10. Even in the face of authenticating miracles, however, the leading Jews in Jerusalem rejected Stephen's message and its messenger. Clearly, the theology of the Jews and the theology of Stephen were on course for a head-on collision. One of them would have to go. And so, the leading Jews in Jerusalem apparently required Stephen to debate the question in the synagogue.<sup>15</sup>

11. Like Martin Luther 1,500 years later, Stephen came prepared to engage in discourse over the meaning of relevant Scriptures to the question of Messiah. And like Luther, he strikes us as a superb young scholar with a brilliant mind – perhaps even Paul's intellectual equal.

12. Standing alone before his opponents in the synagogue, Stephen sought to persuade the religious authorities from the O.T. Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

13. Nevertheless, Acts 6:10 tells us that “though they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking” his words only infuriated them to the point of homicidal rage.

14. It wasn't long after this public debate that His opponents secretly instigated men to swear falsely that they had heard Stephen blaspheme both Moses and God. Formal charges were drawn up and within a matter of hours or days he was sentenced to death by stoning.

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<sup>15</sup> John MacArthur, *One Faithful Life*, (Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2019), 30

15. And as the killing stones began to fly, (Acts 7:55) Stephen, “full of the H.S., gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God’ ... And he called out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them!’ And when he said this, he fell asleep.”

16. Now, it is hardly possible to overstate the significance of the stoning of Stephen.

A. First, because the stoning of Stephen caused thousands of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem that day to scatter all over the known world. And they took the gospel with them! In Acts 11 (some fifteen years later) Luke explains,

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.<sup>20</sup> But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists (also, preaching the Lord Jesus).<sup>21</sup> And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.”<sup>16</sup>

We should remember that Jesus said his people would be witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth, but they were perfectly content to stay in Jerusalem. Through the martyrdom of Stephen, however, God made them willing to go!

What, I wonder... what will it take for you to become willing to go?

B. The second reason Stephen’s stoning is significant is because it was here that Paul would shift from being a supporting bystander before the persecution of Christians to a violent aggressor, singularly determined to wipe out this heretical sect called “the way.”

From here until his Damascus Rd encounter with Christ, Paul lives as a raging tyrant intent on finding, arresting, interrogating, imprisoning, and even killing followers of Jesus.

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<sup>16</sup> Acts 11:19-

17. What I want you to see, however, is not a picture a small tyrannical Pharisee, but a picture of a big and sovereign God. Because, in the mystery of his sovereign providence he turned Paul's homicidal tyranny into a Joy dispersing tyranny that scattered the seeds of Gospel joy all over the world

18. This was Paul's Joy-dispersing Tyranny. As we continue pressing into the timeline of Paul it isn't long before we come to the historical event that brought about...

### III. Paul's Shocking New Identity

1. The Damascus Road encounter was such a significant event Luke records it three times: Acts 9, Acts 22, and Acts 26. You remember the story. Let's pick it up in Acts 26. Turn there with me and let's read the narrative. Paul is offering this account before King Agrippa at Cesarea by the sea (I was just there last April)

#### Read Acts 26:9-18

2. In Jerusalem Paul got word that a substantial number of Jesus-followers had escaped to Damascus, so he asked the Jewish counsel for the authority to track them down. It probably took him a couple weeks to make the 130+ mile journey, but in his zeal he determined to do it in record time even if it meant traveling in the heat of the day.<sup>17</sup>

3. As they approached town, suddenly about noon a great light flashed from the sky... a light more brilliant than the noonday sun!

4. Biographer, John Pollock, explains,

He looked up. Within the center of the light, which blinded him from his surroundings, he faced a Man of about his own age. Paul could not believe what he heard and saw. All his convictions, intellect, and training, his reputation, his self-respect, demanded that Jesus should not be alive. He played for time and replied, 'Who are you, Lord?' 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you, this kicking against the goad. Then Paul knew. In a second that seemed like eternity he

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<sup>17</sup> Acts 26:15

knew he saw the Lord, and that He was alive, just as Stephen and the others had said, and that he loved not only those whom Paul persecuted but also Paul himself.<sup>18</sup>

5. What strikes me in this narrative is that there was no wrath or hostility in Jesus' words. He was simply, almost gently cleansing Paul of his poisonous hatred of the believers he was chasing and his disdain for Christ Himself. Jesus said, "It is hard to kick against the goad."

6. A "Goad" was a pointed stick used by a herdsman to prod his ox to move. Jesus' statement suggests that ever since the stoning of Stephen Paul had been resisting the goading of his conscience – never willing to honestly admit his guilt and rebellion against God. Paul had convinced himself that his fight was against unrighteous people when in fact he was fighting Jesus, His Savior.

7. The very presence of the glorious, omnipotent, and gracious Christ was enough to break Paul's hard heart. "What shall I do Lord?" he cried. And from that question gushed a river of faith, surrender, worship and love. And from the heart of Jesus came a torrent of forgiveness, righteousness, redemption and eternal life.

8. As Paul Himself would later write, "The God who said 'Let light shine our of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ'" (2 Cor. 4:6).

### Gospel Invitation

- A. Oh, my dear friend. From where you sitting right now, can you identify with Paul? You look so righteous on the outside – you blend in so well, but deep in your heart you know that you are kicking against the goad. You're suppressing your guilt and shame and you're the only one who knows.
- B. Do you think that if you come to Jesus today he would be harsh with you, would reject you, would hate you, would judge you? Do you think that the stench of your sin rises higher and blacker than Paul's? Yet, Jesus was gentle with him. He stood ready to

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<sup>18</sup> Pollock, 33-34

forgive him. He laid before Paul the offer of free grace. And so he does before you this very hour.

C. Say to him -O say to him - “Lord, what must I do?” And Jesus will say, “Come to me you who are burdened with a heavy load and I will give you rest.” Your sins have all been forgiven. Your debt is fully paid. Stop fighting and surrender. Enter the joy of His salvation. Do it now while it is still all today.

9. Now Paul is a new creation in Christ. The old has passed away. The new has come. Lying in the dirt on the Road to Damascus the Father delivered Paul from the domain of darkness and transferred him into the kingdom of His beloved Son. Now everything is new. Everything has changed.

10. God sends Ananias to restore Paul’s sight and immediately, out of the joy that has filled his heart Paul begins preaching. And do you know what he preached? He preached the same sermon that Steven preached in Acts 9 -The one Stephen never finished! It was the same message that the disciples on the Road to Emmaus said that they heard from the resurrected Christ. And here is that message:

O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.<sup>19</sup>

11. You see, for the first time in his life Paul understood his bible! For the first time in his life he understood that Messiah was come just as the prophet Isaiah predicted – not as a conquering King but as a suffering servant who would bear all our sins in his body on a cross that we might be saved. And so Paul preached!

12. Paul, whose whole life had been all bound up in meticulous Mosaic law-keeping now found life in nothing but the grace of God in Christ. How could he keep from preaching? Here’s how Paul describes it:

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<sup>19</sup> Luke 24:25-27

He who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16).

13. And do you know what motivated Paul to risk his life preaching? It was the joy he found in the love of Christ. For he said (2 Cor. 5:14-15 – the love of Christ controls us.

14. Think about it: The greatest persecutor of Christ has now become the greatest LOVER of Christ. As he said to his dear Philippians,

Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— <sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...

15. You see, beloved, when the Sovereign Lord grants to you the eternal hope of salvation your soul suddenly rests upon the unshakable rock of hope. And that divine hope manifests itself in pure, risk taking, Christ-adoring joy. No doubt that's why in Rom. 12:12 Paul commands us to "rejoice in hope." Do you know such hope? Does your hope in Jesus manifest itself in joy? If so, then rejoice! For it is the Gift of a sovereign Savior.

16. Paul was full of such hope and that's why he could "rejoice in the Lord always." It's what made him the **Apostle of Sovereign Joy**.

17. All of this was evidence of Paul's Shocking New Identity. But now, fourthly, we move on to...

#### IV. Paul's Unlikely Success in Ministry:

1. After his Damascus Rd. experience he spent time alone in Arabia? No doubt he needed that time to study the Scriptures with new eyes. After that he visited Jerusalem. Clearly, the believers there were terrified of him, but Peter took the risk of bringing him into his home where he stayed for two weeks. Then, Peter and James counseled him to go home to Tarsus (Act 9:30). And this is where Barnabas finds him more than a decade later.

2. Apparently, after the stoning of Stephen a large number of Jewish believers found their way NOT only to Damascus but to Antioch and were meeting together, but they needed to be taught the Scriptures. Now, think about this. Can you imagine what those dear people must have thought when they were told that their Prof for the first semester of class would be none other than Saul of Tarsus? The very man who forced them to flee for their lives from Jerusalem!

3. But fear turned to delight when they discovered that the Lord Jesus has power even to transform a heart like Paul's. Antioch, then, became home base for Paul and Barnabas. From there they launched out into the surrounding provinces. And everywhere they went their strategy was to visit the local synagogue on the Sabbath and teach from the Scriptures. And every Sabbath Paul attempted to prove from the Scripture that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. This was the good news! This was the gospel of Jesus Christ! The same Gospel that we preach today! Of course, most rejected his message. But here is what happened.

4. In Paul's day there were many God-fearing gentiles (Like Cornelius, whom Peter brought to Christ) who had attached themselves to the local synagogues. They were called proselytes. And whenever the Jews in the synagogue rejected the Gospel, Paul had a strategic response. He would say (as we read in Acts 13:46 ff.),

It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. [But] Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup> For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, " 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' "

5. Whenever Paul said that to the Jews there were always Gentile proselytes standing nearby. And how do you think they took that news? Well, Luke tells us (v.

48): “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.”

6. So what do we have here? We have Sovereignty (as many as were appointed to eternal life believed...) and we have Joy (The Gentiles immediately began Rejoicing). This is why I am calling Paul the Apostle of Sovereign Joy. The way he saw it, God made him an apostle (listen carefully)...

“To proclaim the excellencies of Christ in all things to the glory of God in the joy of all peoples.”

7. This strategy of Paul plays out again and again throughout his ministry until in his second missionary Journey where he sets up a base camp in Corinth for a while. And then he does the same thing again in Ephesus where he established the School of Tyrannus from which many young men (such as Epaphras in Colossae) were trained and sent out to plant churches all over Asia Minor and beyond. In fact, Luke tells us (Acts 19:10) that Paul’s ministry there was so effective that “All the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.” And it is said that each of the seven churches named in the Revelation were planted by men who were trained at the School of Tyrannus in Ephesus. Paul’s ministry was enormously fruitful!

8. It has been said that in little more than ten years Paul established the church of Jesus Christ in four provinces of the [Roman] Empire, in addition to Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia. Before A.D. 47 there were no Churches in these provinces; In AD 57, Paul could speak as if his work there was done and could plan extensive tours into the far West reaching all the way to Spain.<sup>20</sup>

9. But while all of that sounds exciting and wonderful (and it was), it didn’t come without suffering. This brings us to the fifth point:

## V. Paul’s Unrelenting Suffering:

1. Back in Damascus when Paul was struck blind by Jesus, the Lord sent Ananias to speak to Paul and restore his vision. But when the Lord gave him that assignment Ananias was afraid. But the Lord said to Ananias,

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<sup>20</sup> FF. Bruce, p. 18

“Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

2. I suspect Paul’s suffering started in earnest as soon as he went home to Tarsus after his conversion. When he left Tarsus to take his role as a leading Rabbi in Jerusalem it must have made his father more than a little proud. His son would surely be the greatest Pharisee in Israel!

3. When he returned to Tarsus after his conversion, however, I suspect he was received as a traitor to his people. His parents, no doubt, bore the brunt of scorn in the community. And you know Paul. There was no way he was going to keep his mouth shut. He had to preach Christ to those he loved. He had to try to convince the leaders of the synagogue them from Scripture that Jesus is the fulfillment of the O.T. promises of Messiah.

4. For that, he was most certainly flogged and excommunicated. In fact, in 2 Cor. 11, he offers a sample list of the ways he has suffered. He recounts (v. 23-24) experiencing

far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.”

5. That mention of five times receiving forty lashes is interesting because Luke only records two. Some of the biographers I read suggest that the other three lashings probably took place at home, in Tarsus.

6. Paul continues his list with,

Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; <sup>26</sup> on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; <sup>27</sup> in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often

without food, in cold and exposure. <sup>28</sup> And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

7. Beloved, what kind of man can endure such suffering. Of course, all of us suffer. But none of us suffer like Paul suffered for the gospel. And how did he describe his suffering? He used the following words: Sorrowful, but always... rejoicing.

8. From a Roman Jail Paul once wrote to his beloved Philippians these famous words (Phil 1:20): 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. <sup>21</sup> For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

## VI. Conclusion:

1. I know your bulletin promises one more point. I was going to talk about Paul's Hope-preserving clarity. I wanted to reserve time to talk about his letters and his doctrine. But perhaps it would be best if I just Got back to preaching them.

2. In the meantime, there is so much application for us here as we think about the life of the Apostle Paul. The author of Hebrews commands us to identify men like this and imitate their faith. And that's why we take this time every year to dive deep into the life of someone who is worthy of emulation.

- None of us has rebelled against Christ as did the apostle Paul, you can be forgiven and justified, and redeemed as Paul was.
- God has not called any of us to be apostles. But all of us can strive to be more effective ministers of the Gospel. And some of you young men should consider whether God is calling you into gospel ministry.

- Others should begin today to seriously think about leaving the comforts of the United States for a new and difficult ministry where Christ has not been named.
- Still many of you simply need to just stop wasting your life on empty entertainment and begin discipling yourselves to know Christ and become ruled by his love.
- And all of us could stand to resolve afresh to fulfill our calling to proclaim the excellencies of Christ in all things to the glory of God in the Joy of all peoples.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (Rom. 15:13)