

Sermon 4:
Joy In Proclaiming Christ
Philippians 1:12-18a
CRCC 2/12/17

Intro

Joy is the theme of this letter. And we've seen that Paul's joy was tied up in his relationship with the Philippian saints. Every time he thought of them his heart beat with joy for them. Joy in partnering together for Christ. Joy in praying to Christ. In our present passage we see that Paul's joy was also tied to the progress of Christ's gospel.

Many people wrongly think that joy depends on their circumstances. But biblical joy is not self-focused. Rather, joy is found in love for Christ, His church, and His cause. In spite of his imprisonment- not exactly a place most of us would find joy- Paul is focused on the needs of the Philippians seen in his prayer for them (9-11). His focus is then on God's overall purposes in the gospel for the world.

This is a Christ-like attitude. We studied the Upper Room Discourse a few months ago and one of the things we saw is that in the last few hours of Jesus' life He was totally unconcerned about Himself. He was focused on the disciples being comforted and understanding their mission. He was focused on obeying His Father's plans for Him including drinking the cup of wrath for sinners. He trusted in His Father. Jesus was God, but let's remember that He was also a man. John points this out telling us in John 13:21 that Jesus was deeply *troubled* and yet He encouraged the disciples to not let their hearts be *troubled* about what was getting ready to go down (14:1).¹ Paul was Christ-like, ever concerned about

¹ Ferguson Comm, 17-18

² Hendriksen Comm, 69.

others. He practiced what he preached in 2:4 where he says, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” He cared about the well being of his dear Philippians and most importantly God’s agenda.

Paul writes 1:12-18a with the Philippians and God in view. On the one hand, he does not want the Philippians to worry about him. He is imprisoned, but is doing okay. On the other hand, he wants them to know that God’s agenda is still being accomplished through his difficult circumstances. In 1:12-18a Paul tells the Philippians that he rejoices in his imprisonment because it has actually served to **advance the gospel**.

These verses serve to remind us that when we find ourselves in unexpected and unwanted circumstances that appear to be obstacles to the progress of the gospel, we need to think again. Difficult trials, relationships, a job, or just feeling ill equipped for God to use us to help advance His gospel is the wrong attitude to have. No level of personal difficulties, bad circumstances or world events can halt the progress of the gospel.

Paul, a persecutor of the church and hater of Christ, was suddenly converted on the Damascus Road and from that day forward his life was marked with singular loyalty to make Christ known throughout the world. And he knew that Christ, now seated at the right hand of God, who spoke to him in a blinding light, was in full control. All the details of time and space were in His nail scarred hands. Nothing happened by chance, not even being imprisoned for doing nothing wrong.

Years earlier he had made plans to take the gospel to Rome. He preached the gospel and planted churches so that the Roman roads of this great empire became the conduits for the gospel to reach the world. We also know that Paul had planned to go to Spain and perhaps from there to the

frontier lands where people sat in pagan darkness reaching as far as the British Islands. The sky was the limit. His plans to spread the gospel were as wide as the world. But now he finds himself in Rome alright (the most important city in the world), but he's in chains. But the prison became his pulpit and his congregation were the many soldiers that were chained to him. Since he could not preach in other churches, he wrote them. Since he could not see the members of his churches face to face, he prayed for them.

He knew God didn't make mistakes, which is why he says what he does in v12: **I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.** He had one strategy to reach the world, but God had His. He would submit to God's. How did Paul figure that his imprisonment would **advance the gospel**? The word **advance** (προκοπή) is translated as *progress* in the NASB. The word describes moving ahead against road blocks. Paul knew of Satan's schemes to hinder the advancement of the gospel (I Thess 2:18). But if God successfully used Satan's evil schemes to accomplish His purposes through His Son's work of redemption, then Paul knew He could use him to continue to spread the gospel no matter how unfavorable his circumstances were. Paul would spend two years under house arrest when he wrote this letter. Before this he spent two years in prison in Caesarea (Acts 24:27). But Paul doesn't complain. He has an unwavering trust in God's sovereignty.

But in all likelihood the Philippians weren't as strong in their faith. They were worried about Paul. They were worried about the **advance of the gospel** and what would happen to the church if Paul was executed for his faith. But Paul knew that when he went to Rome as a prisoner, it was

really the gospel that went with him! As Paul sits in prison he lives out the principle he gave in I Cor 9:12: “we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ”. He saw his chains as a challenge by Satan and viewed his imprisonment as an opportunity. Though Paul was bound in chains, the gospel was not (2 Tim 2:9).

We learn from this passage a valuable lesson: when a Christian places himself or herself at the disposal of Christ no circumstances can prevent the ultimate progress of the gospel. God’s people may be in imprisoned situations or actually be in a literal prison, but the gospel cannot be imprisoned!

Proposition: We can have joy and confidence, as Paul did, that the gospel progresses through the world in spite of 2 *common obstacles* that we find in this passage, and that we will invariably find from time to time in our own lives: *deliberate persecution from outside the church* and *disingenuous preachers from inside the church*. God is bigger than both of these obstacles and we must learn to believe that today.

I want you to have confidence today that God is bigger than challenging family members who don’t know Christ. He’s bigger than your friends who mock the gospel. He’s bigger than even your inability to feel effective at proclaiming the gospel. God is sovereign over who gets saved and the means He uses to get them saved. Your task (and mine) is to be faithful with the opportunities and trust in Him.

Trans: The 1st obstacle that Satan often uses to try and stop the progress of the gospel in the world is...

I. Deliberate Persecution From Outside the Church (13-14)

In vss 13-14 Paul shows 2 ways how the persecution that led to his imprisonment actually resulted in the progress, or **advance of the gospel**.

A. Progress Outside the Church, 13

Speaking about the advance of the gospel, Paul continues in v13 saying: **that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ**. Its impossible to overestimate the significance of what God did through Paul's imprisonment. Commentators try to explain the significance and I will try to. But just know that what happened was absolutely extraordinary.

The **imperial guard** made up some 10,000 soldiers and was established by Caesar Augustus who ruled when Jesus was born. The Caesar strategically placed these men throughout Rome to protect the people and also to protect the Caesar. These were hand picked men who signed up for 12-16 years of service. They were the cream of the crop and were highly honored. When they retired from the force they were given handsome severance packages. The power of this group of men grew so much that they not only protected the Caesar's, but also chose who would be Caesar.

These were powerful, hardnosed, tough, take no nonsense men. Military men usually have other things on their minds. When I was in seminary our church was almost on the base of Ft. Knox. Every Sunday we drove by strip club after strip club just to get to the church. There were 8 or 9 in that small little Kentucky town. Why? Because the military base was right there and they were trying to cater to the soldiers.

Since Paul was under house arrest (Acts 28:16, 20) he was chained to one of these soldiers 24-7. He had no privacy. What happened was amazing. At first, they probably mocked Paul and viewed him with contempt. But then they listened to him as he talked with Christian friends who visited, or they heard him dictate one of his epistles to a secretary. They undoubtedly heard him pray. It's not hard to imagine how awkward it was for these soldiers to literally live every day with Paul. But as these soldiers relieved one another from the duty of being chained to Paul, they began to talk among themselves what kind of man he was: his patience, grace, courage, and loyalty to Christ. Finally, it dawned on them, "This man is not a criminal. He's incarcerated only because He is a Christian who loves Christ." Pretty soon the news spread from guard to guard and then to the families of the guards. Amazingly, the word of the gospel spread all the way to Caesar's household as Paul indicates in 4:22! William Hendriksen says, "Paul's *case* and, even better, Christ's *cause*, became the talk of the town".² Indeed, Paul says in v13 that the gospel spread not only to the **imperial guard** but also **to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.**

Another commentator imagines the scene this way:

At times the...room would be thronged with people, to whom the apostle spoke words of life; and after they withdrew the [guards] would sit beside him, filled with many questionings as to the meaning of the words which this strange prisoner spoke. At other times, when all had gone, and especially at night, when the moonlight shone on the distant slopes...soldier and apostle would be left to talk, and in those dark, lonely hours the apostle would tell soldier after soldier the story of his own proud career in early life, of his opposition to Christ, and his ultimate conversion, and would make it clear that he was there as a prisoner, not for any crime, not because he had raised rebellion or revolt, but because he believed that Him whom

² Hendriksen Comm, 69.

the Roman soldiers had crucified, under Pilate, was the Son of God and the Savior of men. As these tidings spread, and the soldiers talked them over with one another, the whole guard would become influenced in sympathy with the meek and gentle apostle, who always showed himself so kindly to the men as they shared, however involuntarily, his imprisonment.

How absolutely consistent the apostle must have been! If there had been the least divergence, day or night, from the high standard which he upheld, his soldier-companion would have caught it, and passed it on to others. The fact that so many became earnest Christians, and that the Word of Jesus was known far and wide throughout the [imperial] guard, indicates how absolutely consistent the apostle's life was.³

It's helpful to remember that Paul was not awaiting a trial, but a verdict from the Emperor as to whether he should live or die! And yet he still had an impeccable testimony and concentrated effort to refuse to allow any obstacles (even imprisonment and being chained to a soldier 24-7) prevent his efforts to spread the gospel and strengthen the churches. Admittedly, Paul probably engaged in one on one evangelism with these soldiers. He was bold like that. But it was the day in and day out Christlikeness that made the difference. This made the soldiers begin asking questions about this Christ is wrote about, prayed to, and spoke to others about.

Sort of puts in perspective every petty complaint and grumble we have about our family and friends who won't listen to us when we tell them about Christ, or mock us. It helps us understand that our places of employment have multiple opportunities for us to share the gospel. It tells us that we are all often guilty of living a self-centered life that fails to even look for opportunities to tell or show people the hope that lies within us. We may think because we are a small church we have little

³ F.B. Meyer

opportunity to proclaim Christ, but that's not true. We all have family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, etc. who need to hear about Christ. Thankfully, God is bigger than our seeming obstacles to proclaiming Christ. He's also bigger than those moments of deep discouragement when we feel that the lost one we love and have invested so much time into doesn't seem to care or listen. Indeed, Paul's situation reminds you that every and any situation you find yourself in is an opportunity that God has sovereignly placed you in to either proclaim the gospel or show the world you are trusting in the gospel above all things.

The missionary Robert Moffatt worked for years in South Africa without seeing a single convert. When some friends in England wrote asking what they might send him as a present, he requested a communion set. Since there were no other believers there, they were surprised, but complied with his wishes. When the set arrived several months later, more than a dozen natives had been won to Christ and were served their first Lord's Supper. Such a beauty and courage of faith.

We have a tendency to think that the circumstances must be right if we are going to be used by God. But we don't have a choice in our circumstances. God is sovereign. Right where you are is where God wants to use you. Whether you are in school, retired, seeking employment, a stay at home mom, working 70 hours a week. Your first duty and privilege is to find ways to proclaim and show people that the gospel is your most prized possession. In the Great Commission (Mt 28) Jesus commanded His disciples to go into all the world with the gospel with the promise that He would be with them. Christ was with Paul in prison. And the results reveal this. Christ is also with us in spite of persecution or scorn from the outside world. God's gospel will progress!

Trans: But not only does Paul show us that the gospel progressed outside the church in evangelism, it also progressed inside the church in the form of encouragement.

B. Progress Inside the Church, 14

One of the reasons its important to view any perceived obstacles to the gospel's progress as something God can and will overcome is that such an attitude is contagious for our fellow believers. Paul goes on to say in v14: **And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.** We often forget how our boldness in treasuring and proclaiming Christ can have on others. Many have observed that historically the church sees revival and conversions during times of intense opposition and persecution. This is because one person is bold for Christ and it results in 10 more being bold. This is just the way it works. Paul recognizes that in spite of his circumstances there was progress not just outside the church, but also inside the church in encouraging other **brothers** who because of Paul's example in prison **much more bold to speak the word of God without fear.** Since Paul is careful to highlight "preachers" in the verses that follow, it's best to understand **brothers** as referring to Christians in general, not just preachers in the ministry. More specifically, it refers to the believers in the city of Rome. Years earlier, a congregation had been planted there. Paul's boldness caused them to not be afraid or ashamed of the gospel (Rom 1:16). Acts 28:30 tells us that during Paul's 2 years under house arrest that he "*welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom*

of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.”

Paul’s life goal is a worthy one for all Christians to follow. He told the Ephesian elders, “*But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24). You may not be a preacher, work in full-time Christian service, or even feel as if you have many gifts to offer. But your desire in life should be to see the gospel advance. And the truth is when other Christians are bold for Christ it encourages us to do our part in whatever way the Lord shows us. History is important because it reminds us of the boldness of those who have gone before us. This spurs us on in boldness for Christ.

John Bunyan was an English Puritan whose preaching was powerful. But because the Church of England didn’t like the biblical gospel he was preaching, they put him in jail to squelch his influence. Refusing to be silent for Christ, he began to preach in the jail courtyard. Prisoners willingly listened, but also hundreds of citizens in the town of Bedford where the prison was located flocked to hear him standing outside the prison to hear him. The authorities tried to solve the problem by putting him in a deep jail cell where they forbid him from preaching. Since he had no audience to preach to, he picked up his pen and wrote *Pilgrim’s Progress*, the fruit of which has impacted a world audience. It is the most widely read and translated book than the Bible. What the authorities intended would stop his preaching actually became an opportunity to have a wider audience to hear the gospel in book form.

All from that tiny jail cell in Bedford. Bunyan's book and his life encouraged other Christians to stand up to the Church of England.

The Philippians of all people knew that great things took place in jails. The Philippian jailer and his family were saved as a result of Paul and Silas' imprisonment. The question is do we believe that even if we are imprisoned, or find ourselves in less than favorable circumstances, that God can overcome these obstacles so that His gospel progresses?

Trans: So we've seen that the 1st obstacle that Satan often uses to try and stop the progress of the gospel in the world is deliberate persecution from outside the church. Most of us won't face that to the extreme that Paul and other Christians through history have, or likely won't. But we for sure face the 2nd obstacle, which is...

II. Disingenuous Preachers From Inside the Church (15-18a)

Paul switches gears. Since he has just brought up the brothers who are bold to preach Christ, he goes ahead and mentions some preachers who may be in the ministry with insincere motives. Note Paul's words in v15: **Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.** He mentions those who preach from **good will**, but his emphasis is on those who preach from **envy and rivalry** because he keeps referring back to them in vss 16-17. These words speak of the disingenuous motives of some preachers within the church. These are not false teachers. He does not call them dogs as he does the false teachers in Philippi (3:3). He does not say they preach a different gospel as he does about some who were in the region of Galatia (Gal 1:8-9). If they had been, then Paul would have exposed them as such. Later, Paul

rejoices in their preaching (18a). He would have never rejoiced in false teaching. The problem was not that they didn't have truth in the declaration from their pulpits, but they didn't possess truth in the motivation of their hearts. It may be unthinkable, but it's certainly not impossible for preachers to preach from bad motives. On the last day, the Lord will cast many into hell who prophesied in Jesus name because they prove to be fakes (Mt 7:22). **Envy** is the desire to keep others from having what is theirs, or to wish they didn't have it. And **rivalry** indicates that these preachers were competing with Paul. Perhaps, these preachers tried to take advantage of Paul's imprisonment to see if they could gain the influence he had. The church in Rome was not established by Paul so perhaps the preachers in these churches didn't like the attention he was receiving in prison and resented somehow the conversions and impact of his ministry while being chained. They became jealous of Paul because some in their congregations were looking up to him instead of them.

But what I want you to see is that in spite of this perceived obstacle of disingenuous preachers, the gospel still progressed both inside the church and outside.

A. Progress Inside the Church, 16-17

Progress inside the church is seen in v 16 where Paul says: **The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.** These were the "good will" preachers. They loved Paul, were not envious of his influence and great gifts, and rejoiced in the way God was using him in extraordinary ways. They preached **out of love** for Christ and the apostle they knew Christ had personally set apart to preach. The

phrase **put here** (κεῖμαι) is translated “appointment” in the NASB. It’s a military word used to describe assigning an officer or soldier to a special assignment like guard duty. As much as the Roman soldiers were appointed to guard Paul in prison, Paul himself had been appointed by a greater authority to guard the gospel while in prison. Jesus appointed Paul and said of him, *“he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.”* (Acts 9:15).

These “good will” preachers would not mess with God’s sovereignty. God had clearly called, gifted, and equipped Paul. He had sovereignly and strategically placed him in Rome. Therefore, they would support the Lord’s man. Unfortunately, that is not always the attitude taken by many in the church, even preachers. And Paul admits this in v17 to speak about the envious preachers: **The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.** These preachers are hungry for fame and honor. Paul says they **proclaim Christ** so they weren’t false teachers. But they had false motives because they proclaimed Him not **sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.**

That is an interesting phrase. In what way could they inflict Paul in prison? The word **afflict** (θλιψις) means to cause friction or pressure.⁴ Paul is saying, “These preachers are not content in seeing me in prison, they want to rub these chains deep in my flesh to harm me.” How could they do that? They could tarnish his reputation. Nothing is worse than being on the receiving end of a false accusation especially if you’re a preacher. Maybe like Job’s friends, these preachers said Paul’s imprisonment was

⁴ Ferguson Comm and Silva

God punishing him for something he did, perhaps a secret sin. Others maybe said that Paul was in prison because he lacked faith to be released. Still others perhaps thought Paul had not only gotten himself but the whole church in a mess. Based on the Emperor's decision on whether Paul lived or died may determine the fate of the church. As a result, some preachers may have criticized Paul and distanced themselves from their association with him and his influence on their congregations out of fear for the Roman authorities. After all, envious preachers grew to such a large number that later Paul admitted, "At my first defense no one came to stand by me" (2 Tim 4:16) referring to his 2nd Roman imprisonment that resulted in his beheading. In spite of these envious preachers there were still the "good will" preachers so that the gospel was still progressing from some who had good motives.

Trans: Moreover, Paul points to the progress outside the church in spite of the disingenuous preachers.

B. Progress Outside the Church, 18a

Paul's analysis in v18 shows the motives of his own heart in ministry, as well as the joy and confidence he had in the progress of the gospel no matter the obstacles. Look at it with me. He concludes: **What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.**

You say how could Paul rejoice in such circumstances: *deliberate persecution from outside the church* and *disingenuous preachers from inside the church*? One answer: He says **Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.**

Absolutely nothing could take away Paul's joy! He knew that God could use preachers with bad motives to spread His gospel. He did it with Jonah who didn't want Nineveh to repent. But preached anyway and Nineveh did repent. Paul was like Joseph who was thrown in a pit and sold into slavery by his brothers and yet still says, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." Paul knew that Jeremiah was cast into a muddy cistern but yet said, "Great is Thy faithfulness" to God (Jer 38:6). And most of all, he knew His Lord and Master Jesus Christ was crucified as a common criminal though he was pure, blameless, and undefiled. Through all these circumstances- and more- God accomplished His purposes. And other than Jesus, He used imperfect people to do it.

Sinclair Ferguson gives a word of warning to us in his commentary:

The wrong motives of bad men must never be allowed to become the determining element in our attitude to either our own lives or the fellowship of the saints.

Here's where this message applies to us today. We cannot control the attitudes and motivations of other preachers. But we can control our own attitudes. It is very easy, if we are not careful, to become bitter in our spirits toward the errors of professing Christians, churches, and other pastors. What happens is that we begin to think that we are the only right ones and our demeanor is then shaped by criticism toward others instead of focusing on declaring the truth. This can result in a harsh spirit, which does not reflect a Christ-like attitude. We learn from Paul that we can recognize the false motives of preachers, the errors of church ministries that get a lot of things wrong, but do so with a Christ-like temperament that is not marked with cynicism, arrogance, and unnecessary criticism.

Paul was the first one to expose false teaching when he saw it and he made no apologies for doing so. But when other churches or preachers- even those who sought his own personal harm- that proclaimed the right gospel he learned to rejoice.

Why do I say this? Because a church plant can become a dangerous place that can nurture attitudes of superiority and competition with other churches. Let us learn to rejoice when other preachers and churches who proclaim the right gospel even if they get a lot of other things wrong. Let us learn to worship and give glory to God when his Word is stood upon even when it's by brothers and sisters in another church and even when it's truth is declared from bad motives.

The truth of the matter is that none of us are perfect. And none of us do everything from 100% pure motivation. We must examine ourselves before we are quick to jump on others. And we are always to keep the main thing the main thing, which is the pure preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16).

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So may you have confidence in the progress of the gospel. May you see to it that you are using your opportunities, resources, and gifts to advance it. And may you rejoice in Christ being proclaimed!

A wise preacher once told me that Satan will do anything he can to prevent the impact of the gospel. He will try and *distort* the gospel through false teaching. And if that doesn't work he will try and *divide* Christians. And when neither one of those works he will do all he can to *distract* Christians from the gospel. Let us not be guilty of being distracted from the joy we are called to experience in the progress of the gospel.