

Philippians 1:12-18

Introduction: Those who live lives that we would look at as being very successful or very fruitful are not always free from tragedy or great hardship. Throughout its history, the Christian Church has witnessed what looked like crushing defeats many times. When it came the missionary zeal and importance, no one eclipsed the Apostle Paul. He was the go-to guy, the most zealous, bold, and courageous. He inspired so many others on to incredible feats of bravery. He had planted so many church, seen so many converts, helped so many struggling churches, defended sound doctrine when even the apostle, Peter, started to compromise it (Galatians 2:14). He was so very important in the eyes of so many believers throughout the rapidly expanding Christian church. It must have been a crushing blow to hear that Paul was now imprisoned. What would become of the Great Commission? What will the churches he planted do now for guidance regarding their brand new elders and deacons? How will the gospel move forward? Who will be able to defend it as well as Paul did?

Clearly, these were questions heavy on the Philippians' hearts. And Paul is going to calm their fears and encourage their hearts by pointing out the *good* that had already come in the furtherance of the gospel of Christ from his imprisonment.

Outline:

1. Trials into Triumphs - V12-14
2. I Rejoice in this: That Christ is Preached - V15-18

1. Trials into Triumphs - V12-14

[12] But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel,

Point: What had "happened" to Paul was: *He had been thrown in jail.* Paul who was so mobile, so on the move, so zealous, who was always praying, planning, and pushing the gospel forward with relentless and almost reckless abandon - this same man was now stuck in jail. To the newborn Christians in Philippi, this could only mean disaster for the future of the truth of the gospel.

Illustration: If we know and love our Bibles, we have surely learned to see that God has a history of making that which appeared to be a tragic end *was actually a triumphant beginning.*

Consider the ways God has turned for good what seemed hopelessly bad:

- a. **Abram and Sarai's barrenness** - Out of their painful struggle, God would raise up two great models of faith and obedience:

Hebrews 11:8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Hebrews 11:11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.

- b. **The destruction of Jerusalem and the report given to Nehemiah** - When he heard the terrible news: **Neh. 1:3-4** And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire." [4] So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

⇒ **Results:** Fasting and prayer - true repentance... and **then** the formation of an unstoppable vision and passion **to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall.** And against all odds - this incredible man, Nehemiah, this man of prayer, sees it happen - surrounded by enemies on the outside and traitors on the inside - at one point working on the wall with swords in one hand and trowels in the other! This **terrible disaster**, this unspeakable evil, that Jerusalem was razed to the ground... ends in triumph. **One man emerges as a spiritual giant - and the story ends of national repentance!**

- d. **Jesus' death.** Remember that seemingly tragic Friday afternoon just a few years back which looked

like a sad and hopeless end to an otherwise brilliant life? Jesus' trial, scourging, crucifixion, and death - what could possibly have looked more dark to those close to the situation? Remember Jesus' disciples' reactions to this? They returned to life as fishermen! "Oh well... so much for that... we'll sure never forget Him, all He said, all He taught... but I guess it's over now." Even after Jesus had told them repeatedly:

Mark 9:31 For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day."

Application: Jesus' own disciples did not believe anything good would come from His death *even when He had repeatedly promised them that it was necessary and that He would rise from the dead!*

Application of v12: And here Paul is telling them: "the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel!" **He goes on to explain how - 2 ways (v13 & v14) his imprisonment and mistreatment furthered the gospel:**

First Way the Gospel was Furthered by Paul's Imprisonment:

[13] so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ;

Point: A door was now open to make the gospel of Christ known to the "whole palace guard" - the "praetorian" guard centered there in Rome - the members of Caesar's household were being witnessed to by Paul.

Question: In what other way could Paul have ever gained an audience with such people?

Illustration: As a final statement of how much good was coming from this imprisonment, at the end of the book of Philippians, Paul says:

Philip. 4:22 All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household.

Second Way the Gospel was Furthered by Paul's Imprisonment:

[14] and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Point: John Calvin's comments on this verse are marvelous:

"By this instance we are taught that the tortures of the saints, endured by them in behalf of the gospel, are a ground of confidence to us. It were indeed a dreadful spectacle, and such as might tend rather to dishearten us, did we see nothing but the cruelty and rage of the persecutors. When, however, we see at the same time the hand of the Lord, which makes his people unconquerable, under the infirmity of the Cross, and causes them to triumph, relying upon this, we ought to venture farther than we had been accustomed, having now a pledge of our victory in the persons of our brethren. The knowledge of this ought to overcome our fears, that we may speak boldly in the midst of dangers."

Illustration: There is just something about knowing that someone else is holding fast and showing courage against all odds that makes those in the same cause braver and bolder.

Application Those engaged in war - *and make no mistake about it, life for the Christian and for the church is a war* - need heroes. They inspire us and push us forward.

Point 2: There were many people who dearly loved Paul. He knew there were *many eyes* watching him. Paul took the example he set for others very seriously as he knew it would affect them. Notice the text: v14, "and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."

Illustration 2: Paul worked so very hard to be a godly example - as he knew they were watching him very closely - the brand new, infant Christians in Thessalonica during the very short time he was there (recorded in Acts 17):

1 Thes. 2:10-12 You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; [11] as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, [12] that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Illustration 3: I believe in heroes - I believe in having heroes. I believe in pointing to great men and women

of God who have gone before us, and reading their stories and biographies.

Application 2: When we look at Paul - and others who have been in chains for Christ, suffered for Christ, been persecuted for Christ, enduring loss and shame for Christ and for righteousness' sake - *we too become emboldened and stronger.*

Illustration: Hebrews 11 - the hall of faith - the great saints and all they endured and accomplished for the sake of believing God and expanding His kingdom on earth:

Hebrews 11:36-40 [36] Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. [37] They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-- [38] of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. [39] And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, [40] God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Final Application of Point 1 (Trials into Triumphs - v12-14): It is only the Christian believe among people on earth who can actually believe that trials are a blessing - and can actually find them to be "pure joy":

James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, [3] knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. [4] But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Paul did this: He was filled with this very kind of joy - because he saw that this great trial, imprisonment, *actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel...*

Every time Christians have been persecuted, the church has thrived: Tertullian, the late 2nd century AD, wrote: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." Every attempt to persecute and stamp out Christianity has always caused explosive growth and purified holiness among its professors.

And in this marvelous passage we see a very early attestation to this wonderful fact - Trials make the church and its proclamation of the gospel "perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

2. I Rejoice in this: That Christ is Preached - V15-18

[15] Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will:

Point: This is a somewhat difficult passage to interpret because the question comes up: How could people preaching the gospel of Christ *accurately* and *faithfully* yet from ill motives possibly add affliction to Paul while in prison?

[16] The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains;

John Calvin gives the best solution: It had to be one of two things (and I think both may be correct):

a. **Anti-Christians** who, in speaking out against the gospel were actually forced to explain what the gospel was in order to deny it - thus inadvertently preaching Christ!

Illustration: A hostile anti-Christian professor at the University of Pennsylvania once read out loud to one of his classes Jonathan Edwards' sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, hoping to show how harsh, disagreeable, and sour the New England Puritans were. At least one student was **converted** by this reading.

Question: Was this man "preaching Christ" with right motives?

b. **True Christians** who were motivated by a desire to make a name for themselves or become famous. Calvin makes this great point: "Ambition is blind, nay, it is a furious beast."

Question: Are there actually Christians, even Christian pastors, who simply want to create a great name for themselves even as they preach Christ and seek to build up their flocks?

Point 2: There can be no doubt that Paul was, in a sense, "famous" among Christian people. He was seen as a very important, godly, wise individual. People loved him. *Because of this, he was no doubt the envy of many people - even among Christians.* Yes, "selfish-ambition" is something Christians, even deacons, ruling and teaching elders must be constantly exhorted to fight against:

Philippians 2:3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each

esteem others better than himself.

Question: Why command this *if it was not a possibility or problem?*

[17] but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.

Point: The other group preaching Christ did so out of love for Christ and were willingly associated with Paul and the *cause for which he was now imprisoned*. Paul was well-known by the world of his day, and his imprisonment was a widely known fact. It would have been very easy for opponents of the faith to simply ask non-imprisoned Christian preachers: "So, you agree with and believe the same things Paul the apostle believes? He who is now in prison?"

Point 2: Remember, there was a group preaching Christ wanting to "add affliction to my chains" - but this group mentioned in v17 did so "out of love, *knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.*"

[18] What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

Point: As long as the gospel is going out and moving forward, it does not matter what the motive of the preacher is. Now, *it does matter to God what the motives are...* but as far as Paul is concerned - when it comes to the salvation of souls and the spreading of the gospel - Paul sees that the good news of Jesus Christ is being preached to those who have never heard it - by good guys and by bad guys.

Application: Paul addresses the motivations of ministers ("stewards") in detail in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5. Listen carefully to his words:

1 Cor. 4:1-5 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. [2] Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. [3] But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. [4] For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. [5] **Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.**

Application 2: There is so very much that people hide from one another. People rarely actually meet "us," they meet who we want them to meet, they meet our "representative." But God sees the heart and knows it all. And there will be a judgment of works - this is not the judgment determining our eternal destiny - that being provided by the death, burial, resurrection, and imputed righteousness of Christ, but there will be a "testing" of our works.

1 Cor. 3:12-13 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, [13] each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

Application: It does make some sense that even all of the good that is done by Christian people and ministers will be mixed with ill motives and sin. All of us will continually struggle with sin until we are in glory

Application 2: And we, like Paul, can rejoice that Christ's gospel continues to move forward, even when it is preached with bad motives - for personal self-promotion and ambition, or anti-Christians trying to attack it - *Christ is preached, and in this we rejoice.*

Illustration: Charles Templeton - a man who was a contemporary of Billy Graham. He was on his way to being just as influential and well-known as Graham until he suddenly rejected the Christian faith and wrote a book called: "Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith." Prior to this, Templeton had preached to stadiums filled with people and many, many people became true believers through those evangelistic events. And yet, we know that Templeton, the entire time he was preaching, was an unbeliever.

Final Application: Christ is preached, and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. Will there always be driftwood like Charles Templeton? Of course. Are there men in pulpits with bad motives - for purposes of self-promotion, or a desire to gain celebrity status? Of course. But this is exactly why our faith must always be in Christ and not in men. And let us remember Paul's instructions as we close (reread the text - v15-18).

1. Trials into Triumphs - V12-14

2. I Rejoice in this: That Christ is Preached - V15-18