

Philippians 1:12–26 “The Joyful Confidence of The Believer”

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 October 2026

Preacher: Guest Speaker

[0:00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Thanks so much, George. It's really great to be here among friends. We so appreciate the fellowship and the ministry here of Church of the Messiah, and I so appreciate George's friendship. We've been friends ever since we moved to Ottawa in 2016, and George's friendship has been a constant for me, which I've appreciated so much. So it's great to be back and to be with you. We are in Philippians chapter 1 this morning, and if you've got a Bible there and you'd like to open to that passage, that would be wonderful. Then you'll be able to follow what we're talking about, and as you do that, and as we prepare our hearts, I'm going to lead us in a word of prayer. Let's pray together.

Father, God, our Father, we thank you for the gift of your living word, and we pray that as we open its pages now, we would hear your voice and you would feed us in our spirit that we might be nourished and refreshed to serve you in the days that are to come. For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

[2:08] One of the repeated themes, as you may know, of Paul's letter to the Philippians is the theme of joy and rejoicing. Joy runs like a red thread through this letter. Paul tells us that he is rejoicing at various points, and he calls us to rejoice too as we walk with Christ. Paul tells us in verse 18 of our passage today in chapter 1 that he is rejoicing and that he will continue to rejoice, and he tells us in verses 25 and 26 that he wants the Philippians to have joy as well. Now, we all know what it is to experience joy. We look back with gratitude, don't we, to those seasons in our lives when we've known real joy. We are delighted when our circumstances bring us joy at the present time, and we long for a joy-filled future, each one of us. But for most of us, most of the time, our experience of joy tends to be tightly bound up with our circumstances. Family life is happy, and we rejoice. Our health is good, and we're able to be joyful. Our finances are healthy, and it's a source of joy. We receive good news, and we rejoice. But the remarkable feature of Paul's experience of joy in Philippians is that it seems to be thoroughly unshackled from his circumstances. After all, Paul is writing this letter from prison, and everything seems to have gone wrong for him. On one level, Paul is living through a nightmare, and yet at the same time, he is filled with joy. Paul's joy in the midst of crisis is a very striking feature of this letter and of our passage today. And so today, the question I would like us to think about and consider together is this. How can we learn to rejoice as Paul rejoices even when things go wrong? It's easy to rejoice in the good times. We all know how to do that. But how can we rejoice when crisis strikes, when it seems like life has just gone off the rails? Now, as we begin to consider that question from this passage, a key thing to notice is that Paul's joy is grounded in conviction. It's grounded in knowledge. Notice how

the passage begins, I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. And then he proceeds to tell them how that is so, and then down to verse 18, and in that I rejoice. Let me help you to know what I know, what I have seen to be true, and let me help you to understand why it is that I can rejoice. And then again, second half of verse 18, the start of the new paragraph there, yes, and I will continue to rejoice. Why? Why will Paul continue to rejoice?

For I know that through your prayers, etc. Paul rejoices because he knows and he understands certain things to be true. His rejoicing is grounded in his confidence, indeed in his conviction, that certain things are indeed true. How will you and I learn to rejoice when things are hard and when things go wrong, when crisis strikes for us personally or corporately? We will be able to do that if we are confident of two truths, one concerning the present and one concerning the future.

So first, a conviction about the present. God is at work for the gospel. That's the conviction for the present. God is at work for the gospel. And here we're looking at verses 12 to 18.

The arrest of the apostle Paul must have seemed to the Philippian Christians to be a total disaster. The apostle Paul had brought them the gospel. He had prayed for them. He had corresponded with them.

He had taught them the great truths of the faith. He was their spiritual father. And now he languishes in a prison in Rome. It's disastrous. It's catastrophic. Surely, they think, this will cause the cause of the gospel to be set back by years, even decades. Think of all the people who would be evangelized if Paul would just be set free. Think of all the immature believers who would be brought to maturity through his teaching. What a shame this is. What a terrible setback. And as they contemplated this unfortunate turn of events, the Philippians may well have been wondering something else, something even more troubling. Has God actually lost control of this situation? Has God's good plan for the apostle and for the work of the gospel, has it now just been knocked off track?

[7:37] Those fears may well have troubled the Philippians, as they may well trouble us when crisis strikes. But what does Paul have to say in response, verse 12? I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. When I was a child, my grandmother used to knit tapestries. She had a long-term project ongoing to knit reproductions of a series of famous medieval tapestries that are actually kept in the Musée Cluny in Paris. They're known as the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries. Maybe you've been to that museum. Maybe you know the ones. You've seen pictures.

They're beautiful, rich images with vibrant colors, lots of sparkle, imagination, a good dose of whimsy too, actually. My grandmother had been working through this project for a number of years, and by the time I was old enough to remember, she was on to her final one. By that time, most of the series of these big tapestries, probably, I don't know, five foot by four foot, had been stretched, mounted in gold frames, hung in various places in their home. But one thing that always fascinated me was to look at the tapestry that she was working on, and particularly to look at the back of the tapestry. You know, the front was beginning to take some shape, but the back of the thing was always just an awful mess, with straggly kind of tufts of wool coming out all over the place, looking all mixed up and disorderly. For the life of me, I couldn't see how this mess of wool, especially when seen from the back, would end up producing anything like the beautiful pictures that were hung around the house in the gold frames. But of course, it did in the end. A mess on one side, a masterpiece on the other.

Paul says to his Philippian partners, no doubt confused and bewildered by Paul's circumstances, I want you to know that God is up to something here. From our perspective, this looks like an awful mess, but I want you to know he is putting together a wonderful gospel masterpiece. I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. How is that so? How has God been at work here? How is this mess a masterpiece for the gospel? Well, in a couple of ways, he tells us. Verse 13, as a result of my imprisonment, it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. The imperial guard here refers to a company that numbered some 9,000 men at this time. We shouldn't probably assume that Paul meant that every single one of them knew his story, knew the details, knew what he was in for, but Paul's language here is actually quite inclusive. Throughout the whole imperial guard, you notice it there, and to all the rest, Paul is indicating that hundreds, thousands of people have become aware that this man is here in prison because he believes and

trusts in Jesus of Nazareth. This man has been putting his life on the line because he believes that Jesus is the true king and the savior. That's his cause. That's his crime. And even the great might of imperial Rome, well, it cannot silence him. And actually, it's wonderful to see God's strategy at work here. We all know the power and influence of key cities for spreading ideas and extending influence. If you want a global presence or global impact, you know, you've got to set up offices in New York or London or maybe Toronto, even Ottawa, we might add. What was the great global hub in Paul's day? Where was the seat of power, the place of influence? What was the great world city of the first century? Well, we all know the answer. It was Rome, of course. And by his imprisonment, Paul has found himself grounded at the very heart of the Roman world, chained in Caesar's own prison with 24-hour-a-day access to

[11:52] Caesar's own guard. It looks like a mess, but it is God's masterpiece for the gospel. And look what has resulted, verse 14, and most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. As other believers in Rome have looked on and seen Paul's witness in prison, as they've seen the cost that he has been willing to bear for the name of Christ, they too have been emboldened to speak the word of God more courageously. You might think that the model of a man in chains might put other people off. You might expect that the realization that prison is a real possibility that that would sober the believers and just quiet them down, but just the opposite has proved true. Paul's ministry looks like it's being curtailed by chains, but actually it's being amplified, expanded, and made more effective. All that being said, Paul is aware that even some of the good things that have resulted from imprisonment are pretty tainted by sin. Even this boldness in gospel proclamation, it's got an ugly underbelly in some cases. Verse 15, you notice it there.

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I'm put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. It's not all roses.

Some have actually used Paul's imprisonment to pursue their own agenda while he's locked up. Some have even seen here an opportunity to raise their own profile in ministry, but Paul's confidence is unshaken. He knows that even here God is at work and his good plan won't be derailed.

Verse 18, but what does it matter? What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. The apostle in prison, the great preacher in chains, what a disappointment, what a disaster. Preachers preaching from envy and rivalry, from selfish ambition. How ugly, how worrying. It looks like chaos. It looks like a mess, but God is working out a masterpiece for the gospel. The word is going out. Christ is being made known. The gospel is advancing.

It's moving forward. When the atheistic communist party came to power in China in 1949, all Western missionaries were asked to leave the country. With the combined effect of a rising atheistic state on the one hand and the removal of the mission agencies on the other, it looked like the growing but very fragile Chinese church was just going to be decimated. Decades of persecution of believers followed, and some of that persecution was very intense indeed. In recent decades, as China has begun to open up against the rest of the world, we might have expected to find that the church had been wiped out and that the party's mission had been accomplished. But you probably know just as well as I do what actually happened. Gospel growth in China has been explosive. There are something like 100 million Christians in the country. By the year 2030, it's estimated that China will have more Christians than any other country in the world. And in a wonderfully ironic development, it's thought that there are probably now more Christians in China than there are members of the Communist Party. You see, it's a mess that became a masterpiece in the purposes of God. How many Chinese Christians could echo in recent decades

[15:55] Paul's words in verse 12, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the death of five of the best-known Christian martyrs of the 20th century. Jim Elliott, Nate Saint, Ed McCulley, Peter Fleming, and Roger Udurian were American missionaries, as you may know, who in the early 1950s moved with their young families to Ecuador to bring the gospel to the Hurani people. After months of dropping packages of gifts over Hurani territory to build bridges of friendship, the five men eventually established a camp near their territory, hoping to establish personal contact. But on January the 8th, 1956, the five men were murdered by tribal warriors, apparently bringing their

efforts to an end in failure. It was a tragedy, and it looked like a disaster. Five young lives full of promise cut terribly short. Five young wives, nine young children, suddenly left without husband and father, and all that with the gospel never having reached the Hurani. News of the death of these five men was soon broadcast globally. Something about their story had captured the world's attention, with Life magazine running a feature about their story.

It's hard to quantify this, but by all accounts, it seems certain that the death of these five men gave renewed focus and impetus and energy to the church in North America and beyond to invest in global missions. And countless young believers were inspired to offer themselves for service as missionaries as a result of hearing this story. The impact of the death of those five young men on the missionary movement for the generations that followed, it is incalculable. And there is really no telling how many people all around the world have heard and responded to the gospel as a result of their sacrifice. But by every account and every estimate, the impact was staggering. It seems quite certain that their deaths did more to spur on world mission in the second half of the 20th century than any other single event. You see, it was a mess that became a masterpiece. It's verse 12 all over again. Friends, I don't need to tell you that there are and will be crises in our individual lives and in our corporate life which will look and feel like disasters. Some among us will be going through real crises at the moment. That's your story.

What will keep us in such times? How can we, like Paul, learn to rejoice? Well, we need to have the conviction that the sovereign God is still in control. We need to know and believe that he is still at work in the circumstances of his people. But as we see that, we need to recognize that God's purpose here in Philippians 1 is the advance of the gospel specifically. And that is still God's purpose and his concern today.

That's his big agenda. And for his servants in the short term, the advance of the gospel won't always mean the increase of our happiness or our comfort. Paul in his day could see that God was doing something wonderful through his imprisonment. He rejoiced to see that the sovereign God was at work, but that didn't mean that things were going to get any easier for him personally. He had no confidence that he was going to get out of prison. He had no confidence that the people of verse 17 were going to stop trying to stir up trouble for him. He simply had the confidence that God was using his trial for the advance of the gospel.

When you and I face times of difficulty or crisis, we long to find that special passage of Scripture that tells us that God promises to take our troubles away. But we search for it in vain, don't we? [20:15] You see, the tough reality is that God doesn't promise to take our trials away this side of heaven. But Scripture teaches us again and again that he is more than able to use our trials for his gospel purposes and for his glory. What we see here in these verses is actually part of a repeated pattern that we find throughout Scripture. You know, we see it in Joseph's life in the Old Testament. His brothers sold him into slavery thinking to do him harm. But when Joseph sees that he was actually sent to Egypt so that the Lord might feed his people in a time of famine, Joseph can look back and say, you meant this for evil, but God intended it for good. We see the pattern actually repeated throughout the book of Acts. Disaster after disaster for the apostles is shown only to propel the gospel to new lands. And supremely, of course, we see the principle at work in the life and the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The Lord's Messiah, the King of kings, rejected, mocked, beaten, crucified. It's a disaster. It is a mess through which God works out the masterpiece of our salvation.

What Paul speaks of in verses 12 through 18 is no isolated incident. This is part of the biblical pattern of how the sovereign God works. Time after time, God uses the trials of his servants to achieve his good purposes for the gospel. In God's economy, you see, no experience in the life of the believer is ever wasted. It is all part of a larger plan to bring the gospel to a needy world and to bring glory to his name. You see, you and I, we may never see the presentable side of God's tapestry, this side of heaven. We may never know how God may be working right now in and through our trials for the sake of the gospel. Paul had the privilege of seeing some of the outcome of what God was doing. He saw verse 14, the proclamation that resulted. He could see verse 18 that Christ was being preached. You and I, we may never see it, but we have the confidence that the same sovereign God is at work today, bringing his plans to fruition in and through our own circumstances, just as he was at work in Paul's day.

Some time ago, I was speaking with a member of our church who was diagnosed with a serious life-threatening illness. She shared a little bit about how she had been processing what was going

on and how she was learning to trust the Lord through it. It was wonderful to hear her testimony and to see how the Lord had been sustaining her. But I think I was most struck by what she shared with me about her initial reaction to her diagnosis. She said that when she was first given the news that she had this life-threatening disease, the first thought and the first image that came into her mind was the image of a tapestry. Right away, she thought to herself, God is doing something here. He is weaving something together. He's got a big plan, and I'm only seeing a small part of it. And as she shared that reflection, I thought, what a wonderfully Christian instinct that is. What a Bible-shaped way to think about what is going on. On the surface, here is some terrible news, a crisis, frankly an ugly mess.

But what does the believer see with the eyes of faith? A masterpiece that is being woven together. But at the same time, if you ask her, you ask me, how is this mess going to be a masterpiece? Well, she has no idea, nor do I. But here is a core conviction to sustain the believer and even to give joy in the midst of trial. God is at work for the gospel, and he is able to use our circumstances, good or bad, to further his cause. That's the conviction for the present. And now, rather more briefly, in verses 18 to 26, Paul teaches us a conviction concerning the future. And the conviction is this, God will deliver his people. Middle of verse 18. Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance.

On first reading, it looks like in verse 18, Paul is saying that he is rejoicing because he knows that the Philippians are praying for him to be delivered for prison, and he just knows that God is going to answer their prayer and get him out of prison. But as we read on, it becomes pretty clear that the deliverance Paul has in mind is not necessarily a deliverance from prison in the short term. Verse 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. See, by the end of verse 20, it's pretty clear that Paul is aware that he could still die. So his confidence is not first and foremost that he will be released. No, his confidence is that God will give him ultimate deliverance. That word deliverance in verse 19 is actually the same word that can be translated salvation. What Paul is saying is this. He knows that as the Philippians pray for him and the spirit of Jesus helps him, he will stay secure in Jesus, secure in his salvation. And he continues on in that same train of thought. Verse 20, it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed or not be put to shame. It could be rendered. Often in the Bible, when it talks of a person being put to shame, it speaks of their standing before God. Ultimately, the only judge we should care about is [26:23] God himself. And the only shame that really matters is the shame we might feel before him. To be put to shame on the day of judgment is to be rejected before God. But to be without shame on the final day is to be accepted and to be saved. And I think Paul has that kind of Bible background here in mind in verse 20.

And I think he's saying something like this. I eagerly expect and hope that I will have no reason to be ashamed before Jesus my judge. Paul's got the final judgment in view. He's got eternity in view. And so what might make Paul ashamed before Jesus on the final day? Well, simply this. He will be ashamed before Jesus on the final day if he is ashamed of Jesus before others here on earth. If when it comes to his trial in Rome, Paul is embarrassed of Jesus, he's embarrassed of the gospel, well, he knows that he will be ashamed when he stands before Jesus on that great and final day. You may remember that Jesus said in Mark chapter 8 that if any of his followers is ashamed of him and his words in this generation, he, Jesus, will be ashamed of that person when he returns. Well, Paul is confident that he will not be put to shame on the final day, but rather he will have, middle of verse 20, full courage to exalt Jesus in this present situation, to remain faithful to Jesus, to stay true to the gospel. And as long as he is doing that, Christ will be exalted in Paul, whether by life or by death. Paul's concern isn't his present circumstances. It isn't primarily this trial before Caesar. It isn't even the matter of life or death. What he has in view is ultimately the day when he stands before Jesus Christ. Paul isn't concerned about what will happen today or tomorrow. His concern is what will happen on that final day when he meets his Lord. He is confident that the Lord Jesus is able to deliver him, to bring him safely to heaven. And so he's able to say, verse 21, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. All that matters to me in this life is the Lord

Jesus Christ. And death is actually a gain and not a loss, because I go to be with him and I enter into the fullness of his salvation. With things said in that perspective, Paul is able to speak with great peace about the question of whether he lives or whether he dies, verse 22. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Well, that will be good on one level. Yet what shall I

choose? I cannot tell. I am hard-pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and your joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again. On the one hand, dying and going to be with Jesus would be better by far. On the other hand, staying around a little bit longer is going to be useful for the Philippians. But either is okay with Paul, because he knows that his eternity is secure. He knows that whatever Caesar may do, the Lord will deliver him.

[30:05] We thought a moment ago about the five martyrs who gave their lives to bring the gospel to an unreached people. Jim Elliott, one of the five, famously wrote these words in his journal a number of years before heading to Ecuador. He wrote this, he is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. What was Jim Elliott meaning? He knows his eternity is secure. He knows that the Lord can deliver him. And he knows that this life is brief and the things of this world are temporary. So why not spend everything in the Lord's service? See, Jim Elliott was clearly someone who believed, verse 19, that the Lord delivers his people. And he is clearly someone who lived out, verse 21, and in his kindness, the Lord used him, his life and his death, in a remarkable way for the gospel.

Friends, we have an assurance in the present that God is at work in ways that may be confusing, that are largely invisible, but he is at work for his glory, for the sake of the gospel, for our good. And we have a hope for the future, a firm hope that he will indeed deliver us as we trust in Christ. And so in these things, we may have joy, whatever our circumstance today. Let's pray together as we conclude. God, our Father, we thank you for this assurance that we have, an assurance for the present, and an assurance for the future. And we pray that you might teach us to have joy, whatever our circumstance, that we might be liberated to serve you freely and wholeheartedly. For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.
Amen.