

Finding joy in your circumstances

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[0 : 00] So Philippians is four chapters, just 104 verses.!

Let me just encourage you, spend time in God's word this week. You know, it took me, I think, about 15 minutes to read the entire book of Philippians.

And it was just a quick and easy read, and yet there is so much contained in Philippians. And I hope to share some of that with you this morning.

Before we open God's word, let's open with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you that you love us so much. We thank you for the opportunity to come today and worship a risen God.

We thank you for the opportunity to fellowship with fellow believers who all share that common bond in Jesus Christ. We thank you for that.

[1 : 27] Lord, guide our time today. We pray that your word would speak to us and that you would use me this morning and speak through me the words that you have.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable. In Christ's name, amen. Sorry. I come back at this very naturally. My father was very emotional, and I think I got some of it from my father-in-law.

That's a unique gift, right? You'll notice there is no PowerPoint up here this morning, and there were no note-keeping inserts either.

My IT director, technical services director, was not home this week to help me with that task. She was in Disneyland, and I know she had a great time because I got pictures throughout the week, and I will say I am quite gratified that I did not have to go.

[2 : 49] I told her I would look quite ridiculous with the Mickey Mouse bow thing on my head, and so I'm glad I stayed home, but I know she had a great time.

Philippians. Let me just give you a little bit of background about the book. Throughout the book of Philippians, is a recurring theme in spite of what Paul and Timothy are experiencing while this book is being written.

In fact, they're actually in prison at the time that this book is written. Philippians is actually a letter from Paul and Timothy to those who live in Philippi.

Philippi is a city that is in Greece. In the letter, there are a series of vignettes that look back to or look forward to kind of the central part of the book of Philippians, and it's in chapter 2, verses 5 through 11, that we find this poem, if you will, or the central basis of the book of Philippians.

So chapter 2 of Philippians, verses 5 through 11, says, it says, have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God, a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

[4 : 56] And being found in human form, he humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God.

That section retells Jesus, the Messiah's incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation.

And really, those verses are something that we should all become very familiar with. Those verses are taken directly from Isaiah, starting in chapter 42 and 43, 45, and into 52 and 53.

Paul quotes Isaiah as part of his exhortation and that key thought. Then he spins around that section, that chapter 2, 5 through 11, and he uses just little vignettes, if you will, different than a lot of Paul's letters where he is talking about a certain topic and he works that through to completion for whoever is receiving that letter.

And this one is just a series of vignettes to encourage us. What he wants to show through these vignettes is that living as a Christian means seeing your own story as an expression of Jesus Christ's story and in so doing, Christ and the gospel through you will be shared to those who have

never heard it.

[7 : 05] Now, I chose Philippians today because today is Missionary Sunday and this is truly a missionary letter.

As I said, Philippi, the place, the town where the Philippians lived, we are Washingtonians, we live in Washington. the Philippians, Philippi, is a city in modern day Greece.

It's about 10 miles north of the north end of the Aegean Sea. It's in the area of Greece known as Macedonia. And Paul, we find in Acts chapter 16, actually received a call or a vision from God, a man saying, come and preach to us.

And so, after that vision, Paul said, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them, they went to Macedonia.

When Paul was there, it was a city full of former Roman soldiers. I don't know if that's because I'm sure it's a very warm kind of tropical place, a good place for a soldier to retire.

[8 : 34] That's what I suspect. I'm a little surprised it wasn't on the Aegean Sea, but they chose Philippi. But what that meant was Philippi was not welcoming to the gospel.

It was not a place where the gospel could be presented freely without any implications. In fact, it was in Philippi where Paul traveled and during his sharing, a young lady who was possessed by a demon would forth tell the future, a fortune teller.

She had handlers and eventually Paul cast the demon out. The men who were the handlers said, oh, this isn't good because now they've lost their source of income.

They took Paul and Silas at the time to the magistrates and they said, they're preaching the gospel, this is contrary to Roman law, and besides that, we've lost our income.

The bottom line for Paul and Silas, they are arrested, they are thrown in jail after they are beaten. And it was in jail that then a miraculous earthquake occurred, their chains fell off, and making the story just a little bit shorter, the jailer comes to know Jesus Christ and his family.

[10 : 24] So even in jail, Paul was able to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with those around him, and he led somebody to a Lord.

Another character that is in that Acts 16 account, is a lady named Lydia. Lydia lived in Philippi. Somehow she had come to know the Lord. Paul and Silas meet her. She convinces them that while they are in Philippi, they should stay at her house.

And so we have, and Paul and Silas, they had to be convinced of that. That was not an easy sell, but eventually it says she prevailed, and they stayed with her.

The interesting part there is just the simple act of opening her home to a missionary. What a great example. But what is so fascinating to me is here we have the book of Philippians, and it's written to the church at Philippi.

[11 : 40] And we already know some of those people. Right? Think about that. He met Lydia, and she was most certainly one of the first people within that church.

We don't know the jailer's name, so we'll call him Jailer, and his family. And I don't know how big that was. But they came to know the Lord, and they most certainly were part of the church at Philippi.

That account is in Acts 16. If you're interested, we won't go there and look at it, but it's a fascinating thing to contemplate that we know the very start of that work.

When Paul crossed the Aegean and went up to Philippi, one of the people that I read this week said that was the first time the gospel of Jesus Christ had crossed into Europe.

For me personally, I've never thought of Greece as being in Europe, but it's the first time that we know of that it made its foray into that region and heading west.

[13 : 00] when Paul writes a letter, almost without fail, he starts it off with thankfulness and in this case with joy and he does that because it's because of the partnership of the Philippians.

if you read chapter 1 starting in verse 1, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy, because your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Partnership. When, I know if you listen to Dave Ramsey, I don't know if any of you listen to Dave Ramsey, but he will talk about the only ship that doesn't sail in the financial world is a partnership.

partnership. I've never been there, I'm not sure I understand that, but that's Dave Ramsey. This is a different kind of partnership.

[14 : 43] This idea of partnership that he's talking about in that early section is fellowship. It's the word, the Greek word, *koinonia*, where people within a group share common goals, share common values, responsibilities, and the outworking of it is shared resources and a commitment to a common purpose.

So Paul was looking at the Philippians and said, as Christians, you are partners with me in sharing the gospel.

I just find it so interesting that there is no mention, even in this early part of Philippians, of the treatment that Paul received at the hands of some Philippians, not those in the church.

Instead, he only focuses on the joy. In fact, if you look at Philippians 1, 12 through 14, this will tell you a little bit about Paul's mindset.

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

[16 : 22] And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Paul is in prison in Rome when he writes this letter.

Paul was no stranger to being in prison, prison, but you never hear about how terrible an experience that was for him.

He only finds joy in that situation. The thing I want us to gather from this is God never stops working.

God never stops working. It doesn't matter our circumstances. He is still at work. He is always at work. We have a role as believers.

It's not a negotiable role. It's not something that we can choose to accept or reject. 2 Corinthians 5 verse 20 says, therefore, we are, emphasis mine, we are ambassadors for Christ.

[17 : 43] God making his appeal through us, we implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. An ambassador, in governmental terms, is someone appointed to go from one country to another country and present the very best picture they can of their home country to the guest country, to share about how wonderful that this country is and to represent them in all things.

Our role as believers is to be ambassadors for God. That is our role. We, like I said, we don't have the option to accept or reject.

that is our position. Following that same idea, if you look at, just real quick, look at Romans chapter 10, verse 14.

Remember, I said, an ambassador represents the country to another group of people. And they do that through speaking good things of the country.

So, now we know from 2 Corinthians 5 that we are ambassadors. Paul, in Romans 10, 14, says, but how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him?

[19 : 25] And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And then, how do they preach unless they are sent?

Well, the answer to that goes back to, we are ambassadors. We are sent to convey the good news, the gospel, in partnership with Paul and with Christ Jesus, to share what it is that he has done in our lives.

Paul understood that the best way for the Philippians to share their faith was in one-on-one conversations, to tell their story of their salvation experience, or what God was doing in their life. In the same way, that's how we share Christ to those who have not yet met him, through a very simple story.

I was thinking about it this morning, there's a tendency to believe that if we evangelize, that we have to close the deal, that we have to get somebody to ultimately accept the Lord, and anything short of that is not success.

[21 : 01] But we know that one man plants and another waters, but God gets the increase. Our story of how God is working in our lives, shared with someone who doesn't know, is the most precious thing we can share with that individual.

individual. It doesn't require that you have every answer or present a perfect exemplary life.

Throughout scripture, God often works through ordinary, flawed people who are willing to speak honestly about what God has done.

Neither the message nor the invitation of Jesus are about having a trouble-free life. In fact, Jesus himself said we would have trouble, but he also gave us another promise that he would always be with us.

In Philippians chapter 1 verses 27 and 28, it says, only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind, striving side by side for the gospel and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

[22 : 31] He wanted to encourage the Philippians engage in the fight, engage in evangelism, engage in telling others your simple story.

Again, it doesn't have to be complex, it doesn't have to be a three-point sermon that's shared, it's very simple sharing.

He also says in those verses, I think it's in verse 28, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. When I traveled to Africa 20 years ago, maybe a little longer than that, I met with a friend of mine, Ted Rabenold, who is a missionary in Tanzania, in an area of Tanzania that's very primitive.

The government pretty much does not have any interest in the Rukwa Valley of Tanzania, but that's where Ted ministers. And we would meet each morning while my team of three of us and Ted's team who worked with him had devotions.

And it was humbling to hear Ted's prayer every morning. His prayer was not that we would be wise in seeing opportunities to share the gospel.

[24 : 10] people. It wasn't that we would have more knowledge so that we could more effectively share a three-point outline. It wasn't that we would have a rally where we could share Christ.

His prayer every morning was for courage. courage. And I really think that's what Paul's saying here that courage or the fear of what someone else will say is often what stops us in sharing our little story.

One story. We have experience. We have knowledge. We just need to share that story with those we come in contact with.

Philippians 2, 14 and 15. I love this because this hits very close to home. 14 and 15.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing. that you may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world.

[25 : 38] You know grumbling and complaining can sound like Paul is talking about words but I think it's much more than words. It's an attitude.

It's an attitude of I'm not happy with the situation where I find myself. I'm not happy with the circumstances in my life.

And yes it comes out in words but it's that heart attitude that Paul is really talking about. Further he goes on to say we are shining lights in the world.

and believe me I know from first hand experience the world is watching how you face adversity.

And I will give you just a brief glimpse into how minor something can really take you down. I worked for Seattle Fire Department.

[26 : 43] When I was a firefighter every day that I went in I would take a couple of eggs and a piece or two of bread maybe a slice or two of bacon. I had a pan a nonstick pan and a spatula at work that I would use to fry the eggs do the bacon.

Well one morning Dennis asked can I borrow your pan and spatula? Sure. So Dennis borrowed it and I got it back and somehow the spatula had been laid on the burner and so now I had a seriously misformed deformed spatula that was just uncomfortable to use.

Wow. Did I complain and grumble and say to him do you plan on replacing this?

Is this what's going on? And his reply wow and you're a Christian and you're upset about a ruined spatula?

Yeah. Grumbling complaining. The world will watch when you face adversity probably more than a burned spatula. When you face adversity the world will watch because we are shining lights and they are watching us and how we react in that situation will speak loudly about our trust, faith, and confidence in God's plan for us.

[28 : 27] Remember Paul was in jail when he wrote this. He had been in jail previously in Philippi and yet the only thing we hear about that is wow God is using those circumstances in my life for his

glory.

That's what Paul is sharing with the Philippians to do on a regular basis. We're going to skip ahead to chapter 3 verses 12 through 14 and we're going to skip back and forth here a little bit.

Starting in verse 12 of chapter 3 not that I have already obtained this or I am already perfect but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Brothers I do not consider that I have made it my own but one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead I press on toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Our mindset as we share our story as we live our story as we're in fellowship and koinonia and partnership with the gospel is to press forward keep moving forward with the gospel.

[30 : 02] keep presenting it at every opportunity with an upward look knowing that ultimately our citizenship is in heaven and if you go back to chapter 3 verse 8 Paul actually talks about what he has in this life and what it means to him.

chapter 3 verse 8 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.

we won't necessarily look at it but Paul struggles in this letter with is it better for me to be here and sharing the gospel when I would really rather be in heaven and he answers that by saying no it's better that I'm here now here with you through this letter here with you in prison and sharing the gospel with the Roman guard that was better for Paul and he wanted to encourage us that the troubles and problems we face as well as the riches that we may have the good things that we have those are not nearly as important as knowing Jesus Christ as Lord.

as if the Philippians needed an example if Paul in his life was not a good enough example for the Philippians he offers two examples of men who walked with God lived out their faith they were living walking examples of the gospel he gives that in chapter 2 starting in verse 19 and I won't read all of this but it's interesting he chooses Timothy who is with him in prison it says in verse 20 for I have no one like him who will genuinely be genuinely concerned for your welfare and again as I've said these vignettes look back to that central portion that I read initially where it says that Christ humbled himself and Christ God is looking for humility in our life and here we have an example of it of Timothy with Paul another example is a man named Epaphroditus he is from Philippi he has come from Philippi to Rome with gifts for Paul and it says in verse 27 indeed he was ill near to death but God had mercy on him and not only on him but me also lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow and then again in verse 30 it says of Epaphroditus for he nearly died for the work of

[33 : 52] Christ risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me Paul is giving us great examples of men who were willing to die for the sake of the gospel that were concerned about genuinely concerned about the welfare of the people in Philippi great example for us and to you I would say it is okay to look for men and women that faithfully serve God and emulate their behavior in chapter 3 verse 17 it says brothers join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us look for those examples growing up my father had a group of friends that he knew from when he first attended the

University of Washington and those group of guys were mentored by a man named Chief Peterson Charles was his first name but they called him Chief he was the house parent that probably gives you some idea of how things went at the University Christian Union's men's house if it was Chief Peterson but I do know he was not afraid to disciple and mentor those young men and they had an incredible relationship with one another that spanned time distance all those things when they would get together it was like they were unfortunately still in the University of Washington they were characters but all of them loved the Lord and they demonstrated that love to one another by challenging each other by caring for others kids when they became wayward they would they would step in

I can't tell you the number of times my dad went and met with one one man's son just to encourage him in his walk or to bring him back to God look for men like that look for women like that as I said I was quite jealous of my dad for having that kind of relationship with that group of guys what was it honey two weeks ago three weeks ago we traveled back to Chicago and I went to don't hate I went to my 50th college reunion okay I actually parenthetically I remember as a student seeing all those 50 year people and wondering I didn't know that people could live that long and now

I was one of them but I will tell you that I am blessed to have a group of friends close friends close Christian brothers and then their wives who are walking with God who challenge and encourage me even in spite of time and distance these are guys that I played football with while I was at Wheaton it's incredible to have friends like that one one last admonishment that Paul gives is found in chapter four verse eight it says finally brothers whatever is true whatever is honorable whatever is just whatever is pure whatever is lovely whatever is commendable if there is any excellence if there is anything worthy of praise think about these things think about these things again growing up we had a youth pastor and his wife and they would meet with us on Sunday evenings after church at an event called afterglows great time of fellowship with our friends one of the things the recurring themes at those afterglows was garbage in garbage out they were not using this passage of scripture in fact

I never heard it directly related to this but Paul is saying garbage in garbage out in a very positive way that what we intake into our mind if we can read scripture and this can be the basis of how we live but we also have other inputs as well and he is saying those things that are pure just honorable worthy of praise excellent all those things let those things fill your mind and your life will reflect that out to a world that is very dark in so doing you will shine as a light in the darkness finally and this this is the part of the letter that I always thought was the important part and after studying this week I realized this actually this last one is probably the least important if they had to be ordered in the same way it's a very important element in chapter four verses 15 and 16 and you

[40 : 32] Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel when I left Macedonia no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again the idea of giving Katie asked the question last week can our tithe be something other than money is that a fair the Philippians helped meet Paul's needs there's no question about that but we can give in at least three different ways time talents and treasures all three we have been given by given by

God to steward faithfully our time our talents and our treasures Paul talks about the gift that he received from the Philippians in verse 18 he says what they gave to support his work is a fragrant offering a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God if you look at the life of Epaphroditus he did at least two and quite possibly all three of the time talent treasures he traveled from Philippi to Rome to be with Paul while he was in prison he took the time to make that trip and because of that he almost died from sickness he for sure brought money needed to support

Paul while he was in prison and very likely the talents of the Philippians were displayed through garments blankets and other material needs that Paul would need while in prison it's interesting when I think about this passage I think about this church we are on the board of directors of a mission Grace Ministries International and pastors or pastors missionaries travel around the United States typically they come here in October one of the last big visits I don't I don't even remember when it was exactly maybe 22 the missionaries were up at

Stonewater Ranch in one of the homes there that group of missionaries were so incredibly thankful for the opportunity to all be together to fellowship with you and they looked at it as a place of rest and respite from a very busy schedule and I know I've heard well we don't have we as a church here don't have much to offer you I will say this church offered its heart to the missionaries in providing that and they were incredibly thankful they love this group they love this church well there you have it a look at a missionary letter a letter that looks at hardship that Paul faced jail lack of resources he even mentions in this letter conflict with others who preach the gospel as a cause to be joyful as a cause to be joyful