

Philippians: The Book of Joy (Phil. 1:12-18)

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[0:00] Today, we are looking at a passage in the book of Philippians. If you have a copy of the scripture with us, if you with you today, if you can turn to Philippians chapter one, we will be in verses 12 through 18 in a moment.

And we have been looking at this book and we are going to be preaching through this book that we find in the Bible. And it's really a letter from the Apostle Paul to the church at Philippi.

And Paul has been writing to them. He introduces himself and he has this great affection for this church at Philippi, mainly because of their partnership in the gospel.

And we find ourselves in the text. I'm going to read it with you. If you can read along with me as we read Philippians chapter one, 12 through 18, Paul writes.

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.

[1:12] And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.

The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed. And in that I rejoice. Would you pray with me?

Father, we are here to hear from you today. Lord, do you know each person? What all of us come in with?

The places of encouragement, the places of joy, the places of discouragement. And I pray that as your word is preached, that you would minister to each of us in the ways in which we need to hear from you.

[2:20] I love you, Lord. And it's in your name we pray. Amen. Today, the primary big idea of our text today is that one can possess joy in the proclamation of Christ, despite one's circumstances, despite the trouble that one may find themselves in.

I want us to read one more time just three verses of our text, beginning with the first one that we read, verse 12. I want you to know, brothers, what has happened to me.

What is it that Paul is describing? What is it that he's saying has happened to him? He is saying in here, I have joy. I have joy in the Lord, despite the things that have happened to me.

I'm giving you an update, church at Philippi, of the things that have been happening to me. But what is he speaking of? He's speaking of his present circumstance. Paul, as we know, is a prisoner.

He is under house arrest. He will be there for a total of two years. He is in a rented private residence there in the city of Rome, awaiting a trial where he will be ultimately sentenced to death.

[3 : 32] He is paying for this rented residence out of his own funds. We read this in Acts chapter 28. Out of his own expense, he's doing this. And likely he is receiving monies from the churches around who are expressing generosity to him.

And Paul is physically chained, both likely day and night, to a Roman soldier of the Praetorian Guard. And we're going to get into that in a moment.

But imagine Paul has no privacy. When he ate, when he slept, when he wrote, when he prayed, when he had various members of the Roman Guard, when he was visited by friends who had come to see him and his guests, he had no privacy.

And various members of the Roman Guard, this Praetorian Guard who he was chained to, they were on duty to ensure that Paul would not escape while he awaited trial. And they heard everything that Paul said and everything, and they observed everything that he did.

And Paul is rejoicing. And you say, well, in what ways is Paul rejoicing? How does he have this joy despite this imprisonment, despite the lack of privacy, despite being chained to a Roman guard?

[4 : 57] Why does he have such joy? I find three reasons in our text today. The first one, though, I'm going to hearken back to our first sermon that Pastor Jay preached when we opened this book.

Paul, in his original greeting in verse 1, the first reason that I find is that Paul, it's his identity, is why Paul has joy despite his circumstance.

Paul says in the first verse of the letter, he says, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. Paul envisions and sees his identity as in Christ.

He is a servant of Christ. And you say, why is that such a source of joy? Well, Christ is the one who, by his grace, saved Paul.

And Paul is indebted to the sacrifice for sin that Christ has made on his behalf. And in choosing Paul to serve him, he says, I can do no better thing with my life than to serve Christ.

[6 : 00] And I am in Christ. And you think, well, how can you have such joy just being in Christ? Because no one can take Christ away. And so he has joy because he is in Christ.

And there's nothing anyone else can do that can take that away from him. Think about all the things that we can find and take joy in that can be removed in an instant. Some of us may take joy in a career.

This is why it's hard sometimes when I am. I have heard and I don't think I'm altogether different. So I'm not critical of those. When folks approach retirement, maybe they don't know what to do with themselves because they have taken on this identity of I've seen myself as this type of person.

And now I've retired. And now who am I? Because I'm no longer that. Your career can come and go. Our identity cannot be found in our career.

Investments in wealth. I'm going to share a story later in the sermon. Investments in wealth can be gone in an instant. But some can take their identity and say, well, I'm kind of a big deal.

[7 : 08] I'm worth a lot. Some can say, my house, where I call home, is a place of security for me. Ask those in California how much security their house provides them now.

You can't place your identity in what your possessions are, your home. They can be gone in an instant. So too can your looks. I lost mine a while ago.

And those are fleeting. Life itself can be gone. Popularity. Some take their identity in being a social media influencer type person.

You say the wrong thing. And all those followers turn on you. And it could be gone. Popularity comes and goes. All of this, if we find our identity in any other thing, it can lead to disillusionment, disappointment, depression, all the rest.

Because all of it is fleeting. But what no one can take away from you is being in Christ. And so Paul takes this joy. He says, I know I'm in prison.

[8 : 30] I know I'm under house arrest. I know I'm waiting trial. I know all of this. But I'm in Christ. And I'm a servant of Christ. And no one can take that away from me.

Second reason I can see that Paul finds joy despite his circumstances is because the gospel is being advanced. Look with me in verses 12 and 13. 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 garden to the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. But look with me in verse 12. Paul takes delight in knowing that despite his present circumstances, it has really served to advance the gospel.

My imprisonment is for Christ, he says in the last line of verse 13. And you think, and he mentions an interesting group here.

He says, it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard. Who are those individuals? These are the known as the praetorian guard. It was established by the praetorian guard in the Roman Empire was established by Caesar Augustus.

[9 : 49] Caesar Augustus is the reason for why Joseph and Mary made pilgrimage to Bethlehem where Jesus was ultimately born. Why is that? Because Caesar Augustus, the guy who started the praetorian guard, that same Caesar was responsible for taking a census where everyone had to go to their hometown to register for the census.

And that's why Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem, humanly speaking. But that Caesar was the same guy, Caesar Augustus, who established the praetorian guard.

These, you may think of them as the secret service of the Roman Empire. They were a special unit where they were responsible for protecting the emperor.

They were responsible for protecting high civil and military officials. They were the best of the best. And in this case, one of them is on duty, at least for guarding Paul, as he awaits trial because Paul has said, I want to take my case before Caesar.

And he appealed to Caesar. And so he's awaiting trial. And he's now being guarded by one of these members of the praetorian guard. And undoubtedly, they are on a rotation. They typically served 12 to 16 years.

[11 : 13] And upon retiring from one of the members of the praetorian guard, you get this handsome severance pay. It was a privileged service. And so these poor guards, they witnessed firsthand the teaching that Paul proclaimed.

They witnessed firsthand Christian hospitality. They witnessed graciousness. They witnessed patience. They witnessed perseverance in the light of great affliction.

They witnessed words that would be used to give life. They witnessed the wisdom that Paul had, his deep convictions, his genuineness of his faith, his humility, and his love and concern even for them who he was chained to.

Can you imagine being a member of the praetorian guard being chained to Paul? I pity you because you're going to get it. And why do I say, and so undoubtedly, these members of the praetorian guard would have a week of service, or we don't know how long they would be on guard duty for Paul to ensure that he would meet his trial date.

But undoubtedly, they perhaps rotated through. And how, because I find something very interesting. At the very close of the letter, if you can turn to Philippians chapter 4, verse 22, real quick, we're going to read a verse that I find very interesting.

[12 : 38] At the very end of the letter, we read, Paul is greeting the church at Philippi, and he's greeting the church at Philippi by others who want to greet them. And he says, all the saints greet you.

That means all the saints at the church at Rome greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. Well, how is it that Caesar's household came to faith in Christ? Could it be that members of the praetorian guard who came to faith in Christ because of Paul's witness to them ultimately cycled through Caesar's palace in guarding Caesar, and perhaps even Caesar, members of Caesar's household heard of Christ because of these members of the praetorian guards?

Who knows? We don't know. They also could have just heard because of the church at Rome had proclaimed the gospel, and eventually the gospel reached Caesar's household. We don't exactly know.

But I find it very interesting that even members of Caesar's household greets the church at Philippi. I have one more reason for Paul to have joy even in the midst of his circumstances.

And the third and last reason I find is in verse 14, and that is this. It's because of the boldness of the believers that Paul has heard.

[14 : 03] Verse 14, And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, by the very nature of Paul being imprisoned, has led to boldness and courage in the believers there at Rome because of his imprisonment.

Because Paul has, he is in prison because of Christ. He has courage and boldness as people have come to visit him. He's able to receive visitors, and he continues to proclaim Christ.

And the effect of that is other believers have said, Paul's in Rome. Paul is in prison for the sake of Christ. How dare we not be equally as courageous and bold?

What could anyone do to us? We have Christ. And that built up in the believers' courage. And Paul, despite his circumstances, has joy for the three reasons I mentioned.

Because his identity is in Christ, and no one can take it away from him. He has joy because the gospel is being advanced even while he is in prison.

[15 : 19] And thirdly, boldness and courage is being witnessed in the life of other believers because of his circumstance. But there's a problem.

There's another. Paul has joy in proclaiming Christ despite of his trouble. The second, though, Paul has joy despite of the surrounding circumstances.

What were some of the compounding surrounding circumstances that Paul is facing? Look with me in verse 15. We find them. In verse 15, we read, Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.

The latter do it out of love. That is, those who preach Christ out of goodwill, they do it out of love. But, remember, there are some who preach Christ from envy and rivalry.

And so then in verse 17, those who are preaching Christ from envy and rivalry, he says, The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

[16 : 39] So not only is the fact that he is in prison bad enough, but he also has those who are proclaiming Christ who are actually looking to afflict him while he's in prison.

And it's not from the lost world out there who, it's from members potentially of the household of faith because they're preaching Christ.

And it says that they are preaching Christ out of envy. Envy of who? Paul. Think of this. Can you imagine with me a pastor getting jealous of the Apostle Paul? Because Apostle Paul has an incredible reputation. Everyone knows Paul.

Paul. It's in the Roman Empire. Paul goes to Antioch. The church at Antioch sends him out on the first missionary journey, proclaiming Christ all throughout Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey.

[17 : 45] Second missionary journey, the reach goes a little further. Third missionary journey, the reach even goes further. Paul is establishing churches. Paul is establishing elders. He's appointing elders.

He's encouraging other pastors to appoint other elders. Everyone knows Paul. And so then you have a pastor who doesn't have quite the reputation that Paul does, and they're just a little envious.

Paul has this church planting success. All that you can't minister anywhere a pastor goes without running into someone who's very familiar with the Apostle Paul.

and speaks well of him at that. And he says, I want that reputation. And then, there's those who preach Christ not just out of envy, but some also out of rivalry.

Can you imagine someone saying, hey, you know, I know the Apostle Paul is kind of a big deal, but he's in prison. I'm free.

[18 : 55] I'm here before you. I'm speaking to you. He's in prison. Something must have gone wrong for Paul for him to be in prison. It can't just necessarily be for the cause of Christ.

He's on the wrong side of the law. You know, and I'm here talking to you, and so I must have a little better character than that guy because something went wrong.

And so there's a little bit of a rivalry. I'm better than that guy. And then, we see envy and rivalry, but then in verse 17, Paul just kind of summarizes it.

I don't care if it's out of envy. I don't care if it's out of rivalry. Whatever it is, it's out of selfish ambition. So let me just give you the big lump category to put those in. It's just selfish ambition.

And out of that big category, that selfish ambition, it has this implication also of potentially being something like, what's in it for me?

[20 : 04] I'm proclaiming Christ, but I'm proclaiming Christ because there's got to be something in it for me. And by the way, what's my compensation package? And you can kind of maybe hear that in their tone.

I'll proclaim Christ to you, but what's my compensation? I mean, I'm willing to do it and all that, but how much are you going to pay? Maybe you know pastors like that.

Verse 17. But notice their motivation. They're proclaiming Christ out of this selfish ambition.

They're not doing it sincerely. And they're doing it with the expressed purpose to inflict harm on Paul, thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

In verse 17. This should serve as a warning to all of us who are in vocational ministry, all of us who are pastors, especially, all of us who serve as elders.

[21 : 14] What are our motives? I pray it would be in the motives of what is here called goodwill, out of a love for the Lord and out of a love for God's people.

It is also a warning today for those who are pursuing ministry, preparing themselves to be a missionary or a pastor, those who aspire to serve in the office of an elder in some capacity.

Over the years, I've had an opportunity to visit with a number of young men who aspire to be an elder, aspire to be a pastor someday, and I have asked them from time to time or every time, why?

Why? What's the motivation? What's interesting is some have said to me as I have visited with them that they want to serve in the office of an elder and be a pastor because they want to be in a position where they have influence over people and they have a reputation.

That is their sincere desire as to why they want to be in ministry. One young man even told me so boldly that he wanted to tell people what to do.

[22 : 26] That's an exact quote. I was like, man, is that what you think I do? But thirdly, it's a warning that we ought not to do this for selfish ambition, to be a servant for hire, just to do it for the money.

If I were to say, what is it that I am looking for? How would I instruct young men who aspire to be an elder one day, to be a pastor one day?

What would I, what is it that I would be looking for? First, I would say this. Are you someone who desires to proclaim the gospel as the, one of your deepest desires of your heart is you love the Lord so much, you want to be one who proclaims the gospel and give yourself to the study of God's word, to find yourself faithful, to proclaim his word to others?

Secondly, do you desire to shepherd a flock of God's people and does your heart break when you see wandering sheep? So if your desire is that your heart breaks because you want to study yourself, study God's word and be faithful in the proclamation of God's word and you can't help but proclaim the gospel, if that is an internal desire and you love to shepherd God's people and your heart breaks for wandering sheep, I'm interested in visiting with you but first, let me provide a few words of what I'm not looking for.

You should be willing to do this without any financial compensation. I'm speaking to the heart of the person sitting here saying, I may aspire to be an elder.

[24 : 28] However, 1 Timothy 5.17, let me be clear, I think the church has been informed that if they find an elder leading effectively, they're worth double honor.

So to the church, I would say, be sure to pay someone and they're worth honoring in that way but to the heart motivation of a person who desires to be a pastor, I would say you must be willing to do it without any compensation.

I have, many of you know I have traveled, I have served as a missions pastor so for many years I used to travel and been to 30 different countries and I've seen much and there are heroes of the faith for me who no one knows their names but they are pastors in little villages, no one pays them anything but they faithfully are proclaiming God's word because the village cannot afford to compensate for that.

And then lastly, do you desire to shepherd and can you desire shepherd in obscurity where nobody will know your name?

Heroes of the faith for me, sincerely, and I'm not, I'm not, I'm not, there's no humor in my tone.

[25 : 52] I know I speak humor monotone so it's like, is he being serious? Is he joking? I'm being sincere when I say heroes of the faith for me are solo pastors in small towns in America where nobody knows their name.

They're ministering, they're, they don't have staff, the average church size in America is 70 to 100 people, they only have one paid bivocational, sometimes pastor, ministering alone in a town, shepherding a flock of God's people faithfully, proclaiming the word, they've got no blog, they've got, their sermons are not online, they're ministering in obscurity, nobody knows their name except for that town.

And I think, wow, I love the privilege I have to serve with other staff, to labor with others as we do this together.

I don't know if I have what it takes to do that. They're heroes of mine. They minister in obscurity. And then lastly, can you do this for God's glory alone?

Can you serve as a pastor and serve as a missionary for God's glory alone? And if the answers to those questions are yes, that sounds like me.

[27 : 13] I want to help prepare you for ministry. I want to come along your side for those who aspire to the office of an elder and want to serve as a pastor. I'd love to help prepare you.

Not just myself, but the other staff, Cole, our youth director, he, we put together an internship program to prepare those who aspire, young men who aspire to the office of an elder.

And I'm grateful for Pastor Jay and our whole team who stands ready to do this and are doing this.

Okay. Okay. but you say, but Scott, so I want us to notice the beauty. Paul has this joy, but it's despite his circumstance.

It's despite the trouble that others are causing him. And in verse 18, he concludes with saying, what then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, those people who do things in pretense and those who are in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.

[28 : 29] Yes, I will rejoice. What then? Only that in every way, whether those guys who are preaching Christ who are not doing it from a good motive and those who are doing it from a pure motive, God will be the judge of that.

But here's what I, what Paul takes joy in is that Christ is proclaimed. That's the most important thing. So I take joy in my circumstances, despite my circumstances of being in prison, despite the trouble that those who are proclaiming Christ aim to afflict me in, despite all of these things, I take delight in knowing that I am in Christ and that Christ, the gospel is going forward and his name is being proclaimed.

That's what I take delight in. And Paul is overjoyed with that. I think he's a challenge to us to say what is it that I, where is the source of my joy?

If it is not in your identity as being in Christ, it is fleeting. And you say, oh Scott, I lost track of time.

Okay, you say, oh Scott, those guys who are doing that out of selfish ambition, those preacher people who are proclaiming Christ out of the selfish ambition that Paul says, that kind of stuff isn't named among us.

[30 : 01] I mean, that's so far from us. Let me just share a quick story in U.S. history to illustrate how selfish ambition collapsed.

A large company and people lost deeply and then I'm going to get a little more personal to conclude. Enron was a company, an energy and commodities service company based in Houston, Texas and the company dramatically collapsed in 2001.

Jeffrey Skillings was the CEO and he pursued his own selfish gain through this company. He sacrificed his children, he sacrificed his marriage, he loved being in magazines, he loved sharing how his company had grown, but he heard some things, some internal things about his company that indicated that his company was on shaky ground.

And not being content with his \$150 million a year salary, he pulled all of the shares of his company out before the company folded so he would maximize what the shares were worth because he knew this thing was going to go down.

And so he pulled all of his shares equaling another \$60 million and then the investors thought this is weird.

[31 : 20] Why is our CEO stepping down and why is he pulling all these shares out of the company? So all the investors got a little worried and what resulted was the worst bankruptcy in human history or in U.S. history to that date because of the selfish agenda to save his own skin and for his own glory.

And over 20,600 people lost their job and not just their jobs but because they were vested in the company, they lost their retirement. They lost everything.

Thousands more lost millions who had invested. What pursued was chaos, anger, disunity, shattered dreams, marital strife because of one person who wanted to pursue his own interest and live for his own glory.

Cheryl Crow, when I was in junior high, I think, came out with a song whose lyric reads this, if it makes you happy, it cannot be that bad.

And if not careful, Christians can have that mantra in them. We do things out of selfish ambition. What is selfish ambition rooted in? Well, if it makes me happy, it can't be that bad.

[32 : 50] There are 200,000 ways to make a cheeseburger, yet in 1974, Burger King came up with a slogan, have it your way. Good advertising focuses on you, catering to your dreams, causing you to be dissatisfied with what you have for the newer and shinier thing or experience, getting what you want and having your way.

So our culture says, do things out of selfish ambition. Do what you want. Don't worry about what will happen to anyone else. It's all about you.

So now let me get a little more personal to us. Because when I read about those guys who preach Christ out of selfish ambition, I get a little angry. I think, how could you do that?

And then I have to think about my own life. So let me reflect on our own lives, perhaps. Do you do, is your life bent toward doing things out of selfish ambition?

Example number one. A husband comes home after a day's work, a wife who is tired, keeping house, raising children in the admonition of the Lord, reading to them stories during the day, disciplining them when necessary, playing with them as she has time, ensuring she displays the love of Christ to them in all of her interactions, cooking, cleaning up after she cooks, ensuring that the children are fed, changing diapers, doing laundry, doing the hardest job in America, homemaking, and child rearing.

[34 : 22] No time off, no vacation pay, no sick leave, no overtime. She needs rest. And the husband had a rough day and he comes home in the house knowing this about his wife, but he comes home and he just puts his foot on, feet up on the couch, turns on the TV, grabs his phone, and scrolls mindlessly.

If it makes you happy, it can't be that bad. Have it your way. You first. Everyone else last. Example number two.

Perhaps you have a juicy piece of gossip, you know, the juicy kind, and you decide to share and you cannot control the wildfire of consequences that ensue because of your choosing to share.

and in the process, you have harmed others deeply, but you look pretty good. You become a little more popular at the expense of others.

If it makes you happy, it can't be that bad. It's all about you. Have it your way. You first. Others last. example number three.

[35 : 44] Simply put, a wife who knows how to manipulate her husband to get what she wants. If it makes you happy, it can't be that bad. Look out for yourself.

What I find interesting about Paul in this passage is that in the proclaiming Christ, his joy could not be stifled.

His joy could not be stifled in his circumstance. He's in prison, chained to a guard, no privacy, awaiting trial, will be condemned to death.

He couldn't be stifled. His joy could not be stifled because others meant in the way that they proclaimed Christ to inflict him.

Him knowing that, it didn't affect his joy. Why? Because his identity was in Christ. He was a bondservant of Christ and nobody could take that away from him.

[36 : 50] Secondly, because he delighted in seeing that the gospel was being advanced and in part because of his imprisonment. And then thirdly, because of the boldness that he witnessed and the life of other believers.

And I pray we would be, have joy in the very same way. We would say, Lord, I have joy because of my identity in you.

Nobody can take that away. Lord, I'm a part of a church and the church is advancing your gospel. So despite my circumstances, I can see the gospel being proclaimed in neighborhoods and schools and I take joy in that.

And because of my example and the example of others, others are experiencing boldness and sharing Christ themselves. Lord, your gospel is being advanced and I find joy in you.

And I pray that that would be our heart, church. Despite circumstances, we could still have joy. Let's pray. Father, thank you so much for this day.

[38 : 02] Thank you for the opportunity to declare your word. I pray that we would be a people who would find our joy in you and no one could take that away.

Despite our circumstances, despite the trouble that others may want to cause, Lord, you're good. Thank you for your work on the cross enabling us to have a way to have a relationship with you through believing in your life, death, and resurrection.

You are oh so good and it's in your name we pray. Amen. Amen.