

The Joy of Living with Purpose

Phil. 1:12-18

Intro: What makes people unhappy? Guilt, shame, fear, worries. Or someone has said, "bad people, bad things, bad circumstances". Think about that last one. How much control do we have over our circumstances? Really very little. So then, if we react to our circumstances we become spiritual yo-yos! Part of the time we are exuberant and the rest of the time our chin drags the ground! Can we be joyous even when life is not going our way!? For an answer let's turn again to Phillippians chapter one!

If anyone ever had an occasion to be unhappy because of his circumstances, Paul did; and yet, it is remarkable to notice that it was in the midst of extremely difficult and trying circumstances, Paul wrote this epistle to the Philippians, and spoke repeatedly of his joy in the Lord. Today I want to show you how you too can find joy even when life is tough. 1:12-18 In this section we see:

PAUL'S TRYING CIRCUMSTANCES

Always wanted to go to Rome as a preacher but went there as a prisoner. While in Jerusalem was illegally imprisoned captive for something he didn't do. The Jews falsely accused him of desecrating the Temple by bringing in Gentiles and would have murdered him had it not been for the intervention of the Roman armies in the temple precincts.

However Paul's "rescue" from the Jews was to lead him to further misfortunes—to anxious trials before the Sanhedrin & Felix and threats of Jewish death plots.

For two long years, Paul was held in prison in Caesurae only because the governor wanted to be bribed by the church to secure Paul's release. Only after two long years and a hearing before Festus and King Agrippa did Paul have an opportunity to appeal for a hearing before Caesar in Rome.

If that were not enough, he was shipwrecked in the Mediterranean.

And finally arrived at Rome, placed under house arrest waiting at least two years for a hearing before Caesar..

While at Rome awaiting trial, Paul discovered that some of the Christians there, who felt threatened by Paul's presence and who had their personal ambitions, were preaching the gospel only to increase the possibilities for Paul's harm. Consequently out of a sense of competition and envy they preached the gospel not to save souls but to cause Paul more trouble in his imprisonment.

So if that had been your lot for the past few years how would you have reacted? If anyone ever had occasion to complain and murmur about his lot in life, Paul did. If anyone ever had reason to give up on God and give in to despair Paul did. And yet notice his remarkable response to these things:

PAUL'S POSITIVE REACTION

v. 12 They turned out for the greater progress of the gospel. "Progress" or "furtherance" derives its picture from those who clear the woods in preparing a road. cf. the T.V.A. lines

Teaching of those in the "whole Praetorium guard"! Get the picture of Paul in his rented quarters. Soldiers ever present. They would hear Paul preached and pray. They all knew Paul was in prison for preaching Christ. And they had to come to know also who Christ was!

v. 13 Would it have been possible for Paul to preach among the palace people any other way?!!
More preaching in Rome in general--"to everyone else". The majority of the brethren found greater courage in Paul's bold and faithful example of preaching Christ while in prison itself. v. 14

And in that, Paul would rejoice with great joy! v. 18 Amazing!

PAUL'S SPIRITUAL PURPOSE

What was it that made Paul feel such joy in the face of such trying circumstances? The answer is clear.

Paul's circumstances brought about the progress of the gospel.

Paul's circumstances brought about the proclamation of Christ.

If Paul was released from imprisonment, it would mean he would be free to preach again!

For Paul the most important thing was the furtherance of the cause of Christ.

What Paul wanted to do more than anything else was to "magnify Christ". "Megaluno" meaning to make large! The Christian is a spiritual telescope or magnifying glass! The glory of Christ may seem dim in the minds of those around us; but by a life of faith we "magnify" him before others. When he is magnified in our lives, he will be magnified in our neighbor's mind!

What gave him the greatest joy was "the furtherance of the gospel"—to know that people were coming to know about Jesus and that souls were being saved. For this prospect Paul would endure all life's hardships and difficulties.

Paul's joy was founded upon his purpose as a Christian to advance the cause of Christ in this world. Wherever that happened he found joy!

APPLYING THE MESSAGE TO OURSELVES

Realize that we can be joyful even while enduring trying circumstances.

Everything does not have to go our way in order for us to be joyous. Joy does not depend on our circumstances but how we react to our circumstances!

Cf. thermometer (goes up and down with the changes) vs. thermostat (adjusts to the circumstances to keep things even!)

Evaluate difficulties in light of your spiritual goals rather than physical considerations.

There are two ways of looking at every problem. We choose what we want to see in life. We can see the physical inconvenience and pain or we can see the spiritual benefit.

God teaches us how to look for the good in the bad things of life.

Make up your mind that your life's purpose is to always glorify God.

We must see how God can use our circumstances to His glory.

Like Paul, we must find consolation that God can use every circumstance of life to bring glory and honor to himself, if we are faithful in it!

Cf. story of lady converted at Birmingham!

Conclusion: Like Paul, all of us will be confronted with difficult circumstances. We can choose to see how we may glorify Christ in our lives and further his cause among men. If we do, then we can have joy in our hearts even when life is hard.