

Intro: The measure of a person's spiritual strength and spiritual maturity is what it takes to steal their joy. At whatever point your joy breaks down, that's the level of your spiritual strength. You can find out how spiritually mature you are by finding the breaking point where joy is lost. That is where bitterness, negativism and a critical spirit begins to creep in and take over your life.

According to Galatians 5, joy is the fruit of the Spirit-controlled life, and we are to rejoice always. Paul is an example of this because he is a man whose joy knew no breaking point.

Philippians 1: [12] But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; [13] So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; [14] And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

1. Joy When Facing Challenging Difficulties (12-14)

A. Problems

We all must expect difficulties will come our way.

According to 2 Cor 11:23-27 Paul had been imprisoned, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, robbed. He had also been betrayed, starved, dehydrated, cold and stripped to shame.

For Paul, this latest ordeal began in Acts 21:17, as Paul came back to Jerusalem from his 3rd missionary journey. Paul wanted to affirm himself to the Jews as one who loved them.

He went into the Temple to carry out a vow and he was immediately attacked by a wild mob.

This crowd accused Paul of speaking against the law and against the temple.

They would have lynched Paul but he was rescued by those who took him to prison.

Paul was in prison not for anything he had done, but as protection from the crowd.

Paul is in prison for preaching the gospel of the very Christ that had been crucified as a criminal.

Paul became the object of unfair and cruel insults. He became the object of shame, the object of lies. There had been even a plot on his life of which he was warned and by God's grace was spared.

Finally, Paul appeals to Caesar to have his case heard and he languished in prison 2 years.

After 2 years, Paul is dispatched on a ship to Rome.

And the journey was not without its tremendous difficulty because the ship he was on was wrecked. Thus Paul had to swim for his life at the end.

When he arrives at Rome after the shipwreck, he is destined to spend another two years as a prisoner.

It appears he is forsaken and forgotten, but he is not sulking and pouting.

Yes, Paul has hardships but he knows God is greater.

During his second two-year imprisonment, he writes the prison epistles, Philippians being one of them.

We may not understand troubles, trials and tribulations or why we experience pain pressure and problems.

God doesn't wake up and read the headlines that said you are in trouble.

God has allowed it! It is no accident but an appointment.

The conditions of his imprisonment are quite interesting, he has some unusual circumstances.

Acts 28:16 says that Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier who was guarding him.

In other words, Paul was not put in a common prison with the rest of the prisoners.

Remember he was arrested for preaching in order to keep him safe.

Now it had been about four years since the Philippians had really heard any word about him. Somehow the word came to Philippi that Paul was in Rome a prisoner. Epaphroditus was sent from Philippi with a gift to encourage Paul. So Philippians is written to the Christians at Philippi to inform them of Paul's condition in the gospel. And the theme is joy. He wants them to know that in spite of the circumstances, he rejoices. You will notice that he had joy in spite of chains, troubles and difficulties.

B. Progress (12-14)

The assumption would be, Paul's a prisoner, Paul's incarcerated, he's chained, woe is me. The gospel is shut down, the ministry is debilitated, the preaching is limited. But for Paul just the opposite is true.

The word "**furthurance**" means progress in spite of obstacles, danger, distraction or resistance. It pictures those who would go before an army hacking their way through undergrowth to make a path. So it is progress against resistance, against opposition and against those things which would hinder. One obstacle was his imprisonment and another obstacle was the hostility of Rome against the gospel. But far from binding the gospel and halting it, the gospel was advancing against these circumstances

Remember Joseph who said, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." Paul can look at his captors and say, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it to further the gospel." Jesus Christ was crucified, but the very death He died destroyed sin, death and Satan. The early church was persecuted but the scattering of the church was evangelism to the world. Every means to stop the message of Christ only furthers it, and this is Paul's joy, this is Paul's joy. Paul says that adversity became an advantage. Paul's difficulties became doors. The gospel is not being prevented but promoted. We must not view the adversity but we must focus on the end result!

In verse 13, Paul said his "**bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace.**" In the palace was the Praetorian guard, which is comprised of 10,000 soldiers to protect the Emperor. Paul was chained to at least one man 24 hours a day. This guard changed duty or changed shifts every 6 hours. Imagine being chained to Paul six hours. Paul saw 4 soldiers a day, 7 days a week for 2 years. That is almost 3,000 soldiers.

It's one thing for Paul to be chained to a soldier, but it's another for a soldier to be chained to Paul. Have you ever tried to evangelize someone who wanted to get away? These men could not get away. According to Philippians 4:22 there were many that were converted in the palace guard.

Are you chained to a desk? Are you chained to a place on the assembly line?
Are you chained to a classroom?
Are you chained to a car as you move around from place to place, meeting people in a sales position?
Wherever you are, look at it as a point from which you can further the gospel.

Can you imagine Paul's testimony? The power by which he spoke; the conviction that fell?

- I think of DL Moody giving fearful examples of his ministry.
- Many were saved but some criticized him for using scare tactics.
- Dr. Moody asked "How many have you won to Christ?" They responded none.
- DL Moody said "I think I'll stick to my method."

In verse 14, Paul's imprisonment had been an encouragement to the church. Paul's courage to witness chained to soldiers encouraged others. The church was lacking a little bit of courage, but now they have far more courage. Paul's example caused them to be more bold to speak the word without fear. They were "**confident**", which means to be certain, to be sure or to trust. Paul's strength became their strength. The example of his life touched them all.

Philippians 1: [15] Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: [16] The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: [17] But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.

2. Joy When Facing Contentious Detractors (15-17)

A. Impure Motives

A "detractor" is a person who belittles or devalues the reputation of someone. A detractor is someone who wants to tear someone else down and Paul had them. While they were preaching the gospel their real agenda was to discredit, belittle, and dishonor Paul. Their whole perspective in ministry was to attack Paul. The detractors here were not attacking Paul's theology, it was his person that bothered them. So the detractors are preaching Christ. The difference is in their motive. Paul says they were preaching out of "**envy and strife**." In other words they were jealous. Jealous of what? They were jealous that Paul was so beloved. They were jealous of his gifts, of his blessings, of his ministry and of his high esteem. They focus their whole life on trying to discredit other people. They preach the true gospel but they have such an impure heart.

And as a result of being jealous they created strife. The word means contention, conflict. Their jealousy pitted them against him and conflict occurred. They see themselves in competition with Paul and they become his detractors. And the way they're going to win the battle is by slander, accusation, criticism and tearing him down.

It was probably some group that was saying, "Well, he sinned, this is chastening." Some said "The reason he's in prison is because he doesn't have the spiritual power to be triumphant."

Some had impure motives but others had impeccable motives.

B. Impeccable Motives

But on the other hand, back to verse 15, Some also are preaching Christ from good will. They're satisfied with what God is doing in Paul's life. Their motive is pure.

Some of those who were made bold by Paul's imprisonment were preaching Christ out of love. They were convinced that Paul was where he was because he was faithful. He was where he was not because he failed but because he succeeded. He was where he was not because he was out of God's will but because he was in God's will.

C. Impressive Message

One group preached out of “*contention*” with wrong motives such as selfish ambition. A man who is simply out to magnify himself, really doesn't care who it steps on in the process. This group saw Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity to advance their own influence. They were craving honor, craving fame, craving preeminence rather than loving this faithful man.

They thought to add “*affliction*” to Paul's bonds. They wanted to kick a man when he is down. Adding affliction is worse than those chains rubbing a raw place on Paul's wrist or legs. By attacking his integrity, attacking his credibility, attacking his faithfulness, attacking his character.

They want to add to his chains causing more friction, more irritation, all from malicious treatment. Their goal wasn't to exalt Christ. Their goal wasn't to evangelize the lost. Their goal was to irritate the man of whom they were jealous. then they would be the preeminent ones.

I don't think Paul includes this section in here just to get sympathy. He wanted prayer. Did it steal Paul's joy? No. You couldn't steal his joy in spite of difficulties or detractors. Paul knew the Message was bigger than the man. The message is Christ!

Philippians 1: [18] What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

3. Joy With Fearless Commendable Dedication (18)

Paul says what does the difficulties and the detractors mean to me? Absolutely nothing. Only one thing matters to me. In whatever motive, whether it's pretense or in truth, Paul rejoiced that Christ was preached. Paul says, I don't care about me, I'm expendable. Paul lived for the gospel.

When you put chains on a man like Paul, when you latch him to soldiers for years without privacy or freedom, when you restrict him and forbid him to travel and preach the gospel he loves and build churches, and when you aggravate his trouble with the false accusation rising out of jealousy and selfishness and contention, what happens to that man? Does he quit? Does he lash back? Does he break? Does he lose his joy? No, he doesn't.

Paul knew the message of Jesus is always bigger than the man. The “gospel” is bigger than the “gospeller.” Paul knew that no matter what, God will honor His Word!

Concl: In 1975 the California Superior Court issued a judgment against a man named John Abercrombie. He was accused of and found guilty of shoplifting a 63-cent can of Danish bacon. Throughout the whole trial he maintained his innocence. He was an honorable man, a man of great integrity. He had a very difficult time dealing with the slander. He was a retired Air Force Colonel with a distinguished World War II combat record, he had post-war assignments that involved top security clearance for the government.

Finally, the case was appealed and a jury overturned the case, and exonerated him completely.

The court eventually awarded his family \$100,000 in damages.

But it was too late for him to enjoy.

The slander had so devastated him that he died of a heart attack at age 53 before the case was finished.

Lord, when the slander comes from those in the church who preach the very Christ we preach, please sustain and support us. When it comes from people close to us who misunderstand and misrepresent us please strengthen us. Thank You for the example of Paul who never lost his joy, who rejoiced and would continue to rejoice, no matter what happened, as long as Christ was proclaimed, even by the people who spoke evil against him.