

Pentecost 19
September 30, 2018

Philippians 1:12-18
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Rejoice Like Paul!

- I. See God at work.
- II. See the gospel spread.

Dear Christian friends,

Paul addressed this letter to Christians living in the city of Philippi in NE Greece. Philippi was named after Philip, the father of Alexander the Great. Paul had founded this congregation on his second missionary journey. It was the FIRST congregation he had founded on the continent of Europe. You might recall how **one night** Paul had received a vision **“of a man of Macedonia begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’”** That vision led Paul to this city of Philippi.

This congregation held a SPECIAL PLACE in Paul’s heart. **Paul** and these **Philippian Christians** enjoyed a SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP – a special closeness. This letter is somewhat different from Paul’s other epistles. It’s a PERSONAL letter. It’s a thank-you note in which Paul also gives the Philippians an UPDATE about himself.

The overall theme of this letter is JOY – **“rejoicing in the Lord.”** You might want to read the **four chapters** of Philippians in your devotions this week. For now let’s look closer at these verses guided by this thought – REJOICE LIKE PAUL! **Like Paul** rejoice as you 1) see God at work and as you 2) see the gospel spread.

I. See God at work.

“I want you to know, brothers, that the things which happened to me actually took place to advance the gospel.” So WHAT had happened to Paul to help spread the gospel? **For the answer** we need to go back a good 5 or 6 years. Recall how Paul had made three missionary journeys. He had founded this congregation on his **second** journey and revisited it on his **third** journey. AT THE END of that third journey Paul had returned to Jerusalem with a special offering that the **churches in Greece** and Turkey had taken for the poor Christians in Jerusalem.

Unfortunately Paul’s missionary success had STIRRED UP the **anger** and **hatred** of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. To make a LONG STORY short there was a riot in Jerusalem – a mob tried to kill Paul but was stopped by Roman soldiers. Paul was arrested and spent the next TWO YEARS in prison with basically nothing happening with his case.

After those two years Paul had another trial and THIS TIME he used his right as a Roman citizen and appealed for a trial before Caesar in Rome. **As they’re sailing** to Rome their ship was battered by a hurricane and they ended up shipwrecked on the **island of Malta**. They spent the three months of winter on Malta before finally leaving for Rome. **Once in Rome** Paul spends ANOTHER TWO YEARS mainly under house arrest guarded by Roman soldiers. FINALLY – **after all** those years – Paul has had his first hearing before Caesar and it SEEMS things went well. Paul is cautiously optimistic that he MAY be released in a little while. There’s NOTHING DEFINITE but he’s hopeful.

Basically for a **good five years** Paul had been UNDER ARREST – a prisoner unable to **travel freely** and **spread** the gospel. It looked like the devil had FOUND A WAY to **stop Paul** from sharing Jesus. SO IT LOOKED but Paul saw something else and what he saw made him **“rejoice.”** Paul saw **“that the things which happened to me actually took place to advance the gospel.”**

During those trials in **Jerusalem** – at **Caesarea** – in **Rome** – Paul had had the OPPORTUNITY to witness the gospel to kings and **governors**. If Paul had requested an appointment to **talk** to them **about Jesus** that would NEVER have happened. His trials gave him those **opportunities**. If Paul had asked the ship’s captain to STOP in Malta so he could **share the gospel** there the captain would have

FLAT OUT refused. They needed to get to Rome, not Malta. With the **storm and shipwreck** God got Paul to Malta and gave him time to tell people there about Jesus. Paul mentions here that the soldiers guarding him and those who heard about or visited him NOW REALIZED that he was **no dangerous criminal** but that he was **“in chains because of Christ.”** Indeed **Christians** who MAY have been tempted to LAY LOW and **keep quiet** about their faith so not to get in trouble like Paul – **“the majority of the brothers in the Lord have become much more confident about daring to speak the word of God fearlessly.”**

“And in this I rejoice.” Did Paul from day to day – from one setback to another – ALWAYS UNDERSTAND what was happening or what God was up to? **Obviously no.** But through it all Paul SAW GOD in control and AT WORK. That gave him reasons to **“rejoice”** instead of QUESTIONING God’s ways or wallowing in self-pity.

Paul wanted these Philippians to KNOW and SEE this too. Do WE SEE it today – see God at work – **“working all things for the good”** of His people and His Church? In our personal lives and in our congregation WE LIKE things to go smoothly – NO PROBLEMS, etc. We’d RATHER NOT have to lose our job – deal with major health problems – struggle to pay our bills, etc. We want peace in our congregation NOT DOCTRINAL strife or pettiness. We want enough money to **cover our bills** and allow us to do even more.

God, however, knows what’s best for us and sometimes we need some MAJOR STORMS and **setbacks**. Doctrinal strife drives us into God’s Word for the answers. That’s GOOD! Financial problems make us RE-EVALUATE our **priorities** and **stewardship**. That’s GOOD! Losing our job – health problems, etc. – can kick our PRAYER LIFE into **higher gear** – can teach us how MUCH WE NEED God and the comfort of His Word. That’s GOOD too! That’s God working what WE SEE AS BAD **for our good**. There’s no need for us to get discouraged or depressed by life’s hassles. LIKE PAUL see God as work and rejoice!

Paul sees even more reasons to **rejoice**. Rejoice LIKE PAUL as you...

II. See the gospel spread.

Paul’s rejoicing DOESN’T IGNORE the **real world** and its **real problems**. He’s mentioned that **“the majority of the brothers in the Lord have become much more confident about daring to speak the word of God fearlessly.”** That’s GREAT – but even right here there’s ALSO a problem.

SOME of those emboldened preachers were preaching Jesus **“out of good will”** – they just HAD TO share God’s grace with others. They were preaching **“out of love, knowing that (Paul was) placed here for the defense of the gospel.”** These preachers loved God – loved God’s Word – loved God’s servant Paul. OTHERS, unfortunately preached Jesus **“out of envy and rivalry, out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking they can cause trouble for me while I am in chains.”** SAD, isn’t it? There were actually some preachers who were JEALOUS of Paul – who resented the success GOD HAD GIVEN him – who didn’t like Paul getting all the **attention**.

Note well that Paul is not talking about pastors **preaching** FALSE DOCTRINE but pastors preaching TRUE doctrine but with FALSE MOTIVES. Paul – God for that matter! – deal very clearly with FALSE PREACHERS and **false doctrine** – FALSE TEACHINGS – in other passages. In BOTH the OT and NT God strictly commands His people, **“Do not add to what I command you, and do not subtract from it.”** No Christian – no Christian preacher or Christian congregation – has the RIGHT to add anything to God’s Word or to ignore anything in God’s Word – NO MATTER what society or **public opinion** may be. Jesus warns us, **“Watch out for false prophets! They come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruits (teachings) you will recognize them.”** John tells us, **“Do not believe every spirit (don’t BE GULLIBLE!) but tests the spirits to see whether they are from God, for MANY false prophets have gone out into the world.”** It was this

Paul who wrote, ***“Watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them!”*** God’s will is SO CLEAR when it comes to ANY **false teacher** or **teaching** – STAY AWAY from it! Have nothing to do with it.

Here Paul is not dealing with **false doctrine** but false MOTIVES. These preachers wanted to PICK A FIGHT with Paul – stir up trouble for him. But rather than STOOPING DOWN to **their level** Paul brushes it all off with, ***“What does it matter? Only this, that in every way, whether for outward appearance or for the truth, Christ is being proclaimed, and in this I rejoice.”***

SAD, isn’t it, that pettiness and personalities can GET IN THE WAY of the gospel? God has given us the GREATEST NEWS possible – that we have God’s own Son as our Savior. The gospel proclaims that Jesus TOOK OUR PLACE before God and has made things right between God and us. **In our place Jesus lived** a holy, perfect life. **Bearing the sins** of the whole world Jesus suffered and died on the cross – shed His innocent blood to ***“cleanse us from all sin.”*** TOP that all off with Jesus rising triumphant from the dead on Easter morning. TRUSTING in Jesus and **all He’s done** for us we now enjoy God’s forgiveness of all our sins and we’re going straight to heaven when we die.

THAT’S our Christian faith and hope. OUR MISSION is to share that gospel with anyone and everyone. It’s the GREATEST message yet sometimes our PETTY selfish, sinful natures **act up** and **cause** trouble. The **pettiness** of it has to be MY WAY or I won’t help. **Pastor/teachers** can make the ministry ABOUT THEMSELVES – what I’ve all done for Jesus – how good I’m at whatever. People can make the ministry all ABOUT THE PASTOR/teacher. God sent us a real DUD! If we instead had one like **such and such** church – that’s JUST WHAT we need!

The man doesn’t grow the church – God’s WORD does. God’s Word is more important than any **pastor, teacher** or **member**. God doesn’t give all called workers the SAME GIFTS. Some are better preachers than others, etc., but the POWER is in the Word – in the MESSAGE and **not the messenger**. Take Paul. He admits he **wasn’t** a GREAT preacher. He was known to talk on and on – even put people to sleep. Yet look what GOD all accomplished through BORING Paul!

Paul kept his focus where it BELONGS – on Jesus and His Word. ***“The important thing is that Christ is preached. And in this I rejoice.”*** LIKE PAUL ***“rejoice”*** as you see God AT WORK and as you see the gospel spreading. Amen.

HYMN #566