

Christ Will Be Exalted
November 16, 2008
Philippians 1:12-26
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Synopsis:

Paul's joy is that Christ is being proclaimed no matter what circumstances he found himself in. These verses are so relevant, so appropriate for all situations of life that we are in. *What should be your response to the circumstances you find yourself in?*

Last week Pastor Emily started us off on a new series in the letter to the Philippians, written by the apostle Paul to the church at Philippi **while** he was in prison in Rome. Amazingly enough, in spite of Paul's circumstances, the letter to the Philippians is considered the book of Joy, as Paul uses the word "joy" or "rejoice" 16 times in the 4 short chapters.

Paul's joy is that Christ is being proclaimed no matter what circumstances he found himself in. These verses are so relevant, so appropriate for all situations of life that we are in, that since I've been here at Geneva, which is about 3 years now, these exact verses have been preached on 3 different occasions, by 3 different preachers. The last one being Pastor Michael, a powerful living testimony to God's faithfulness and joy that is found in all circumstances, as Christ is proclaimed and exalted.

PRAYER

One of the first lessons in life that I taught my children was that life is not fair. We've all heard kids say, "But she got to do such and such, and you won't let me, it's not fair." My usual response was, very sympathetic of course, "Well, dear, get over it. Life isn't fair."

You might want to keep your Bible open

Another complaint that people have when life doesn't go the way they think it should go is, "Why Me! Why did this happen to me, what did I do to deserve this bad thing? Why do bad things happen to good people?"

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In these verses, we find Paul in chains in a prison in Rome. He had been there for over 2 years. His desire was to get out and to visit the churches which he had founded. Very dear to his heart was the church at Philippi. Anyone who has ever visited Philippi will never forget it. There is something very special and almost sacred about sitting beside the river where Lydia, a business woman mentioned in the book of Acts, was baptized. The Philippians loved Paul, but had not seen him for over 4 years. They had heard some news about Paul, but were asking some serious questions. "Is he still in chains." "Is he still alive?" So, you can imagine the excitement of receiving this letter. In the midst of his chains of prison, Paul wrote, "Now I want you to know that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel." Paul was in prison as a result of his preaching the gospel- but look at what happened. Instead of stopping the spread of the gospel, Christ is proclaimed even more, even to the whole imperial guard who heard and began to believe in Jesus. Not only Paul's testimony proclaimed Christ, but look at **V. 14**, "Because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear." So, the Christians moved **from** fear to boldness as a result of Paul's imprisonment.

Christ is proclaimed not only by Paul himself, but by the believers around him who were speaking out with confidence and boldness.

Question for you today, Has your life ever had that effect on other Christians? This is a good question to ask ourselves, especially with the economy the way it is. As I was preparing this sermon, I talked with three people who lost their jobs just this week. Looking at Paul's response to hardships and trials, should give us great encouragement. He never asked "Why me?" But he did ask "How can Christ be proclaimed? Are my circumstances providing greater opportunity for the cause of Christ to go forward? If the answer is Yes, then I will rejoice, whatever the cost to me."

Now I must add here that **Paul did not like chains** any more than you or I would like them; he did not like his circumstances, but he rejoiced that God was using them. And that meant much more to him than the anguish he suffered.

As we continue through this passage, **looking at v. 15-18**, a third way in which greater proclamation of the gospel occurred due to Paul's circumstances was because of the boldness of people with evil motives. That's strange, but let me explain. Paul knew that some people were preaching the gospel to build up their own reputations, taking advantage of Paul's imprisonment to try to make a name for themselves. Regardless of the motives of these preachers, Paul rejoiced that the gospel was being preached. Some Christians serve for the wrong reasons. Paul **would not** condone, nor does God excuse their motives, but we should be glad if God uses their message, regardless of the motives.

I would like to ignore these verses, because I'm so critical of some of the televangelist. I think all of us in this room have varying opinions on who speaks out in the name of Christ, but it is clear in these verses that whatever the motives, we are not to judge, Christ is being proclaimed. I don't want to spend a

lot of time on these verses, except to say and take to heart Paul's words in v. 18, "The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."

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Now, looking at your Bible, v. 19-26, another verse that many of us would like **not** to examine too closely is V. 21, "For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain." Very few of us like to look at our own demise. To us, life is always too short, no matter how long it is. Whenever I read this verse I always question my own faith. Can I really say this "For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain"? About 2 months ago, Pastor Michael spoke on this and because of his physical situation, he has lived this verse. Death was facing him head on, he was tested in this verse. Just last week, I heard a comment on testing that really made me think. So often people will say that circumstances **are** in our lives so that God can test us. That is a true statement, but if God is all knowing and sovereign, he already knows our grade in that test. So, why test us? Because God wants us to know that we know. He wants us to know our grade. After all these health issues of Michael, he **knows** that living is Christ and dying is gain. In the Message, Eugene Peterson puts Paul's words this way, "Everything happening to me in this jail only serves to make Christ more accurately known, regardless of whether I live or die. They didn't shut me up; they gave a pulpit! Alive, I'm Christ's messenger; dead, I'm his bounty. **Life versus even more life! I can't lose.**"

Now, as I think over my life, I feel that I can't really identify with Paul. My life, just like many, has had its irritations, its problems, its ups and down, but nothing in which I have had to face my own death, except for fleeting moments while

driving on the freeway. But I have had the privilege of walking with people through their chains, their imprisonment.

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Take **Jean Mead** for example. Due to major complications with a hip replacement, she spent last spring and summer, 5 months in Palm Terrace, on the full care side, waiting for the infection to heal. When I would visit her, she was either working on the insurance aspect of her health care with papers all over her bed, or down the hall playing games. She used her music ability to entertain the patients every afternoon on the piano. Never once did I hear her complain or ask “why me.” This picture of her was just taken on Wed. here at church. God used this time in her life to draw her near to him, and she was able to proclaim Christ and exalt him with her patience.

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This next slide is of **Taylor Martin**, a young man who has been in my life for 15 years now. Some of you have heard me talk about him and many times I have put his name on our prayer chain. For a while, his mother, Cyndi, attended the Women in the Word Bible Study on Tuesday nights. I have played the role of big sister/pastor to this family for the last 12 years and have been present at all of his many surgeries.

This picture was taken last summer while he spent almost 4 months in the hospital recovering from a 22 hour brain surgery. He is 20 years old, but because his pituitary gland has been in jeopardy, he has not really grown into adulthood. He lost his hearing at the age of 12, and currently is home, paralyzed from his waist down, and is unable to eat, so is on a feed tube. Like Pastor Michael, Taylor has stood at death’s door many times.

Two years ago, at the age of 18, he wrote down his autobiography. In his own words, here are parts of his story. “My name is Taylor Martin; I am 18 years old and was born with a rare genetic disease called Neurofibromatosis Type 2 (NF-2). I have endured more surgeries, pain, suffering, difficulties, and trials in my 18 years of life than most people do in their entire life. My mom and dad did not know how difficult my life would be when I was diagnosed with NF-2 at the age of 5. As I was growing up, I always believed in God through the strong influence from my parents as I was born into a Christian home. I believe that God has gotten me through everything in my life because he wants me here on earth to help carry out his message and influence others to come to him.

(Doesn't that sound like Paul!) . . . The way I describe my life right now is a day-in, day-out, 24 hours a day struggle or battle to enjoy or live my life as happily as possible. “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13). Another scripture that Taylor quotes is, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake (Philippians 1:29). . . . He continues, “Now that I have graduated from high school and received my diploma, my goal in life is to convince, persuade, and draw people to Christ in a stronger faith and relationship with him through my story.” Taylor ends his autobiography with this, “God loves me very much and he loves you too. I understand now, at this stage in my life, that like Jesus, my suffering has been used for a special purpose. I feel God knew I would develop strength and courage in my life, to lead others to him and I know he has been with me every step of the way.”

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The last person I want to tell you about is Renee Bondi who is coming here in concert this afternoon. The theme of her concert is **Celebrating 20 years of God's Faithfulness**. Many of you do not know this, but the meaning of this title comes from the fact that 20 years ago, Renee was the choral teacher at San

Clement High School. I knew her then. In a nut shell, one night for some unexplainable reason, she fell out of bed and broke her neck and instantly became a quadriplegic. Her life changed forever. Before I started seminary, I would spend one afternoon a week, doing whatever she needed me to do- our favorite thing to do was to do errands, which allowed us to a lot of gabbing. In spite of her situation, God spared her voice, and she currently a national speaker and Christian recording artists. Renee sees her chains, her wheelchair, as an instrument through which Christ is proclaimed and Christ is exalted. Come this afternoon and see for yourself.

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Now after reading this passage of Scripture and hearing these stories, I asked myself, “*What should be my response to the circumstances I am in?*” I ask you, “*What should be your response to the circumstances you find yourself in?*”

You can either respond, “Why me?” Or you can Proclaimed Christ, and exalted Christ.