

July 6, 2014

Sovereignty of God

Philippians 1:12-18

All Stand and Read Scripture

Depending on which translation you are reading this morning, you may find that verses 16 and 17 may be reversed. This is due to the rules that were used when the verses were translated.

Philippians 1:12-18

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹² Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, ¹³ so that my imprisonment in *the cause of* Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, ¹⁴ and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. ¹⁵ Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; ¹⁶ the latter *do it* out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷ the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.

Prayer

INTRODUCTION:

This is a portion of scripture that talks about joy in affliction and opposition.

The theme of this book from Paul to the Philippians is joy. Although he is in prison, he did not dwell on the circumstances of his life. Instead he knew the true **JOY** that came from being a **bond-servant** of Christ.

Most of us rejoice to be saved. When things are going our way, we praise and glorify His name. Then affliction or opposition comes and it is not as easy to do. But, the Bible says we can experience joy in affliction. This is something that is hard to do, whether it is minor or something major, like having a family member diagnosed with a terminal disease.

Yet, Paul tells us that he was able to face affliction and opposition and rejoice. You will notice that in verses 12, 13, and 14, Paul focuses on the affliction that

he was facing. He refers to his “**circumstances**” in verse 12 and his “**imprisonment, or “bonds” or “chains**” depending on which translation you are reading, in verses 13 and 14. Paul wanted to be preaching Christ, but he was hindered. He was suffering affliction by being chained to a Roman guard in prison. What did he do? **He rejoiced!**

In **verses 15, 16, and 17** he talks about those who opposed him for the purpose of causing him distress. And what was his response? Look at **verse 18**. He says “**Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.**”

Paul knew how to face affliction and opposition and yet write this letter and say, “**I will rejoice.**”

Why did he write this to the Philippians? Because, he knew that they also were going to be facing affliction and opposition. Skip down to verses 29 and 30. Paul wrote “**For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, This is the easy part, but here is the part that is hard for us to accept) but also to suffer for His sake, ³⁰ experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.**”

Paul was telling them that I want you to know that I am rejoicing, because when it happens to you, I want you to rejoice also.

We also, like the Philippians, need to learn how to rejoice in affliction and opposition. You ask, “How do we do it?” The answer is **one word** and that word is **SOVEREIGNTY**. If you believe that God is sovereign, then you will be able to rejoice in affliction and opposition like Paul.

What does sovereignty mean? We don’t use that word a lot. We tend to use it referring to a **king being a sovereign**. The word sovereign refers to someone who is in **control**. **If God rules and is in sovereign control of everything that takes place**, it means that when something happens in your life, **it is no accident**. Instead, it is in God’s plan to bring Himself glory and do something good in my life.

We can either accept that God is sovereign and He is in control or we can choose to not accept His sovereignty and think, “This is not good. God, why are you doing this to me?” We will be tempted to become **bitter instead of better**. It is all about sovereignty!

If I believe in sovereignty, I will say, “God, it is OK!” I might now not choose it, but I am going to rejoice anyhow, because you are in control.

If I don’t believe in sovereignty, I will get **angry**, and I will get **mad**, and I will **fight**.

This is the message this morning. If you **truly embrace the doctrine of sovereignty**, you can **first of all, rejoice in affliction**, and **secondly, rejoice in opposition**.

BODY:

I. By Accepting God's Sovereignty, We Can Rejoice in Affliction.

Let's start with verses 12–14. Paul writes, ¹² Now I want you to know, (I want to stop right here. **They didn't know!** The Philippians were bummed out and saddened because Paul was in prison.

ILLUSTRATION:

You don't want to have your missionary arrested. If David Fish were to go to Chile and be arrested and put in prison, we would say, "OH NO!" The believers in Philippi found out that Paul was in prison and they sent word to him and said "This is not good".

Paul said, "You guys are wrong. You are bent out of shape because I was arrested, but I am not bent out of shape.

Look at verse 12...

¹² Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.

Paul says, "you know that I am passionate about the Gospel. You know that I am arrested. You are very sad. This is not what you need to think! I have been arrested and rather than being **sad**, I am **glad**.

You ask why? Because God is sovereign! You think that my imprisonment is not good, I am going to send you a letter to remind you that it is **very** good!

In fact, he tells us why it is good. Look at verse 12 again.

¹² Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.

You are so concerned that having me arrested is going to hinder the Gospel, please don't think that way. You need to quit thinking that God is not in control. God IS in control, and He is going to use my being arrested to further the Gospel.

How? There are two ways or two proofs.

The first one is in verse 13.

1. So that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard and to everyone else.

The Praetorian Guard is a reference to what we would think of as the elite troops. These are the guys that the Emperor would trust with his life. They were stationed in Rome and they would do different things for the Emperor including taking care of the prisoners. There would be a guard assigned to you. Not to just watch you from a distance, but Paul would have been literally chained to a Roman soldier 24-7.

It says in verse 13 that his **imprisonment in *the cause of Christ* has become well known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard.**

How did all these guys know that Paul was in prison for Christ?

Well, here is why it didn't happen. Paul did not sit around and think...

- I am an apostle
- I am supposed to leading people to Christ
- Now I am arrested
- I am facing affliction
- Nothing is going well for me and it is always this way for me
- God must not **love** me or want me to **spread** the Gospel after all!
-

Paul was thinking, "I am passionate about the Gospel and God is sovereign. He must want me to lead people to Christ in prison, so here I go!"

Paul started talking to guards around him about Christ.

ILLUSTRATION:

Think what it must have been like to have been a soldier chained to Paul? They worked in four hour shifts according to records. Every four hours a new Roman soldier would be with Paul.

The conversation might have been something like this.

Paul, what are you in prison for, murder?

No.

Robbery?

No.

Why are you in chains?

Jesus Christ.

What?

Yes, in chains for Jesus Christ. God became man, died on the cross for you and me, and rose from the dead. That is why I am in chains.

Every four hours, he would share the same message to another Roman soldier. Every four hours, a new Roman soldier hearing the Gospel!

Not to be too imaginative, but can you imagine what some of these soldiers must have done when they left their shift? They would talk to the other soldiers, right? One guard would ask another, "What did you do this week?"

"I was assigned to Paul, I took the morning shift."

"Paul? Who is that?"

"Just some guy"

"What was he in for, murder?"

"No."

"Robbery?"

"No."

"Why?"

“Christ. The Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

“What is he like?”

“He is different. I never met a guy like him before. He keeps telling me about Christ.”

And pretty soon, the **WHOLE** Praetorian Guard is hearing about Christ.

You might ask **sarcastically**, “I suppose **NOW** you are going to tell me that people started **being saved**.”

Well, let’s let Paul tell us. Take a look at the last two verses of the letter in his closing statement. He says something wonderful!

I can’t help but think that he wrote this with a **SMILE ON HIS FACE**.

Philippians 4:22

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household.

I am in chains for preaching the Gospel and I just thought that you would like to know that there are a whole lot of people working for Caesar that are brothers and sisters in Christ! I am leading them to Christ. Praise God!

Paul is rejoicing in affliction.

If Paul was in chains whining and complaining, do you think the Roman guards would say, “Paul you are whining and complaining, tell me why!?” That is not what would have happened.

Instead, people could not believe that Paul was so filled with joy, even in chains!

Why could he do this? One word: **SOVEREIGNTY!**

Honestly believing that what happens to me is no mistake. God is in full control.

I mentioned earlier that there were two proofs that Paul used to prove that God **WAS** in control, and how He was going to use his being arrested to further the Gospel.

The first one was that the whole Praetorian Guard and everyone else would hear the Gospel.

The second proof is found in **verse 14**.

2. ¹⁴ and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

Philippians was written most likely during the reign of Nero. Even though wide spread persecution had not gotten to it's worse, Nero was not a friend of believers. Because of this many people were hesitant to advance the Gospel for fear of Nero.

Paul was in prison. He was preaching the Gospel. Their churches were growing with new Christians, especially from Caesar's Praetorian guard, and they were saying that they had been saved. Paul told them about Christ.

The Christians in Rome (remember he was writing to the people in Philippi, but he was in Rome in prison), no doubt thought that if Paul could preach the Gospel in prison and lead people to Christ, then they could have the courage to do the same.

The Gospel was going forth because that is what God wanted to happen. This all happened because God put Paul in a place of affliction and Paul embraced the sovereignty of God.

If Paul had felt sorry for himself, the Gospel would not have advanced and all of his suffering would have been for naught.

By accepting God's sovereignty, Paul could rejoice in affliction. The second point I would like to make this morning is...

II. By Accepting God's Sovereignty, We Can Rejoice in Opposition.

You might say, I can rejoice when affliction comes my way, but I believe it is much harder to rejoice when one of my own brothers or sisters in Christ turn against me.

Paul was able to rejoice also in opposition. Let's look at **verse 15**.

¹⁵ Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ (He is talking about Christians) even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; ¹⁶ the latter *do it* out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷ the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.

Paul is saying in verse 15 that some people were preaching Christ from envy and strife. Why? The answer is in either verse 17 or 18 depending on your translation of the Bible.

¹⁷ the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.

There were people in Rome who did not like Paul.

Were they believers? Yes.

Did they preach the true Gospel of Christ? Yes.

Did they preach it for the right reason? No.

These were guys who didn't like Paul.

Why does this happen? Because people are sinful. We all struggle with that. We are all sinful. In every church there will be some people who don't like a certain church leader.

You might ask, why would they be preaching for the wrong reason?

ILLUSTRATION:

This is not exactly the situation that Paul was in, but let's imagine that we are in a small town with only two churches. The minister in one church is convicted and sent to jail. The second preacher might be amused with the current circumstance and consider this to be a good time to bring people from the other church into his congregation. If people would ask why he is calling on them, he might say that the other preacher is in jail, and you wouldn't want to go there. This would be for the wrong reason.

When faced with opposition, what did Paul say? **Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice.** The Gospel is being preached and people are coming to God. Praise God! Now, I want to be careful, Paul is not referring to people that are preaching a **false Gospel**.

We are going to read about the "enemies of the cross of Christ" in Chapter 3. Paul never says when someone is preaching a false Gospel, in this I rejoice. He has a very strong language for those people.

When people preach the Gospel, even for a wrong reason, what does Paul say? I rejoice! Yes, and I will rejoice.

Paul is saying here that there is affliction and there is opposition, but God is sovereign. He has complete confidence that God is doing something good.

CONCLUSION:

Here is the question for us here this morning.

Are you facing some type of affliction?

- It might be family affliction. The kids or grandkids might be driving you crazy.
- Maybe it is financial affliction.
- Maybe it is working long hours or picking up a second job to make ends meet and it is just not working out.
- Maybe it is medical affliction.
- Maybe it is a broken relationship.

- Maybe you are having a problem with a brother or sister in Christ.

Here is the question. Do you believe in the doctrine of the sovereignty of God? Do you believe that God is in control or that God is out of control?

Look at your current situation and ask, “God, I know you are in control with my life, how can I use this affliction to further the Gospel?” When we finally accept that God is in control of our life, we can, like Paul, have joy through affliction and opposition.

By God’s grace, regardless of our current circumstances, if we can get our eyes off of ourselves long enough to focus on eternal things and learn to trust God’s grace, we would be a joyful people doing the very thing God made us and saved us to do.

You can have joy in your life if you want it. Follow God’s lead and use every situation in your life to serve Christ.

If there is anyone here today who has not accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, he is waiting for you to surrender yourself to him. In Acts, Peter was preaching to the Jews on the day of Pentecost. He said in Acts 2:36-38...

Acts 2:36-38

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³⁶Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

³⁷Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” ³⁸Peter *said* to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We are also here with open arms, if you would like to identify yourself as part of this family of God in the Greenwood Christian church.

The Family of God

I’m so glad I’m a part of the family of God.
I’ve been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood!
Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod,
For I’m part of the family, the family of God.