**Philippians (1:12-20)**

In his book entitled *Man’s Search for Meaning,* Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl observed, “*Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.”*

If we pursue happiness instead of choosing joy, we’ll become, as Frankl put it, “playthings of circumstances.” Our inner peace will be tossed back and forth according to the whim of events beyond our control. But if we choose our attitude—the one basic freedom that can’t be taken away from us—we can choose joy even in the midst of the cruelest of circumstances.

In my own life, I have come to the conclusion that joy does not come from without, but from within. A life of calm, peaceful satisfaction, a positive attitude, a contented spirit—these aren’t dependent on circumstances but on our mind-set. Recently I came across an observation by Chuck Swindoll on this very issue. He says that the way he sees it, there are two types of people:

**NEGATIVE MIND-SET PEOPLE vs. POSITIVE MIND-SET PEOPLE**

# Those who need certain things # Those who need virtually *nothing* tangible before they can be happy to have inner joy

# Those who are dependent on *others* # Those who depend on *Christ* to to provide happiness give them joy by the Holy Spirit.

# Those who see happiness as being # Those who choose to experience

“out-there” – always future joy now, making it a present reality

It’s not enough, though, simply to say, “*I choose to be happy. I choose joy.”* The Bible’s not a self-help manual to stir up your inner power of positive thinking. When he talks about a positive mind-set, he’s talking about the joyful disposition that comes from the renewal of the mind by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 12:2): “*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”* That’s the internal work of God. But God also uses external means to reinforce His work in us, like when we intentionally set our minds on the things of God (Phil. 4:8).

In the verses that we are going to study this morning (1:12-20), Paul embodies the decision to live a joyful life in spite of troubling circumstances. Remember who it is we’re talking about. He wanted to go to Rome as a preacher. Instead, he went as a prisoner. As a Roman citizen he had the right to be treated with fairness and justice. Instead, he had been mistreated, falsely accused, and unjustly arrested. On top of all this, during his journey to Rome he was ship-wrecked! If anybody had a right to look at the world through dim lenses, complaining that he had been victimized, it was Paul. But even through all this, he did not complain. He was confident, despite hardship (1:12-14); joyful, in spite of others’ ill will (1:15-18); and hopeful, regardless of uncertainties (1:19-20). READ PHILIPPIANS 1:12-20

*"I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ; and most of the brethren have been made confident in the Lord because of my imprisonment, and are much more bold to speak the word of God without fear."* (1:12-14)

I love this passage (Vv. 12-14) from the letter to the Philippians because it depicts the unmistakable marks of authentic Christianity. It is refreshing to think of Paul who is cheerful, optimistic and confident in Christ, undiscouraged despite his circumstances. When you meet someone like that it's as though a window has been opened and the breezes of the Spirit blow refreshingly from that life.

If you as a Christian, for instance, get discouraged when things go badly, you blow up under pressure, and you snarl back at those who mistreat you, how are you different from anyone else? This is the question our Lord put in the Sermon on the Mount. What do you do that is different, He asks? How is your life different from anyone else? From time to time I run into authentic, vigorous, winsome persons who show the true colors of a Christian, and when I meet them, I never forget them. We have some of them in this church. I wish we had more.

Here is one in jail in Rome, writing to his friends far across the sea in Philippi. The Philippians had sent Epaphroditus to Paul because they had heard that Paul was in need. Since Epaphroditus’ departure, they had probably heard nothing of Paul. They may well have supposed that his ministry was at a standstill and that he was understandably depressed. But the news Epaphroditus brought was different. When you look at verses 12-26, look at it with the eagerness the Philippians might have felt for news from Paul. Think about how remarkable Paul’s attitudes are.

Paul is that kind of positive Christian we should all strive to be, and quite unconsciously he reveals for us four unmistakable qualities of authentic Christian faith. These are four reactions a Christian has which cannot be imitated, and that inevitably makes the world sit up and take notice. That is why I like this passage so much. I invite you to trace these actions with me in this passage. Adversity means advance--do you believe that?   Rivalry causes rejoicing.   Testing produces triumph.   Death unveils delight.

In the first one, we note that adversity means advance. Paul says, *“I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ; and most of the brethren have been made confident in the Lord because of my imprisonment, and are much more bold to speak the word of God without fear."* (1:12-14)

I have learned to recognize that the manifestation of this kind of quality and attitude is a test of Christian maturity. The Christian who has become well enough acquainted with the God of the impossible whom he serves, knows that even through apparent defeat, God still is able to work His wisdom. I know that such a Christian has begun to grow up in the Lord. He recognizes that in God obstacles are really opportunities, and nothing can really imperil the gospel. That is an amazing declaration when you think about it. Nothing by man that is intended to defeat ever brings to defeat, that God works His way despite the obstacles, and all obstacles only serve ultimately to spread Christian faith. That is what Paul says, and that is what a true Christian discovers.

There’s the story of a Swiss French pastor who was imprisoned by the Nazis during World War II. He said this: "*I was not able to stand firm except by remembering every day that the Gestapo was the hand of God--the left hand. The worst of tyrants will only end by accomplishing Christ's will*.” Now that is the glorious mark of Christianity that has made it an invincible force through all the running centuries. Here is Paul, under arrest, chained day and night to a Roman soldier, unable to leave the house or the city of Rome. It's easy to imagine what this must have meant to the restless, surging spirit of this man. We read his letters and we can see how he longed to go on to the ends of the earth, always disturbed when he had to stay in one place very long. God had sent him out under His commission that was to take him, as he knew, to the very ends of the earth. He has his eye on Spain as he writes this letter, and to the regions beyond.

It must have been easy for Paul to be discouraged. He doubtless was tempted many times as you and I would have been, to feel sorry for himself and to wonder why God would ever let this kind of thing happen to him when all he was trying to do was fulfill God's will. Do you ever feel that way? It must have been easy for him to chafe under these circumstances as month by month goes grinding on and there seems to be no change. But as we read the letters that come from him out of those days there is not one word of complaint. Instead there is a marvelous triumphant spirit, expression of confidence. Why? Well when he was tempted, he undoubtedly fell back on what he knew about his God. In other words, in the face of temptation to fret and chafe, he believed God.

Earlier he had written to these very Roman Christians with whom he was now meeting. "*All things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to His purpose*" (Rom. 8:28). He believed that! Even though the immediate hour didn't bring relief, he believed Him, and out of that confidence he could see that even those things that seem to be against him are working out the purposes of God. He can see already two things that have begun to happen. One is the wider knowledge of Christ in the whole city of Rome, beginning with the praetorian guard. That is the power of God.

Remember, Paul was the prisoner of Caesar, having committed himself to Caesar's judgment hall. As such he was under the care of the picked palace guard. Paul sees in this the marvelous working of the grace of God. Instead of being discouraged, he is highly encouraged. He must have been thrilled that God had worked out a special training school, for one-by-one these soldiers, the pick of the empire, were brought to him and chained to him so they couldn't get away for six hours and he had a chance to preach to them all that time. Now if you want to feel sorry for someone, don't feel sorry for Paul. Feel sorry for the Roman soldiers, chained to this man, and exposed to the testimony and life of this radiant Christian. They went out changed men, unquestionably. In the closing salutation of this letter you will notice that he refers to the saints in Caesar's household. That is revealing. Evidently there were those out of the very heart of the palace who had become Christians, an infiltration of the gospel into Caesar's household by means of this exposure Paul had to the palace guard as these soldiers are brought to him one-by-one. You see the spirit of God can start anywhere. No wonder Paul was encouraged, as out of adversity there was advancement of the gospel.

I read the story of a man named Gib Martin who worked in the State penitentiary at Tallahassee, Florida and relates how God has been working there in unusual ways. He told how the warden had asked them not to work among the guards but to confine their work only to the prisoners, so Gib and his partner began their work with the prisoners. Little by little the Spirit of God began to work and change lives so that in a month forty-five of those men became Christians. A marvelous spirit began to take over in the whole of the prison, and the prisoners began to witness to the guards. The guards became so interested they finally came and asked if they could have a Bible class too, and it reached up to the warden's office so that he became involved.

(Adversity means advance   Rivalry causes rejoicing.   Testing produces triumph.   Death unveils delight.)

The second result of the adversity was the bolder preaching of the gospel. "*Most of the brethren*", he said, "*have been made confident in the Lord because of my imprisonment and are much bolder to speak the word of God without fear*." The city was beginning to be reached as well. These Christians could see that even though Paul was now in the hands of Caesar, which must have represented to them the worst possible fate, nevertheless God could control that situation so as to keep the door open and it was an encouragement to them. They could see that even though they were arrested that would not stop God's plan, and so they were bolder than ever to preach the gospel throughout Rome.

And even though Paul could see this, he could not see the greatest advance of all. In fact, as far as we know he never did see what the final and greatest result of his imprisonment was. I am convinced that if we had been able to interview the Apostle as he writes from his home while in house arrest, and had asked him the question, "*Paul, what do think is the greatest work you are doing today*?" I think without question he would have said, "*it's to establish churches. God has sent me out to establish churches, and my heart longs to see new churches spring up in all the regions of earth*." He loved his churches. He labored over them and he wept over them, and you can hear his concern in all of his letters.

But from our twentieth century vantage point, looking back over this man's life, we know that he was wrong. That was not his greatest work. The churches that Paul established have long since fallen into ruins. If you visited the city of Philippi today, you would find the entire city is nothing but a pile of ruined stones, and there is no trace whatsoever of the church to which Paul wrote. The testimony that Paul established in many places has long since ceased, and in some of the areas in which Paul labored there has been no Christian testimony for centuries. The greatest and most enduring work this man did was the letters he wrote from prison. This is what has changed the West! His arrest gave him time to catch up on his correspondence! (Perhaps we should all be praying that we might be arrested one of these days.) *Adversity means advance!* Is that the way you are living your life?

But the second mark is even more personal. You can tell an authentic Christian by the fact that rivalry causes rejoicing.

Verse 15: *"Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in that I rejoice."*

Now it's evident here that certain Christians were jealous of Paul. These are not Judaizers. These are not false teachers. They are preaching a true gospel. They were genuine Christians, but they were jealous of Paul. Evidently, they felt they were there first and they felt he had perhaps usurped some of their positions. There is always readiness for envy. But many false doctrines had fallen before the Spirit of power and the cool logic and authority of the Apostle as he ministered to them. Now they see a chance to regain their popularity. They begin to plan extensive campaigns in Rome and surrounding cities, hoping thereby to eclipse the apostle in their activity and zeal for the gospel. They are hopeful that when the word gets back to Paul of how much they are doing he too might feel some of the jealous pain they feel. But the prisoner couldn't care less. The magnanimous spirit he has in Christ only made him rejoice in the face that Christ is being preached. He says it doesn't matter whether they are doing it to make me feel bad or not -- Christ is being preached, and in that I rejoice.

Can you take the success of others? That's one of the hardest tests of Christian maturity, isn't it? I don't think there is a clearer mark of Christian maturity than to be able to genuinely rejoice -- not just say pious words -- but genuinely rejoice in the success of another. Most of us react like the Christian I heard of in the mountains of West Virginia who, when asked how things had been going that year, said, "*Oh things have been terrible. We've had an awful year. Things have never been worse. Instead of having any progress in the church we've had* *setbacks, we've lost people."* But then he smiled and said, "*But thank God, the Methodists haven't done any better."* That spirit is the counterpart of what Paul reveals here. Rivalry caused him to rejoice!

Adversity means advance.   Rivalry causes rejoicing.   Testing produces triumph.   Death unveils delight.

Now the third mark of authentic Christianity is found in verses 19-20.  Testing produces triumph (Vv. 19-20): "*Yes, and I shall rejoice. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death."*

Note the confidence he expresses. I think if we were in these circumstances, we would say something like this. You follow along and I'll read it a bit differently: "*I hope that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this may turn out in my deliverance, as it is my desire and hope that I shall not be greatly ashamed, but that with some courage, as occasionally before, Christ will be honored in my body, or, if necessary and there is no way to escape it, by death.* (1:19-20)"

That's the way we say it, but you notice the supreme spirit of optimism that prevails here. There's no lack of faith here whatsoever. The man is facing his trial before Caesar. He knows that sooner or later, though he has been waiting patiently for almost two years, he must at last come before the Emperor, who was none other than the infamous Nero. His life is at stake. He knows the cruelty of this man, the cheapness with which he regards human life, the self-centeredness that causes him to demand his own will in every situation. When he says "*I know this will turn out for my deliverance*” it implies that he knows he will be brought out from Nero's control, from his hand, he will escape safely. The words he says a bit later on show that he knows it could mean his death, "*that Christ will be honored, whether by life or by death*."

The word here is really "*salvation*".   He does not use it in the sense of eternal salvation, but in triumph, victory. I know that this experience is going to turn out in triumph, whether it means life or death. I know that Christ will be honored. That is the triumph! There is no consideration here of even the possibility that he might slip or unwittingly fail and thus dishonor the Lord. Notice that? He sounds utterly confident, as confident as Mohammed Ali did before a fight. Why? Is he a super-egotist? No, in chapter three he says, "*for we are the true circumcision who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh*." It isn't his own resource or ability. None whatsoever.

There are two things that mark the ground of his supreme confidence there is no possibility for failure. First, because of your intercessory prayer for me. No one believed more strongly in the power of prayer than this man, Paul. He knows that by prayer he is not alone in this battle, and that it is not just a political battle. It isn't just a courtroom trial. It's a spiritual wrestling contest. The real powers are not Nero and his cohorts in the Roman Empire, but those invisible spirits behind it all, and he knows this is where prayer has its most potent and powerful effect. Prayer is the spiritual weapon that can bring down strongholds and bring into captivity everything that is against the knowledge of God, Paul said. He knows the saints are praying, and this give him great confidence.

The second thing is even more important:  the resources of the Spirit. The word "help" is a feeble translation. It should be "resources". "*I know that through your prayers and the resources of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance*." You see the One who was indwelling him was capable of anything. He was fully competent to handle any possible situation, and to direct Paul in whatever response was required, therefore there could be no failure. How could there be? Can the Spirit of God dwelling within, fail? Paul is not trusting in himself; he is trusting wholly in the One who can carry him through, so whether life or death there was no possibility of failure.

This is the same note of confidence that breathed so strongly in the record of those five splendid young men down in Ecuador who laid down their lives under the Auca spears (1956). As you read through the account you realize that though there was fear in the contemplation of the savage unknown, and though they realized anything could happen, and they went in with a great deal of trepidation and uncertainty, nevertheless there rang through it all, that account of a quiet, certain confidence that regardless of what happened, whether they lived or died, Christ would be honored. How marvelously that has been fulfilled, as once the most feared and hated tribe in all the Amazon basin, though a little tribe of only a few hundred people, ten years later became one of the most Christ-centered Christian tribes in the Amazon. Amazing, isn't it! And the very children of the missionaries who were killed are now in the forefront of carrying the message of the gospel to the rest of the tribe who have not yet heard. That's the victory in Christ.

APPLICATION (1:12-20) THREE TRUTHS TO HELP YOU LIVE WELL

The secret to living well is the same as the secret to having joy: the centrality of Jesus Christ. Keeping Him as our top priority in life will give us great joy. Many people today are in a relentless but empty pursuit of happiness through other means. It that’s you, *STOP!* True happiness is the cultivation of a Christ-empowered life.

When Christ is the center, not only does He replace anxiety, fear, and insecurity with contentment, but He also impacts our perspective regarding the three areas of concern Paul has been describing. The following three truths correspond to these three areas and will help us live well even when we suffer.

**First**, *when Christ is the center, He changes our attitude toward our circumstances.* I once read that one of the requirements for working alongside Mother Teresa in her ministry in India was a joyful attitude toward life. Surrounded by so much pain and suffering, there was nothing in the appearance of their work that would make somebody feel anything but sadness and sorrow. But their inner joy reached out to those in need and took them in, washed their wounds, and set them on the road to recovery. Those who live with an internal, abiding joy can’t help but seek to conform their attitudes toward circumstances to their deep-seated convictions. It’s transformative. Choose today to serve with joy rather than suffer under circumstances.

**Second,** *when Christ is the center, He delivers us from our preoccupation with how others view us.* The more Christ means to us, the less other people’s opinions mean. We’ll care less about how many “friends” or “followers” we have on social media. We’ll care nothing about how many “likes” we get on something we post. Over the years I’ve been bothered less and less about pleasing others, not because I care less about people, but because I care more about Christ—His priorities, His passions, His pursuits, and His plan for me. If I make Christ the center, He delivers me from my preoccupations with others. Choose today to care more about the mind of Christ than the opinions of others.

**Third,** *when Christ is the center, He calms our fears about ourselves and our futures.* People frequently say when worried, “*I might die!”* Let me tell you: Unless you happen to be among the generation that sees the Lord’s return, there’s no “might” about it. You will die. So will I. Death has it out for all of us. It may not be for years, or it may be soon. We don’t know, and we can’t know. The last thing we should do is worry about when we will die; instead, we should focus on how we’ll live. If Christ is the center, it doesn’t matter whether we live long or short lives, whether we die sooner or later. What matters is that we love Him, serve Him, and rejoice in His salvation that we clam, *today.* Christ will take care of our tomorrows. Choose today to think more about focusing on Christ, His death, and His resurrection than about fretting over your own life and death.

Isn’t it amazing that when the person of Christ is in full focus, centrally located in our hearts and minds, everything starts to make sense? Order emerges out of chaos. Clarity out of confusion. Life from death.

Prayer: *Our heavenly Father, this glimpse into the light and life of the Apostle has warmed and thrilled our hearts and lives even this day. We consider the marvel that it was written over twenty long centuries ago, still the power of the Spirit teaches, transforms, changes us. We pray that we may recognize that it doesn't come by some effort to convince ourselves, some struggle for positive thinking, but a quiet resting upon an unchangeable fact, that Jesus Christ lives His life within us, and that He is quite competent to meet every situation. May we look to Him and stop looking at our circumstances and learn to rejoice in His victory. In Christ's Name. Amen*