

Sermon Title: Jealous Preachers? *Really?*  
Scripture Text: Philippians 1:12-20 (Philippians #2)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 9-19-10

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We have just launched into our series on the Book of Philippians, so I invite you to open your Bible and join me in Philippians Chapter 1, where we will start at Verse 12. You will find that we move faster through Chapter 1 than any other part of this book, just because of the nature of what is here.

If you have been around Christianity very long, if you have read your Bible much, if you have read commentaries, if you have heard people talk about it, you know that Philippians is generally associated with joy—called an "Epistle of Joy." Well, there are a lot of things that you could use to describe it; that's a legitimate one (e.g., Phil. 3:1; 4:4).

The author of this book was, before his conversion to Jesus Christ, known for his very harsh treatment of enemies, and his overzealous persecution of Christians (Acts 26:9-11); that is, until he met Jesus Christ personally on the road to Damascus (Acts 26:12-18), and he became His most successful ambassador in the first century (Acts 9:15).

The power of the Gospel changed this man, known as "Saul"—his name changed by Jesus to "Paul" (Acts 13:9). He changed him into the one whom God *still* uses to bring joy to the lives of countless people around the world. He went from bitter persecutor to the Apostle of Joy.

It was from his imprisonment in Rome that Paul reveals in this letter what has been accomplished, and what was *being* accomplished, by faith during his time there. You can apply the same principles that he illustrated. I think you will find the connection pretty easy to make.

One of the most reliable ways to tell your level of spiritual maturity is to see what it takes to rob you of the "joy" God gives you through His "Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:6; cf. Rom. 14:17). Paul's maturity shows in our passage for today as he makes it very clear, by his own example, that difficult, unpleasant, painful, even life-threatening circumstances *did not* rob him of joy; rather, it made it increase.

You see, for a Christian, "joy" is a gift of God, granted by His "Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13). Galatians Chapter 5, Verse 22—"But the fruit of the Spirit is"—one of the many things on the list: "joy." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted) But just because God *provides* joy does not mean that you *always* and *constantly maintain* a sense of joy; you don't stay in that condition all the time, because *you* get in the way.

In First John Chapter 1, Verse 4—I hadn't really thought about it this way, but John wrote to his friends, and he says: "These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete." Doesn't that imply that he was writing to people who were in circumstances in which "joy" might *not* be what you would call "complete"?

The one thing you know *for sure* will rob you of the joy of the Lord is "sin" (Ps. 32:3-4), because sin corrupts your fellowship with God (Ps. 5:4; Is. 59:2), who *is* the source of joy (Jn. 15:11; 16:24; 17:13); that's what First John Chapter 1 is all about. If you expect the *Holy Spirit* to show in your life, you *cannot* be courting unholy attitudes, or be speaking unholy words, or be toying with unholy activities.

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You will not live in "the joy of the Lord" (Neh. 8:10) if you hang on to a sinful attitude like dissatisfaction or bitterness or sullenness or anger or doubt or fear or negativism or complaining. Consequently, the only way to "restore" lost "joy" is to repent (Ps. 51:12), and to return to the proper worship of and obedience to God (Ps. 51:19). So, when you sin, you are going to forfeit the sense of the joy that God wants you to have (e.g., 2 Sam. 24:10; Ps. 38:3-8, 17-18).

But *anything other than* you sinning—no matter how difficult it is, no matter how painful or disappointing—anything other than sin *need not take away* your joy. But you will find—and you already know this—that minor things *will* chase away your joy, if you let them, if you react sinfully to them: a change for the worse in your health or your job or your finances or your personal relationships or other important areas of life can very quickly cause you to question the Lord.

I can't tell you how many *hundreds* of times I have heard somebody say, in the midst of a trial, "I just don't know what God is doing!"—as if somehow God has lost His way! That's just bad theology gone to seed, right? God has sovereign "wisdom" (Rom. 11:33; Eph. 3:10)). He has a purpose in every circumstance that *will* make you more like Jesus Christ, if you will work with Him (2 Cor. 3:18; cf. Deut. 8:16; Ps. 119:71).

You are especially vulnerable when things like that happen to you suddenly, and catch you off guard (Prov. 3:25). If you let anger and doubt and distrust and fear and self-pity and ingratitude and complaining rule the day, then events that even are not sinful in themselves are going to lead *you* to have sinful responses—and there goes your joy!

Well, trouble in this life is certain to come. In Job 14, Verse 1—here's one of those uplifting things I'm sure you are going to want to make a memory-verse out of: "Man, who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil." Well, that's just *life*. We *know* that difficult times will come (Job 5:7). And for a Christian, there is *another* factor. Jesus said, in John 16:33, the night before He went to the Cross: "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (cf. Ps. 34:19; Acts 14:22)

Being a Christian does not exempt you from the problems and difficulties that *all* people face because we live in a sin-cursed world. *Plus*, as a Christian, you are in line to be persecuted by the hostile world system for living out your faith. Earlier that same evening, in that same conversation, Jesus said, in John 15:20—"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." (cf. Matt. 5:10-12; Lk. 6:22; 1 Pet. 4:4).

Last year, we studied the Book of James; and he introduces his wonderful little epistle with these words: Chapter 1, Verses 2-4—"Consider it all joy, my brethren"—now, there is the theme we are going to see in Philippians 1—"Consider it all joy, my brethren, *when* you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance." And we learned that that means that God has already prepared you for that trial; He has tested you and approved you to handle this. He continues, "And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

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Do you see it? Trouble is inevitable in this world, but "the joy of the Lord" is *always* available. Sin will rob you of joy, but if you embrace God's will—even in difficult times like the times in which Paul was when he wrote Philippians—then God will use them "all" for your "good" and for His glory (Rom. 8:28), and He *will* provide you indescribable joy in the midst of it (1 Pet. 1:8).

No one has ever understood that truth better than the Apostle Paul. He was a larger-than-life model of a man whose joy never faltered. He resisted anything that threatened to come between him and his intimate fellowship and trust in the Lord. Paul experienced sorrow and tears. He suffered grief and disappointment. He was beaten and left for dead, and shipwrecked. He was troubled by sinful and weak and contentious Christians in *several* different places. Yet there never seems to have been a time when circumstances diminished his joy in the Lord. In fact, it seemed like his worst afflictions *tightened* his grip on salvation's joy (2 Cor. 7:4).

So, Philippians Chapter 1, Verses 12-20 is where we are targeting for today. To maintain joy, I think you should learn from Paul three principles:

Be Courageous (vss. 12-14)  
Don't Be Jealous (vss. 15-17)  
and Be Optimistic (vss. 18-20)

And we will see how those pop out to us from the text as we work our way through.

First of all: Be Courageous: Verses 12, 13, and 14. He begins this way: "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel." Now, right there, that illustrates how a person of great faith views the world. Paul evaluated his circumstances in light of *one overarching thing*: the "progress of the gospel." That comes first in his mind, even before he discusses his own circumstances or his wellbeing or his hope of being released from prison.

Paul's faith is preaching to us from his prison cell in Rome. The roadblocks that are set up by Satan to hinder the spread of the Gospel (Matt. 8:12; 2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:26), God had turned into stepping-stones instead. *More* people heard the Gospel because Paul was in prison. *More* people were *more* encouraged to *spread* the Gospel in Rome than *ever before*, when Paul was in prison there.

The fact is that when Paul went to Rome as a prisoner, it was actually the *Gospel* that went to Rome! Paul had written to the church in Rome. He had said he planned to come there; he *wanted* to come there; he hoped to minister there, and he hoped to go from there on to Spain. We don't know absolutely for sure if he ever got to Spain, but we know he took his first missionary trip, we know he took his second missionary trip, we know he took his third missionary trip—and then the *fourth* one, he didn't have to raise any money, he didn't have to build any tents; it was at *government expense*! They arrested him and shipped him off there! And what they did was, they sent the Gospel to the capital of the empire—in the person of the Apostle Paul!

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What we have in this personal part of this letter is Paul's faith reverberating around the whole Mediterranean rim, from his prison in Rome. You see, people of faith make a difference wherever they go (2 Cor. 2:14; cf. Dan. 11:32b). They see circumstances as opportunities for the glory of God.

Think about Joseph. Remember how he was the favored son, and then he was thrown into a pit by his own brothers—ripped from his family, sold into slavery, transported to a completely foreign culture? Then he magnified God by being faithful, so that in God's providence, *he* was used to spare the people of God's choice—including *his own brothers* who got rid of him (Gen. 50:20). That is faith at work!

Job buried his children, lost his very considerable earthly possessions, and lost his health. From that, he arrived at a deeper understanding of the mysteries of God's wisdom than ever before (Job 42:5). And the story of his life has ministered to millions for nearly 4,000 years, now. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there" (Job 1:21). "Bless God," he says.

Jeremiah was cast into a muddy cistern. He suffered from other afflictions. It was Jeremiah who coined the now-famous phrase that is immortalized in Scripture and in a song that we love to sing: "Great is Thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:23).

Peter and John, upon being imprisoned in Acts Chapter 4, came out and were more bold than ever in proclaiming Christ.

The early church was persecuted in Jerusalem, and it got so bad that God used the persecution to scatter them; and just like sending Paul to Rome, every place He scattered the Christians, the Gospel went (Acts 8:4).

Stop looking at circumstances—*unpleasant* circumstances—as if they somehow *impede* God's will. God's will on Earth does *not* rise and fall with your personal peace and affluence! Paul's situation is a perfect illustration.

Luke says this, in Acts Chapter 28, Verse 16, describing the end of that long journey that got them to Rome. He traveled part of that time with Paul. He says: "When we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him." What he is describing is a house arrest; he was allowed to stay in his own "rented quarters" (Acts 28:30). If they had had electronic monitoring anklets, he probably would have had one on, but electronics were not quite as sophisticated in first-century Rome as they are today, so he had a "soldier guarding him," and they had to rotate shifts all the time. In other words: God brought the mission field to Paul, rather than him going where he might have gone.

So, we come back to our text, and Paul says, "so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ..." Now, he could have said, "My imprisonment on false charges, my imprisonment because by rights were violated, my imprisonment which is unfair." He saw it all as "my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else."

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Being under constant guard necessitated that a guard would relieve that guard that had just finished his shift—meaning that many of them were forced into prolonged contact with the greatest evangelist of the first century. Paul did not grumble to the guards about the unfairness of his situation; *he led them to Christ*—"as many" as God would allow to come to Him (Acts 2:39; cf. Jn. 6:37, 44, 65; Acts 13:48; 16:14).

It is an interesting reference that "the praetorian guard" is here. It was a group of imperial guards. They were distinct from the army or the Roman police. We believe there were about 9,000 of them in the first century in Rome. Their custom, when they were assigned to guard a prisoner, was to be chained to the prisoner during the guard's assigned time on guard duty (Acts 28:20; cf. Eph. 6:20). Now, we don't know for sure that they were actually physically chained to Paul, but we know that he had a guard beside him at all times. When he described the "armor of God" in Ephesians Chapter 6, he was probably sitting next to a guard and saying, "Let's see: helmet—'helmet of salvation'; breastplate—'breastplate of righteousness.'" He was probably *looking* at a physical illustration when he did that.

So, here's a man in prison, and these men assigned to guard him would, day after day, see his gentleness, his patience, his courage. They would listen to him as he talked to friends who came to visit him; he wouldn't be allowed privacy. They would listen to him dictate to his amanuensis the letters that he wrote (e.g., Rom. 16:22)—this one, and Colossians and Ephesians and Philemon. They would hear him when he would talk to the judges. They would hear him when he spoke to God in prayer. And surely, he talked to the guards directly, as well.

His "imprisonment in the cause of Christ" became "well known throughout the whole praetorian guard *and* to everyone else"—all around Rome, Paul's presence had become part of the talk of the town! All that was happening for the spread of the Gospel was having a positive impact on the Christians in Rome. It bolstered the church in Rome to have an Apostle in prison there.

So, he says in Verse 14—"...and that most of the brethren"—this is referring to the ones in the church in Rome—"most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear." God brought a steady stream of people to Paul—guards and others alike—who heard the Gospel from him.

Now, I said it probably won't be hard for you to make the jump from what Paul said to where you are at, but I realize: To my knowledge, we have no one in prison because of preaching the Gospel in our state. I hope it remains that way. But are you willing to pray that God would give you—like this says—"far more courage to speak the word of God without fear"? That was the result there.

Having courage is the direct result of knowing truth, and living by it; knowing good doctrine, and putting it into practice. If you *know* that God is "sovereign" (Ps. 103:19)—and He *is*—and if you know that God is always "good" (Ps. 119:68)—and He *is*—and if you know that He is always "faithful" (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13)—and "*great* is" His "faithfulness"

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(Lam. 3:23)—and if you know that "the gospel...is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes"—and it *is*, according to Romans 1:16—then, to have "courage to speak the word of God without fear" is nothing more than *obeying God*. He will give you the "grace" to handle *any* situation that you face (2 Cor. 12:9); and if it is you and an unbeliever, that situation is an opportunity for you to glorify God and to proclaim the Gospel (1 Pet. 3:15).

So he says: "My imprisonment has caused more people to have more courage." So, to maintain your joy, Be Courageous.

And secondly, here comes something very interesting: Don't Be Jealous.

I am going to read these next three verses together to you all, and talk about them as a whole. Paul says: "Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment."

Now, what is he talking about? What had happened? Well, there is no explanation anywhere else in Philippians or in the Book of Acts or anywhere else in the New Testament of exactly what Paul was talking about in this passage. We can piece it together from what the text says, and we can come up with a pretty good idea of what it is about.

It appears he is *not* talking about false teachers. He does not criticize anything that these people were preaching. We know he was not a bit shy about confronting error, whenever and wherever he saw it—especially among people who professed to be believers.

So the ones Paul writes about here were apparently preaching the true Gospel. The problem is that they were not all doing it from pure motives; "some" were doing it out of "envy" and rivalry.

We know there was a church at Rome, long before Paul arrived there. We know he had written to the church at Rome. Undoubtedly, there had been some who rose to positions of leadership and influence in that circle of believers in the capital city of Rome. But with the arrival of Paul, and all the attention his presence attracted—after all, *his* "imprisonment" came to be known "throughout the whole praetorian guard" and *all the others* in the church at Rome. Maybe some of the ones who had been in the limelight were not being mentioned as often. Probably, some of them became envious. They didn't quit preaching Christ, they didn't change their message; but perhaps they were secretly hoping that if *they* were zealous for evangelism, that would result in Paul getting in more trouble—or, maybe him not being treated so well in his imprisonment.

That happens! I don't know if you noticed the sermon title as it went by, or if you looked at it in your bulletin. I called it "Jealous Preachers? *Really?*" And the answer to my question is: "Yes." It happens. It is my observation that this is an ongoing problem in the Body of Christ. It was not unique to Paul, it wasn't unique to Rome, it wasn't unique to the first century.

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Insecure leaders are a blight on the ministry of the Gospel, but it happens (e.g., 3 Jn. 9). One reason why it is hard work to get churches to cooperate is that it is hard work to get preachers to cooperate, and to get other leaders to get over the sense that they are in competition rather than on the same team. They protect their turf. They secretly rejoice in the problems of other Christians. So often, when you get a group of pastors together, the questions are, "How many?" "How often?" and "How many dollars?"—"How many people come?" "How often?" and, "What is your budget?" And, you know, as long as it is a few less than you have, and they meet a little less frequently than you do, and the budget is a little bit smaller, you're fine. But what if that other guy, *who isn't as eloquent as you*, has a bigger church? Those things affect preachers. There is, indeed, such a thing as jealous preacher; and Paul ran into them.

I have known pastors how have told me, straight out, that they discourage or they completely prevent home Bible studies from developing in their churches because, apparently, they are afraid of *not being the ultimate authority!* There are some people who are intimidated by anyone who shows any strength of leadership, and so there *are* leaders who *drive away* strong people instead of embracing them and working alongside them and developing them. And Paul must have encountered some of that type in Rome.

Christians can fall into the Devil's poisoned way of thinking that makes them feel that it is more important for people to acknowledge that they are *right* than it is for a conflict to be resolved. Think about that when you have a difficult or an awkward time with someone. Do you *really* want the awkwardness to be resolved, or do you want to be proven *right*? "The way *I* feel is the *right* way to feel about this! And if you don't *agree* that how *I* feel is the right way, and you don't feel about it the way *I* do, *you're wrong!*" That really helps, doesn't it?

Sometimes, all that will satisfy, either side of a conflict is the complete demise of the other side. Jealousy, rivalry, and envy—they are *totally* ugly things, *totally* unbecoming a Christian (Prov. 27:4; 1 Cor. 4:6). And in the flesh, we are all capable of all of them.

I have had my times. I've gotten my neck sort of stiffened, and it was like I have to prove I'm right. That doesn't usually help. If it is the truth of God's Word, I will *die* for that truth, but *I* don't have to be right; I will defend *His* truth.

I have been maligned. I have been falsely accused by younger men in the ministry. Some, apparently, had become jealous of my position. They forgot that I gave them their first opportunities for ministry, forgot that I had helped arrange scholarships for their training years and gave them internships along the way. They had no idea what it takes to endure through a lifetime of ministry.

And to this day, there are some who have gone after me in the past who, even though they preach the true Gospel—even though you could go and hear them talk, and they would tell you how to know Christ—some of them want me humiliated and out of the ministry altogether! (Ps. 35:19; 38:19) *That is not very much fun!* That is *not* the best part of my job! I haven't come anywhere near *close* to what Paul endured, but I have come a lot closer to understanding what he meant here in Philippians than I used to be.

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Tragically, I have seen almost all who went after me wash out of the ministry altogether. That's a heartbreak! But as a result of their attacks, what has happened? Well: greater opportunity for the Gospel than I ever *dreamed*; a broader influence than I ever thought *possible*. My goodness—a little church here in Boise, Idaho, with partners *in Russia*, of all places! I was raised to *hate* those people, I don't know about you! Now, some of them are among my best friends in Christ.

Friends, when I say, "Don't Be Jealous," I mean it! Make sure you are on the right side of that issue. If you want the Gospel to spread, *devote* yourself to it. And if you care who gets the credit, you are going to always be a stumbling block along the way in God's will. Do you want *Christ* to be the One exalted, or do *you* have to be right? Do you have to be bigger, better, stronger, more whatever? (Jer. 45:5a)

If you really want the joy of the Lord, you have to do things the Lord's way. That includes Being Courageous. That includes Not Being Jealous.

And then—I don't know how you would command this, but I would put it into this form: Be Optimistic, like Paul was.

"The joy of the Lord" is reserved for those who trust in the Lord, who live by faith, who want what He wants. Paul lived by faith; and throughout this letter, joy exudes from his prison cell. It's a very straightforward passage. Look at it with me, and you will see how it was Paul's faith in God which *completely dominated* his view of the circumstances; and therefore, he was optimistic.

Now, Paul could have bemoaned his unjust imprisonment: He had broken no law; he *had* been falsely accused; there *had* been false witnesses. He could have complained about the interruption of his plans: He *wanted* to do a lot of other things. He could have cried "Foul!" because of government persecution. He might well have, humanly speaking, become bitter about the people he had just mentioned in Verses 15, 16, and 17.

But notice what he says: It's a greater spread of the Gospel. Why, if Paul was in America, he probably would have been having personal injury attorneys visiting him every day to work on countersuing the government and his accusers. That wasn't the point. That was *not* what he was about! Fundraising probably would have been a lot easier for him if he *would have* complained about his lack of funds for defense, and the possibility of his own execution.

But that is not what he did, because those are not the cries of faith; those are the whimperings of unbelief and selfishness, and those are the reflections of a weak and victimized God who cannot take care of His own people (e.g., Ps. 78:19-20). That's not where Paul was! He was in prison, but he was *totally* optimistic.

Look at Verse 18, where he says: "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." Rather than pity himself over the people who were jealous, rather than fight back at the ones who wanted him in prison, Paul put the focus where it belongs.



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This is one of the most endearing statements he ever wrote, when you think about it. What really mattered to Paul was not what anybody was doing to him, it was what they were doing *for* the Gospel (cf. 2 Tim. 2:9).

Is it possible that selfish and jealous individuals can actually spread the Gospel? Oh, yeah. I've seen it. But God uses His Word (Col. 1:5-6; 1 Thess. 2:13). Sometimes He uses His Word almost *in spite of* the proclaimer of His Word. The people who hear the selfish one preaching the Gospel don't know what Paul knows. They hear only the good preaching, they hear the good news; they can't see the bad motive. It is "the gospel" which is "the power of God" (Rom. 1:16), and so Paul says, *whenever* the Gospel is "proclaimed...I rejoice" and "I *will* rejoice." *That* is what is important to a person of faith: spreading the Gospel. *Everything else* is less important. Not *unimportant*; everything else, though, is secondary (1 Cor. 9:19-23; 2 Tim. 2:10).

In Verse 19, he says: "For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Now, we surmise, because of this—and I told you before that of the four Prison Epistles, apparently Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were written early in his imprisonment; this one seems to have been written late in his imprisonment, which lasted a couple of years—and we surmise from what he says here that he was probably awaiting a verdict, not a trial. And the tone of this verse is that he seems to have been expecting to be released; he had probably heard some sort of rumor, maybe from one of the guys that was chained to him that had become his brother in Christ. Who knows?

He attributes the good outcome that he anticipated to two things. Now, I don't know if you saw this one coming or not, but I'm going to hit you with it again. Look at the two things that he says are the reasons why he was expecting to be delivered: "your prayers *and* the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Or, another way you could put it is: man's will and God's will, intertwined—as always.

We keep seeing it, over and over. I am going to remind you of it as often as we run across it. Two things are taught side by side in the Bible; neither is ever diminished by the other: God is sovereign, *and* you are fully responsible for your free choices (e.g., Gen. 50:20; Prov. 16:1, 9; 19:21; Jn. 1:12-13; 6:39-40; 44-45; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 13:48; 16:14; Rev. 17:14b). You have a lot of options. Human responsibility and human freedom, side by side with the sovereignty of God. When Paul was released from his imprisonment, I have *no doubt whatsoever* that if he got to Philippi, he reiterated to his friends there, "It was '*through your prayers*' that I was delivered. Thank you for praying for me." I'm *sure* he said that! I also have *no doubt* that Paul preached that his deliverance from prison was "through the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

Now, which one was it? That's where people get themselves into theological spasms: They have to say it was one or the other! *It was both!* (cf. Ezek. 36:36-37) Does God answer your prayers? Yes! (1 Chr. 5:20) Is God sovereign? Yes! (Eph. 1:11) How do those two work together? I can't fully explain it! But I can tell you that I *don't* want to pray to a God who *isn't* sovereign! If He is not in control, *why* would I pray to Him?

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Why would I want to ask *anybody else* for anything? You know, if you want to get invited into an elite group, you don't ask the parking attendant out front. You have to get the one who has the authority to *let you in!* If you want God to move, you have to ask *God!* And when He does something, it's an answer to your prayer—sometimes "Yes," sometimes "No," sometimes "Wait," sometimes "Watch this, I have an even *better* idea." God is in control. You are responsible for everything you choose. He *does* answer prayer.

It was an answer to prayers from faithful people who continually prayed for Paul that he was released. It was an act of God, and it could not have been accomplished unless God did it (cf. Acts 12:5-11).

And now comes a glimpse of his faith from a different angle. His optimism and his joy were *not* dependent on which way the verdict went. Remember what he said: "I know that this *will* turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ"—Verse 20—"according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body"—and then, I love this—"whether by life *or* by death."

Paul didn't know *for sure* which way the verdict would go, but he knew for sure—he was optimistic that God would be glorified. If Paul was acquitted and released—and he was—he would continue laboring for the Gospel—and he did. He got out of prison. What did he do? He did *exactly* what he did before prison: He preached Christ. He planted churches. He strengthened churches. He disciplined leaders. He wrote letters that became part of the New Testament canon. He "kept right on" doing everything that he knew how to do to glorify God (Acts 5:42). If he was condemned to death, he knew he would go to his Lord with unwavering faith and with a song in his heart (cf. Dan. 3:17-18). And by the way: He *was* eventually *rearrested, reimprisoned, and* condemned to death. And if you want to see how gloomy he was, go read Second Timothy Chapter 4—the last chapter that he wrote. It sounds *just like* Philippians Chapter 1.

That officially finishes our text for today, but it leads us to one of the most well-known verses of the New Testament. It's going to be at the core of our next study, but I want you to look at it as sort of a punchline for today. Paul says: "I will not be put to shame in anything, but with all boldness, I want Christ to be preached even now, as always. I want Him to be glorified through me, whether by life or by death." And look at Verse 21, just as a teaser for next time: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

I told you I would like you to make the connection between what Paul wrote here and *your* life. I do not think it is hard to make the connection. Just ask yourself. Be honest before the Lord (Ps. 51:6); He knows your heart anyway, so it is silly to try to hide from Him (Ps. 44:21; Prov. 15:11; Ecc. 12:14; Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 4:5; Rev. 2:23). Can you *honestly* say, "For me, to live is Christ"? You see, that is the *summary* of what is here. Do you desire, more than anything else, that Christ is honored by how you live your life? Do you desire, above all else, that His Gospel is proclaimed by how you live and what you say? When you go out from here, and tomorrow morning you go to a job, or this afternoon you go to a neighborhood, or you go off to a family reunion, is that like Paul going to Rome: the Gospel went to Rome with him?

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Or when you go from here, do you pass through a telephone booth and become Clark Kent, with your identity never known? We have never figured out why, because he put on glasses, nobody could recognize him! But a lot of Christians have found a lot more effective way than that! *Somehow*, they can come and *lift up* Jesus Christ, and leave and not say *anything* about Him to anybody who doesn't know Him, until the next time they are back together! Can you honestly say, "For me, to life is Christ"? If a stranger followed you around for the next 24 hours, or the next 6 days until you come back here again, would he or she get the idea: *That person loves Jesus?* It's not hard! It's just life-changing to get it.

Can you honestly say, "For me, to die is gain"? Are you absolutely sure that if you died today, you would be better off because you would be in the presence of God the Father and Jesus Christ? (2 Cor. 5:8) Paul is going to elaborate on that one in the passage coming for us next time.

But if you are not sure that "to die is gain," right now could be the most important moment of your life. Romans 6:23 puts it this way: "The wages of sin is death." We have "all sinned" (Rom. 3:23). You know *you* have sinned. "Wages"—that is what you have earned; that is what you *deserve* (Rom. 4:4). "The wages of sin is death, but"—despite what you have earned, despite what is owed to you, there is a "free gift of God" waiting for you: it is "eternal life," and it is "in Christ Jesus our Lord"—made possible by what He did on your behalf (Is. 53:5-8, 10; Matt. 20:28; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18a). Will you spend eternity collecting the "wages" you deserve, or will you spend eternity enjoying the "free gift" of "eternal life"? And by the way: You can *really* start enjoying it *right now!* (e.g., Ps. 32:1-2; Rom. 8:35-37; 1 Pet. 1:8; 1 Jn. 5:4)

Those are the only two choices. Those are the two outcomes. Those are the only two eternal destinies—Heaven and Hell (Matt. 25:46), in Christ or lost (Rev. 20:6, 10, 14-15). And the choice is completely yours (Jn. 3:18; 8:24), and it is the most important choice that you will ever make. John 1:12 speaks of those who make the right choice: "As many as received Him, to them"—the implication is: to them, *and them alone*—"He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name."

If you *cannot* say, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain," then I beg you right now: Believe in Jesus Christ. Cast yourself on Him (Rom. 10:9-13; 2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 6:18). Tell God you *know* you are a "sinner" (Lk. 18:13). You know that "Christ died for your sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). You believe Him. You receive Him. You want to be His child. He has never, *ever* turned away *anyone* who has come to Him with that prayer (Jn. 6:37b).

John 3:16—maybe the best-known verse in all the Bible—"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Your choice—"perish" or "eternal life." Make the right choice, and when the time of God's appointment comes for you, "to die" *will be* "gain"! But that will never be your lot unless you decide to agree with Paul's words: "For to me, to live is Christ." Notice, he put those two together. You cannot say, "to die is gain" if you do not say, "to live is Christ"! If Christ is not the center of your life, then dying *will not* be gain for you (Ps. 145:18; Matt. 7:21; Jas. 2:14, 16; 1 Jn. 2:4). Your choice. God's will.

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And if you belong to Him—if Christ *is* the center of your life—then I can tell you: There is *endless* joy available to you, if you will but have it (Ps. 16:11; Rev. 21:4).

Let's pray:

*Father, how we thank You again for Your marvelous grace to us. How I thank You for this, yet another of so many examples that nothing can thwart Your sovereign plan on Earth. And yet, You have given us the choice, the freedom to believe You and accept the great gift that is ours in Christ, or to reject it. Father, I pray for each of my brothers and sisters in Christ here today. May our joy be made complete, because we obey You. May we be courageous. May we be gracious to those who oppose us. And may we be optimistic because we know that You are in charge. Father, I pray for anyone here who has not yet made that decision that Christ will be Lord of his or her life. Please make this the day that it happens. And whatever needs to be done in each or our hearts, that we could better glorify You, do it, we pray, for we come in Jesus' name. Amen.*