

Contagious Joy

Part 3 – The Roadmap for Joy

Philippians 1:12-26

March 15, 2009

Could it be possible to live in such a way that we were joyful no matter what happened in our life? Is it possible that God has given us a roadmap that we can read and follow? Hard to believe but it is true. Paul provides not only the example of how it is done but the principles we need to live by to get there. How can we be joyful, no matter what? Are you ready for a road trip?

The Background: The background of the story today is that Paul for the last four years has been miserable in circumstances. He's spent two years in prison in Caesarea for a trumped up charge. Then he's put on a ship to go to Rome to appear before Nero who is not known for his niceties towards Christians. On the way he's shipwrecked, stranded on an island, bitten by a poisonous snake, waits the winter there, continues on to Rome, spends another two years in prison awaiting trial to be executed. During this two year period in Rome he is chained to a guard for 24 hours a day. He has absolutely no privacy. Every 6 hours he gets a new guard. Though he wanted to go to Rome to have a crusade, God put him in prison where he would write the New Testament. Yet in spite of all of these situations, Paul says in *Phil. 1:18 "I rejoice and I will continue to rejoice."*

Proposition: What's Paul's secret? How does he stay positive in prison, triumph over troubles, delight in difficulties, stay so happy, positive, joyful in spite of the fact that everything has not turned out the way he planned it. **How can we be joyful, no matter what?** Paul gives us a roadmap for Joy!

I. Look at the **progress** not just the circumstances

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

A. *Greater progress... for the furtherance.*

1. Refers to a company of woodcutters preceding the progress of an army, cutting wood through the forest so that it might advance.
2. Used of the forward movement of something – often of armies – in spite of obstacles, dangers, and distractions.
3. Used of advancing against a headwind.
4. His readers could very understandably have concluded that Paul's imprisonment had brought the building of the church of Jesus Christ to a standstill, or at least slowed its progress significantly. However the apostle announced that this had not happened. Rather his imprisonment was resulting in the advancement of God's program. In relation to the progress of the gospel, Paul's imprisonment was really a good thing, a positive situation. (Constable, p.13)

B. Our circumstances can cause us to lose sight of what God is doing.

1. The quality of your life is primarily determined not by what happens to you, that is by your circumstances, but by how you choose to respond to your circumstances. The way you look at a problem is more important than the problem!
2. "The same God, who used Moses' rod, Gideon's pitchers, and David's sling, used Paul's chains." Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*

C. Our typical response to difficult circumstances...

- **Anger:** Where is God
- **Pity party:** Woe is me! Why me God?

- **Denial:** Where is the problem? There should be no problems. We have to have faith. I must need to do something more!

D. God's advancement of the gospel through history...

1. Persecution of the Sanhedrin forced the early Christians to become evangelists
2. The Pope's challenge to Martin Luther ignited the Protestant reformation
3. The persecution of the Stuarts motivated the Pilgrims to launch out to America.
4. The persecution Korea has spawned the largest church in the world

E. **Reminder: Our response to our circumstances tells us what we really believe about God!**

II. Look at the **purpose** not just the problems

¹³so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,

A. **Remember all the places he had preached?**

1. Jerusalem... the heart of Palestine
2. Antioch... the heart of Syria
3. Ephesus... the heart of Asia Minor
4. Athens... the heart of Greece
5. Rome... the heart of the world!

B. *Praetorian guard:*

1. The group of men in the Imperial guard. Because Paul was in a private house in Rome, "palace guard" probably refers to the members of the Imperial guard who guarded Paul day and night. Acts 28:16, 30

- There were originally ten thousand of these picked soldiers, concentrated in Rome by Tiberius. They had

double pay and special privileges and became so powerful that emperors had to court their favor. Paul had contact with one after another of these soldiers.

Robertson, A. (1997). *Word Pictures in the New Testament*.

- He's chained to the palace guard; the praetorian guard with the crack elite troops of the Roman Empire, personally chosen by Caesar were his body guards. They were the highest paid people of the empire. When they retired after 12 years they were made leaders in Rome. There is not a more strategic group that Paul could witness to if he's going to reach the Roman Empire. God puts Paul in Rome; Nero pays the bill and chains a future leader of Rome to him every 6 hours. In two years at six-hour shifts, Paul had witnessed to hundreds of guards.
- These guards had an inside route to the emperor and as a result even some of Nero's family became believers. History tells us that Nero had his wife, mother and children killed because they became believers. A "chain" reaction. Paul had a captive audience. Rick Warren
- At any rate Paul, chained to a soldier, had access to the soldiers and the officials.
- Note: If his life didn't back what he was saying, that would have spread out through the world as well.

C. Paul wasn't a prisoner of Rome, he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:1; 4:1)

1. Paul had experienced a "curve ball" in his plans but God had a greater purpose.
2. If you always ask why did this happen, you may miss what God is trying to teach you. Some things just don't make sense! **Ask what, not why!**
3. **What do you focus on when things don't go as planned?**

4. *Rom. 8:28... All things work together for the good*

D. What about you ...

1. Maybe you woke up today wishing there was something different in your life. If only this one thing or these two things or these series of events were different.
2. I thought that by the time I reached this age in life, this position and things would be different.
3. There may be some things that have robbed me of my joy.
4. Who would say, honestly, there are maybe a few things that you would love to change in your life?
5. Here is what I would like for you to do if you would, think for a minute and write it down. What do you wish that you could change? If you could change something in your life, what would it be?

E. **Reminder: God has a purpose behind every problem.**

III. Look for the **positive** not at the negative

¹⁴and 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.

A. **Two positive outcomes**

1. The gospel was preached: Christ became known
2. His life was encouragement and example to others: Fear was replaced by courage. Others were bold because of him.

B. Make a conscious choice: Joyful in spite of instead because of! Glass is half full or empty

C. **Illustration: How do you see life? The 2 boys**

D. **Reminder: Instead of asking why, ask what!**

IV. Look at God's **plan** not just the pain

¹⁵Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; ¹⁶the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. ¹⁸What 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,

A. **What is the priority? What is His plan?**

That the gospel is preached, however it happens. When things get tough I need to know what's really important in order to distinguish the trivial from the significant. I can be living my life either based on problems or priorities. Either you'll decide what's important in your life or you'll let other people decide what's important. If you don't choose your priorities, you'll go around putting out one fire after another, living your life simply from problem to problem to problem and not choosing what's important.

B. **Two Different Groups**

1. **His critics... Judaizers:**

- Envy (phthonon):

“Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple.”(Job 5:2 NIV).

“A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.”(Proverbs 14:30 NIV).

- **“Strife” (erin):** connotes contention, rivalry, and conflict, which resulted when Paul’s critics began discrediting him. It is petty and personal jealousy of Paul’s growing influence by the Judaizers in Rome whom Paul has routed in the east, but who now exult at the opportunity of annoying their great antagonist by their interpretation of Christ. Robertson, A. (1997). *Word Pictures in the New Testament*
- **Selfish ambition:** the root words come from “to spin wool and hireling”. Wanted to discredit Paul by

falsely spreading rumors that his imprisonment was God's punishment for some wild sin in his life! They were jealous. How early in church history do we see God's people in "competition" with one another.

- *Distress*
- You will have critics in life. How do you handle those who criticize you? Don't let the critics imprison you emotionally.
- **Illustration: When someone leaves the church**

2. **His comrades...** His brothers in Christ

- *From goodwill:* speaks of satisfaction and contentment, the attitude that Paul's supporters had for him personally and for his ministry.
- *Out of love*
- *Appointed:* describes a soldier being placed on duty.
- *Pure Motives*

- C. **Illustration:** Moorpark churches gathering for prayer on March 29th.
- D. How many arguments in your marriage are over little things that really don't matter? Is it worth losing your joy over? No! Have a perspective to live from and a priority to live by. Know what is important.
- E. **Reminder:** Focus on the main thing: Is Christ being proclaimed by your life? What really counts?

V. Look at God's **provision** not my efforts

¹⁹for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ²⁰according 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, whether by life or by death.

God is work behind the scenes working things out. How? The partnership of their prayers and God's provision

A. **Partnership of: Prayer + Provision of God = Power (deliverance)**

1. *“Deliverance”*: Gr. term for salvation. But it can also be rendered “well-being” or “escape,” which presents 4 possible interpretations:
 - It refers to Paul's ultimate salvation (Lightfoot)
 - It alludes to his deliverance from threatened execution;
 - He would finally be vindicated by the emperor's ruling;
 - Paul is talking about his eventual release from prison.

Whatever Paul's precise meaning, he was certain he would be freed from his temporary distress (MacArthur)

2. What are you trusting God to deliver on? Who is supporting you in it?

B. **Hope + Boldness = Christ's exaltation**

1. *Provision*: supply (Eph. 4:16; Gal. 3:5)
2. *Earnest expectation*. This Gr. word indicates keen anticipation of the future, as when someone stretches his neck to see what lies ahead.
3. Remember you are only accountable for your labor, and not for your success. So still toil on!—Charles Haddon Spurgeon
4. You can't live without hope. You've got to have hope to cope! Cornell University did a study of 25,000 POWs from WWII. They found that a man can handle unbelievable stress as long as he has hope. The moment hope is gone you're doomed!

C. *I will not be put to shame in anything:*

1. Is. 49:23 *Those who hopefully wait for Me will not be put to shame.*
2. Psalm 25:2-3 *O my God, in You trust, Do not let me be ashamed; Do not let my enemies exult over me. ³Indeed, one of those who wait for You will be ashamed;*
3. Psalm 119:80 *May my heart be blameless in Your statutes, So that I will not be ashamed.*

D. **Reminder: Remember who is really in charge.**

1. God is sovereign! He has the power and the prerogative to change things.
2. Can't He do whatever he wants, when He wants, how He wants?
3. Let's go from so what to now what! What do you have for me God? I am excited to join you in what you are doing in my life!
4. Never lose hope!
5. *Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. – 1 Corinthians 15:58*

VI. Look from a heavenly **perspective** not an earthly perspective

²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²²But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; ²⁴yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. ²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

- A. **What are you living for? Is it Christ? Do you have the right priorities?**
1. **Gain:** (*kerdos*). Any gain or profit, interest on money; In N.T. only here, Phil. 3:7; Titus 1:11.
 2. **Flesh:** refers to physical body not our fallen state because of sin.

3. *Fruitful labor*: 3 kinds of fruit
 - Spiritual Qualities and attitudes: Gal. 5
 - Righteous behavior or actions: Heb. 13:15
 - New converts Rom. 16:5
 4. *Hard-pressed*. The Gr. word pictures a traveler on a narrow path, a rock wall on either side allowing him to go only straight ahead.
 5. *Depart*: Military word “to take down One’s tent and be off.” Speaks of a pilgrim’s journey.
- B. **What are the wrong priorities?** For me to live is _____. The ads on television tell us what the values are in our culture. Based on advertising most Americans would fill in the blank in one of 4 ways:
1. **"For me to live is possessions."** Get all you can, and then get some more! Get, get, get. We buy things we don't need, with money we don't have to impress people we don't even like. We work to keep up with the Jones and just about the time I catch up with them they refinance and I'm in trouble again.
 2. **"For me to live is pleasure."** If it feels good, do it. Anything to make me happy! Anything to relieve my boredom for one little moment, but Monday morning back at work, life is still the pits. Pleasure doesn't last.
 3. **"For me to live is power (or **position, prestige**)."** We dress for success and we drive to impress. We pay for our power lunch with our power American Express gold card. Image is everything. We angle for the right position in our companies and want the corner office that goes with it!
 4. **"For me to live is popularity."** For many students it is popularity. They'll do anything they can to fit into the right group even if it means lowering their standards. You can be the most popular person on your campus,

come back two years later and no one remembers you. One minute you're the hero the next minute you're the zero.

The problem with possessions, pleasure, power and popularity is that they don't last. Not a lifetime, much less an eternity. There isn't ultimate fulfillment. Choose the right priorities...

C. His Confidence was in Christ. As Paul lived fruitfully, their joy and confidence would overflow because of Christ's working in him, not because of anything he himself did by his own ability. What is your measuring tool for success? Where do you place your confidence?

D. **Reminder:** How do we live by God's perspective?

1. **J**esus: Put Christ first... (1:21)
2. **O**thers: Put others second. (2:1-2)
3. **Y**ou: Paul put himself last! (2:3-4)

Conclusion: I am convinced that the reason there is so much unhappiness in our culture, so many discouraged and depressed people is because in our society there is a total preoccupation with self. What's best for me? What will make me happy? What is the best thing for me? The ME generation. When you learn to have a greater purpose in your life than just yourself, you will have joy more than you can handle. There is no such thing as problem free living. When you base your life on the kinds of values that are going to last, then problems just aren't as significant. So what that things haven't worked out as I've planned. God has a purpose that is bigger than my problems. He gives us the possibility of Joy in spite of, not happiness because of.

And when you have that kind of joy, there is no "chain" of circumstances that can hold you down!

Table Talk

1. Besides his imprisonment, what other “circumstances” had Paul gone through? See II Cor. 11:23-28. Which one was the worst?
2. What were the positive results of Paul’s imprisonment? (v. 12-14)
3. What is God’s perspective on your problems?
4. What fears do you have in sharing your faith? (v. 14)
5. What were the two kinds of motives from which people preached Christ? (v. 15-18) Describe their attitudes and actions.
6. How do we exalt Christ in our bodies? (v. 20) How do we exalt Him in the Body (our church!)?
7. What was Paul’s purpose in life? What was his hope? (v. 19-21) What is your purpose in life? What are you really living for?
8. Can you list the road map to Joy? (Hint: What are the 6 principles and 6 reminders?)

John Erwin ■ Senior Pastor ■ Moorpark Evangelical Free Church