

The Joy That Cannot Be Stolen – Philippians 1:12-18

Introduction and Outlines

- Scripture reading: Philippians 1:12-18; Psalm 98.
- What are the things that steal your joy? I guess your answer will fall into these two categories: circumstances and people. Paul, however, refuses to let these external elements steal his joy. Imprisoned in Rome, he wrote this letter in chains, but he told the Philippians “in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.” (v18) How could he do that?
- Outlines:
 - Title: The Joy That Cannot Be Stolen
 - 1. Difficult circumstances cannot steal joy (vv 12-14)
 - a. Difficult circumstances bring gospel opportunities
 - b. Difficult circumstances encourage gospel co-workers
 - 2. Hostile peers cannot steal joy (vv15-18)
 - a. Watch out: Preachers with impure motives
 - b. Love-motivated: Preachers with a sincere heart
 - 3. Application —— Lessons on Joy
 - a. Trust in God’s sovereign goodwill
 - b. Live with integrity and no hidden motives
 - c. Focus on the work of the gospel

Difficult circumstances cannot steal joy (vv 12-14)

- “Now I want you to know”: The Philippians obviously knew the circumstances of Paul. What Paul wants them to know is not the circumstances per se, but what it has brought about, namely, the greater progress of the gospel.
If Christians only look at the circumstances, there’ll be endless reasons to worry, be anxious, doubt, fear and be disappointed. These will easily steal our joy in the Lord. Paul wants us to see what God accomplishes through our circumstances.
- “**the greater**”: literally “**rather**”, expressing a surprising result. The surprise is, first, Paul did not plan to come to Rome this way to preach the gospel in chains; and moreover, the enemies of Paul did not plan to see this result! They chained Paul up in order to stop the preaching of the gospel, but instead of stopping it, the gospel progressed all the more.
- “**for ... the progress of gospel**”: First of all, this epistle, along with Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon, were all written in Paul’s imprisonment. The Holy Spirit reveals through Paul’s circumstances precious truths needed by Christians generation after generation for the progress of the gospel. On the other hand, the gospel progressed greatly even in Paul’s own time, which is demonstrated in the next two verses.

Difficult circumstances bring gospel opportunities

- “the whole praetorian guard”: The royal guards of the Roman Empire. These are the highest-ranking soldiers with double salaries and special privileges. Their power is so great that even the emperor has to please them. Paul is guarded closely by these soldiers’ full time.
- “my imprisonment”: literally a handcuff or fetter. Roman prisoners at the time were chained to a soldier by the wrist, so they are being watched 24/7 with no freedom or privacy at all. Even though Paul can meet visitors at his house (Acts 28:30), it is all carried out under close watch by the soldiers.
- **“the cause of Christ has become well known”**: Exactly because of these circumstances, the gospel is spreading to the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else! That chain was intended to prevent Paul from fleeing, but it became Paul’s evangelistic tool! We even read in 4:22 that there’re “those of Caesar’s household” who greet them —— Even in the house of the tyrant Nero people are being saved!

“has become well known”, literally **“has been manifested/seen”**, not only by word of mouth but also by Paul’s life testimony, as well as the testimony of those who came to serve Paul, including Epaphroditus from the Philippian church. What a sharp contrast between their life and the life these Roman soldiers are familiar with, which is full of lust, jealousy, conflict, without joy and without hope!

Paul is under full-time watch by the guards. Any compromise of his life and character will reduce the compelling power of the gospel. If the people you shared the gospel with are with you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, will they still believe the gospel you share?

Difficult circumstances encourage gospel co-workers

- **“the brethren, trusting in the Lord.....have far more courage”**: The comparative means if Paul were not put in prison, they would not have so much faith and courage; it is because of Paul’s circumstances that they come to have far more courage to share the gospel without fear. Some may have feared persecution and shrunk from sharing the gospel; but now that they see Paul and realize that persecution is not to be feared but a special gospel opportunity, they have far more courage.

Hostile peers cannot steal joy (vv15-18)

- **“Some are preaching Christ even from..... but some also from.....”**: Two different motives, but we need to be clear that these people are preaching the true gospel, otherwise Paul would not have rejoiced. (v18) Paul never tolerates any distorted gospel. (cf. Galatians 1:6-9)
But the motives behind preaching a true gospel can be very different. We all have struggles about motives —— whether it is for God’s glory or people’s praise when we do good works?

Do you say something in a Bible study to edify others, or simply to show off your knowledge and let others see how godly you are?

Watch out: Preachers with impure motives

- “**from envy and strife**”: They envy Paul and want to compete with him, so they preach all the more fervently when Paul is in prison. Envy does not want to see others succeed, and especially not when others are more successful than you are.

Titus 3:3 “For we also once.....spending our life in malice and envy”

- “**out of selfish ambition**”: Selfish ambition sure is the motive behind envy and strife.

These people preach the gospel not from a pure motive to glorify God, to exalt Christ, and to call sinners to repentance and be saved. Although they may have such motives to some extent, what they want more is their selfish gain. They may have used these opportunities to belittle Paul and elevate themselves.

- “**to cause me distress in my imprisonment**”: It is very likely that they attack and slander Paul while sharing the gospel. For example, they may say God must be punishing Paul for some unknown sin and so He wouldn’t deliver him from prison. They think that this will cause Paul distress, but they cannot be more wrong.

Love-motivated: Preachers with a sincere heart

- “**from good will**”, “**out of love**”, “**in truth**”: These describe the preachers motivated by true love, without any hidden motives. Good will includes love for God and for man, desiring God’s glory, desiring the conversion of sinners into true worshippers which glorifies God. This is the only correct motive for preaching the gospel.

1 Corinthians 4:5 “Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.”

Application — Lessons on Joy

“The measure of their spiritual maturity is what it takes to steal their joy. ... You can find out how mature you are ... by finding the breaking point where joy is lost and bitterness and negativism, critical spirit, sullenness begins to creep in and take over your life.” — One shepherd

Trust in God’s sovereign goodwill

Before seeing the gospel fruit, Paul must have already trusted in God’s sovereign goodwill for his circumstances, otherwise he would not have had such a positive attitude and would have not seen God’s goodwill. Do you have this kind of faith, no matter what happens, you know that

God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and make you more like Christ Jesus? If you do, you will rejoice always and obey God's will in every circumstance.

Live with integrity and no hidden motives

Someone who lives a double life in front of and behind others cannot have genuine, lasting joy, let alone in trying circumstances. Paul, showing a wonderful gospel testimony under 24/7 watching, was full of joy; while the preachers with impure motives were full of envy and strife, the exact opposite of joy. If you hide sin in your life and not deal with it by the power of the Holy Spirit but simply cover it up in front of others, then joy will not be yours to have.

Focus on the work of the gospel

The most important thing is that Paul's eyes are fixed on the work of the gospel rather than his own benefit. (v18 "*in this* I rejoice") The reason for lack of joy for many Christians is because they focus too much on themselves and not much on Christ! If you want to have unshakable joy, it must be built on the unshakable foundation. If we build our joy on the gospel work, if we truly desire the progress of the gospel of Christ, our joy will have a firm foundation and won't be shaken by any circumstances. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes," (Romans 1:16)