

Fellowship of Joy: A Study in Philippians, 1:12-20, Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on July 20th, 2008

“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”
Matthew 16:17-18

Intro:

Last week we saw Paul's love for the Philippian Church, and how he tempered his prayers around them, and his desire to see God to continue to work in them. The gospel and eternity shape everything Paul is about, and his prayer life reflects that. Instead of praying for himself and his own circumstances, he prays with the gospel at the center. He has an eternal perspective that energizes his prayer life. Today we will take a look at how God can and does use evil in Paul's life, for his own redemptive purposes.

From the Head...

The gospel story is God's story from front cover to back. The bible is God's redemptive history with His people, and His plan. It is easy to fear that certain circumstances, laws, philosophies; governments will thwart the gospel message. Even this faithful Philippians church was wavering in the midst of persecution, but Paul reminds them and us that there is nothing that will stop the advancement of the gospel, through God's people. Persecution either physically or psychologically has plagued the church throughout the years, and nothing has neutered the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Jesus said in **Matthew 16:18**, *“The gates of hell shall not prevail against it (The gospel).”* In today's passage we see how both persecution, and personal attack did not stop the advancement of the gospel, nor crush Paul's spirits as he sat in prison.

Gospel and Bad Circumstances (Philippians 1:12-14).

Paul's circumstances have become bleak. He is in prison strapped to a guard 24/7. It couldn't really be that much worse for Paul. No one is sure which imprisonment this one is, but we know for sure Paul had gone through some tough times since becoming a follower of Jesus (**2 Corinthians 11:23-28; 4:7-11**). In spite of his circumstances, he rejoices because of 2 things:

1. *“The gospel has become known throughout the whole imperial guard” (v. 13)*
2. *“Most of the brothers...are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (v. 14)*

Once again we see Paul's heart and perspective in regards to the gospel and his identity in Christ allows him to rejoice because the gospel is being proclaimed! His imprisonment is not thwarting the advance of the gospel, it is perpetuating it!

The Gospel and Bad Relationships (Philippians 1:15-17)

Secondly we see Paul's potential discouragement has to do with people that are obviously trying to use this opportunity to hurt him. These are unscrupulous people that only care about their own selves, and not the gospel. They give lip service to the gospel, but are about themselves. Apparently there were some people who were preachers, but they were preaching not out of love for God and Paul, but out of envy and rivalry! First we must understand these people preaching out of envy are NOT Judaizers or false teachers. Paul wouldn't and didn't rejoice over false teaching, but he confronted them (**Galatians 1: 8-9**). These people are in the church, preaching the words of the gospel with a heart of envy and strife! They are cancer! These words are listed among the sinful in many of Paul's writings (**Romans 1:29; Galatians 5:20ff**). These people were jealous of Paul's success. These people were as Greek historian Xenophon said, *“The envious are those annoyed only at their friend's successes.”* St John of the cross explained it's ugliness in the church, *“As far as envy is concerned, many experience displeasure when they see others in possession of spiritual goods. They feel sensibly hurt because others surpass them on this road, and they resent it when others are praised!”* In spite of the constant sin and jealousies of the church, the gospel advances, and God uses their own message for its advance, and that allows Paul to rejoice and not despair. This cannot be used to say that God doesn't care about the motives of the people, just that God can use any preaching that is gospel centered in spite of the motives and heart of the preacher.

The Gospel and Our Hope (Philippians 1:18-20)

Verse eighteen is key to Paul's joy and contentment. His identity is in Jesus, and he is a missionary for the gospel of God, so he can rejoice when the gospel advances, and Christ is proclaimed! Verses 19-20 help explain why Paul can rejoice.

This is interesting in that he says *“This will turn out for my deliverance” (Salvation)*. The Greek construct of this statement is exactly the same construct that we see in the Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament) for Job 13:16. He quotes this in the context of Job saying, *“Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.”* Our Hope, and Paul's hope is not in the things that we can get here on earth, our hope is in God's redemptive plan. He is reminding the Philippians that “This” (His present circumstances) will bring forth his “deliverance” (Salvation, *sotarian*). This is why we, as believers in Jesus can deal with both the physical and psychological persecution that we face. This is why we can serve this earth, without pretense. We simply don't need anything that God can't give us. This is in stark contrast to those who are preaching out of envy and strife, and who are trying to find their reward amongst humanity instead of God.

What salvation is Paul referring to? In the context of the Job quote we see that this salvation is a “Vindication” (See **Job 13:18**) of Job before his friends. This is most likely true of Paul, who will be vindicated through both prayers and the

“Supply” (see **Galatians 3:5**) of the Spirit of Jesus, that Christ will be magnified and Paul will not be ashamed. There is a close grammatical relationship between their prayers and the promise of the Spirit supplied to Paul to live the Christian life without shame, and gives him the boldness to stand firm in the faith under persecution. Here the Spirit is not so much our “helper” as some texts read, but the one that God supplies to us as a gift to, with prayer, live the life He has called us to live. This is how Paul remains confident, and it is what gives him eschatological hope!

...to the Heart

We need to understand clearly that human circumstances are in the hands of a capable, loving God, and that God uses ALL circumstances for the advancement of the gospel, and His glory in this world. With this in mind, there are at least three implications for us as believers. First, there is great value in finding believers who have grappled well with the world’s suffering, and still proclaimed the gospel boldly. Second, God works through adverse conditions to redeem the broken, and lastly, our ultimate joy is connected to the advancement of the gospel, and not our physical circumstances or the responses of those around us. It all goes back to our identity as believers in Christ, and His atoning work on the cross for our sins. The only way we can truly rejoice with Paul in Christ, is to be firmly planted at the foot of the cross, and know that He was broken for our sake!

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