

## Introduction (1)

*Learning To Sing In Prison*

By David McClelland

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**Bible Text:** Philippians  
**Preached on:** Sunday, September 1, 2013

**Grace Covenant Church**  
11 Colby Road  
Litchfield, NH 03052

**Website:** [www.GraceCCNH.org](http://www.GraceCCNH.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/grace](http://www.sermonaudio.com/grace)

Let's begin our reading, then, at verse 9 of chapter 16 of the book of Acts. I'm not going to read from Philippians but we will be referring to it in a moment's time. So here's the formative incidence of the formation of this Philippian church.

9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. 10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. 11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; 12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. 13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. 14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. 15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us. 16 And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: 17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. 18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. 19 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, 20 And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, 21 And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. 22 And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. 23

And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: 24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. 25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. 26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. 27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. 29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. 32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. 34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

Before we get into a detailed analysis of this book, it is very important at the outset that we understand the theme of the book as a whole. It's especially important because this book is a book that is rich with a great wealth of themes, that there's many themes. There's only 104 verses in the book of Philippians and yet it contains almost every major doctrine of the Christian faith. So there are themes but we have got to understand what is the theme and I think there is one theme that reoccurs no less than 16 times in this book and it is the theme of joy, in fact, the letter to the Philippians is one of the most joyous books in the Bible. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that it is the most lyrical, the happiest epistle that the Apostle Paul ever wrote.

So among the many familiar lines and soundbites that we are inclined to repeat ourselves comes that well-known command in chapter 4, verse 4, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." For many people in the church, they have taken that as their motto. For people outside the church, they have done the same. Some people see this as the Bible's version of "Don't worry, be happy. Just rejoice and again I say, Rejoice." And yet sadly these soundbites have been taken out of context in some instances so the experience, then, of this fourth verse, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice," it's understood with a superficial happiness rather than a deep theologically grounded command because that's what it really is, and so technically speaking, then, the theme is not as is commonly thought of this book, you know, the epistle of joy. That would be misleading. Philippians calls us not just to joy but it calls us to a very particular kind of joy, it is the joy that's experienced by the Apostle Paul even in Roman captivity, sitting on Death Row while his leaders, while his colleagues have become usurpers within the newly formed Christian church.

So what makes this book so remarkable are the circumstances that Paul is in when he writes it. When Paul writes this book, he's already been in prison for two years in Caesarea without trial. He's been now moved, he's in Caesar's jail in Rome and he's being held for an unknown duration. This is a jail in Rome. This is a dirty dungeon. This means that he's very likely chained to one of the soldiers. Remember how he arrived in Rome in the first instance, he has just survived a perilous storm in the Mediterranean Sea, he's been deserted not by the world but by Christians, he's been attacked by his colleagues, some of those closest to him have turned on him and are now discrediting his ministry hoping to cause for him more trouble by intervening with the government. In his mind, he knows chances are he's not going to get out of this place alive and Paul is in a desperate predicament. I would suggest that there's not a soul in the sanctuary today that knows anything of the extent of the hardship that this man Paul is in, and yet no book in the Bible is so filled with joy as the book of Philippians.

So the theme of this book, then, it's not just joy but it is the type of joy that a person can have even when they are in prison, and that changes the thought entirely. And you see, we read from Acts 16 this morning and one of the reasons I wanted to read from Acts 16 is because there is a picture between verses 24 and 25, an incident that I think is iconic of the entire theme here because what you have is Paul and Silas singing and praising God even in the prison. They're thrust into the inner prison, verse 24 says, they are secured, feet fast in the stocks and at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God and the prisoners heard them. Now that happened in Philippi and he's not in that prison now, right now he is in a Roman prison, he's incarcerated, his future is uncertain but now he's writing to these people and he is writing to them about this whole concept of singing praise unto God not when life is rosy but singing praise unto God even in prison.

So taking that iconic picture of Acts 16, I've entitled the series "Learning To Sing Songs In Prison." By learning to sing songs in prison, we have got to understand that as being the overarching theme of this whole book, and when we understand that, all of a sudden this book becomes exceeding relevant and so practical. James Montgomery Boice said of this book, "Any Christian who is feeling down or discouraged about anything should study Paul's great letter to the Philippians." Are you down or discouraged about anything? How often might we fall into that category because, you see, the thing is this: sooner or later, in life we all meet with difficult circumstances and those circumstances can, for us, become a kind of a prison. It might be the prison for you of a sickbed, it could be the prison of an accident, a prison of grief, the prison of sorrow, the prison of personal depression, the prison of financial straits, the prison of relational nightmare, the prison of domestic turmoil, the prison of complex family situations, something has put us there and we're not real happy that we're there but there's no way we can escape and there's no way we can avoid.

I tend to think that's how Israel felt when they were taken captive by the Babylonians and record the sad words, then, of Psalm 137, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion." What was the cause of their grief? They remembered better days and, child of God, perhaps you're here today and if you were to think of your present prison and where you used to be, you could sit and you could weep.

They said, "We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof." Do you know the nation of Israel was known among many things for their singing and their constant joy? It was a nation filled with the praise of God. "We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. Lord, how can we sing? We'll never sing again. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion." What a mockery. And not only had they lost their song but they're being mocked now because they had become songless. And then they ask this question, "How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land? Lord, how can we sing as your people in this situation?"

You know, the epistle to the Philippians is the answer to that question. "Lord, we're your people, we're in this situation, how can we sing?" And Paul answers that question over and over and over again in this book to the Philippian church and we know that it is therefore through the power of the gospel, that's how we're going to sing, that's how the nation is going to learn. Lloyd-Jones said the greatest lesson we have to learn therefore is how to live without allowing circumstances to affect our inner peace and joy. What ultimately matters in life is not so much the things that happen to us as the way in which we look at those things.

Now different things have happened to us and your prison may not be my prison but sooner or later we're going to be thrust into circumstances that naturally we don't like, we feel escape is impossible, and it's as if our harps are in the willow trees and, Lord, we can't sing any longer. Well, child of God, take confidence, then, in the mercy of God that he leads his people and he leads his church and here, then, is the theme of this book: learning to sing songs in prison, whatever your prison is, whatever the circumstances that would steal away from you the joy of the Lord. This is not some superficial epistle written by a guy whose life is perfect. This is written by a man who likely is incarcerated, as he dictates this both hands perhaps to a Roman soldier. His future is uncertain. He's on Death Row and he's writing about the joy of the Lord and therefore the theme becomes, then, so so valuable to every one of us.

So our theme, then, for this series is learning to sing songs in the prison, and as an introduction this morning, what I want to do is suggest to you four reasons, four reasons why Paul could sing in the prison because that he did it is one thing, but the question immediately comes to us, "Then, well, how did he do it?" So this is a very practical book and what I want to do, then, is take four reasons and these four reasons are suggested by the general content of the four chapters and these four reasons will be four pillars that we'll come back later throughout the weeks and hang our thoughts upon these as we move.

So how could Paul sing in the prison? 1. Because Jesus Christ was Paul's life. Jesus Christ was Paul's life. Would you notice that familiar word in chapter 1, Philippians 1:21. Paul makes a remarkable statement, he said, "For to me to live is Christ." We could just stop there for the rest of the morning. "For to me to live is Christ." What does he mean by that? I think Paul earlier in his life could have said, "For me to live is religion. For me to live is intellectual pursuit. For me to live is reputation." But now this man with massive

intellect, a man who once had a massive reputation, he now says, "For me to live is Christ." In other words, more than anything else what defined this man was Jesus Christ.

That's a big claim. How do we know it was true? Well, the first chapter makes it very clear, in fact, there are seven different ways where this can be evidenced that this is true of Paul, that the Christ defined his life. So we don't have time to take time on much of them but we're just going to state them and I want you to look at the statements made in this first chapter. How do we know that this was true, that the Christ defined his existence? We know, first of all, because he had the same feelings as Christ. Look at verse 8 of chapter 1. He says, "For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ." Paul was an affectionate man and his affection comes out in this epistle more than any other. He loved these people. But notice how he describes his affection as being the affection here in the Authorized Version, "I long after you in the bowels, in the innermost recesses of the heart. I have an affection for you." And what was that affection but the affection of Christ? Doesn't that tell us that Paul was a branch, Jesus Christ was that vine? All right, when we're in union with Christ, it's not going to be long before that which is in the vine begins to make its way down into the branch, and this man, he's got yearnings, he's got an affection for the people of God and what is that but the reality of the affection of God for his people now being worked in them through Jesus Christ. That's why you can't say, "I love God," and you don't love his people. We have the same feelings of Christ if our life is defined by him.

Notice he has the same interests as Christ. Chapter 1, verse 12, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." The things which have happened unto me. He says that so quickly but what had happened to him? Think of all that that included. But notice his perspective on it, all right, these things happened for the furtherance of the gospel.

Coming down to verse 18, he there concludes, "Whatever be the case, if they are stealing my credibility, if they're attacking my character, if I'm in prison, if I never leave this prison, I can content myself in this reality that Jesus Christ is preached." And what is that but the reality of Christ in this man? He had the same feelings as Christ. He had the same interests as Christ.

Thirdly, it's because he had the Spirit of Christ. Verse 19, "For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit," capital "S," "of Jesus Christ." Why did Paul, could he define his existence as being Christ-centered? Because that's the reality of a man filled by God's Spirit, the Spirit of the Son. Going to have the same feelings as Christ, going to have the same interests as Christ, the furtherance of his kingdom, going to have the same Spirit of Christ.

We're not surprised, then, fourthly, that Christ was his supreme concern. Look at verse 20, "According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death." And child of God, are you there yet? As you

stand back and you look and you conclude in your mind, "Whether it's in my life or if it means by my death, Lord, I'm content that your name be magnified in all."

This is not an empty claim, "For me to live is Christ." All right, this man's life was defined by Christ. How do we know? Because he had the same feelings, the same interests, he had Christ's Spirit and his supreme concern was the glory of Christ's name and, fifthly, Christ was his dearest possession. Look at verse 23, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." Notice the reason why he wants to depart. I would probably be inclined to say so I can get out of this Roman prison. He says because then I'll be with Christ, I'll be in his presence. You don't speak like that unless Christ defines who you are. Do you have the same feelings, the same interests, the Spirit of Christ, your supreme concern is the furtherance of his kingdom, and then he becomes your dearest possession because your life is defined now by this person.

We notice, sixthly, that Paul's entire conduct is now determined by Christ and the gospel. Look at verse 27, "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel." Paul was not somebody who professed Christ and lived something else. Paul lived what he professed and how do we know? Because he's encouraging these people here, "Look, there ought to be a likeness between what you say and who you are." And that's how we know that this is true of any one of us, "For me to live is Christ. Christ is more important than any other thing. He defines my existence. So why do I do what I do and why do I not do what I do or I don't do? These things can be defined by our application of the gospel, the daily living."

Then, seventhly, of course, it affected his attitude toward other people. Look at chapter 1, verse 27. He is encouraging them to be of "one mine, striving together, one faith for the gospel." Look, if you are indwelt by Christ's Spirit and you've got the same feelings and the same interests and the same passion, well, then those of you who are just like Christ, there ought to be something that binds your hearts together.

So what we can conclude is this, that Paul had a life that was defined by Christ and there is, therefore, a very important connection for us to make this morning between a Christ-centered life and singing in prison. Don't fail to make that connection, the connection between a Christ-centered life and singing in prison. Can you imagine if Paul's life had been defined by his comfort, would he be singing now? What happens if Paul's life was defined by his personal ambitions or his personal freedom? What if his life was defined by his health or his reputation? What happens if his life is defined by his relationships? Do you know Paul lost every one of these things? He lost every one of them and yet his life was defined by something he could never lose. Remember he said to the Romans, "I'm persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

I can lose everything but thank God I can never lose my interest, the interest of God by Christ Jesus. And thank God you can lose everything and you will not lose an interest in

the Savior. That's why back in the book of Habakkuk you have the teaching to the nation of Israel, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom." Now if your heart's defined by the production and the agricultural growth of figs, well, you're not going to be real happy but he says, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom." Well, what happens if you're in the vineyard? "Neither shall the fruit be in the vine," is not a good day for you. "The labor of the olive shall fail." What happens if that's what your living is? "And the field shall yield no meat." Not a good day for a butcher. "The flock shall be cut from the fold and there shall be no herd in the stalls and yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Paul could sing in prison because his life was defined by Christ and he could never lose Christ and Christ could never lose him, and I'm convinced that this is the reason why we and even as believers are so often so miserable, because our life is defined by other things and when we lose those things, we go down into this valley and we hang up our harps and we can't sing anymore and we question, "Lord, how will we ever get back again to those days of satisfaction and joy?" The gospel for so many has become not a message that defines our existence but a message that changes a couple hours of our week. Is that the gospel to you? I mean, does it define you or can we conclude the gospel as being something that changes your Sunday morning from, what, 9 o'clock until 12:30 if the preacher speaks long? Beyond that, it's just, you know, it's a part.

I came across something written by D. A. Carson and I think it illustrates the point so well. He said, "I would like to buy about \$3 worth of gospel, please. Not too much, just enough to make me happy but not so much that I get addicted. I don't want to own so much gospel that I learn to really hate covetousness or lust. I certainly don't want so much that I start to love my enemies, cherish self-denial and contemplate missionary service to some alien culture. I want ecstasy, not repentance. I want transcendence, not transformation. I would like to be cherished by some nice, forgiving, broad-minded people but I myself don't want to love those from different races, especially if they smell. I would like enough gospel to make my family secure and my children well-behaved, but not so much that I find my ambitions redirected or my giving too greatly enlarged. I would like about \$3 worth of gospel, please."

I think sometimes that's what we live on, \$3 of gospel, and when we come to books like Philippians, then we want what Paul has, the ability to sing in the prison, and we forget that this man at the beginning of the book says, "For me to live is Christ." Well, you know, the thing is this, this is a book that's not only true of Paul, it ought to be true of us all and that's why he's writing to this church. This is not just to be true that Christ defines you, Paul, but Christ is to define me, and so when I act and I interact and I transact, could it be said that Christ defines my existence? It's something for us to take home. If Christ is just a small part of what defines us, I suggest to you, then our joy is going to be just the same, it's going to be a small part. But if Christ defines us, our joy will be large, even to the point when we're in the prisons of life, we'll still be able to sing his praise.

Chapter 1, Christ was Paul's life. Chapter 2, Christ was Paul's mind. And there's going to be a progression we'll see as we go through here. If Christ is your life, then it's inevitable

that Christ is going to be your mind, right? You're going to think the same way Christ thought and that's what you have in the second chapter of Philippians. Notice in the exhortation he gives to this congregation, "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded. I want you to be likeminded." Notice he didn't say whose mind it had to be like. You know, Euodia, like we looked a few weeks ago, or Synteché, was it one or the other? No, be likeminded. And then he gives an exhibition of what that looks like, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

Aaron is going to be with us in a couple of weeks and I'll not forget being in our seminary class when the lecturer came in and he said, "Is there a brother here who would like to read a scripture and then lead in prayer?" Then Aaron got up just before we go to write a test, right, and he gets up and he reads Philippians 2:4, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." He thought that he had divine warrant for cheating.

That's not the case but the idea is simply here, that that mind, that's not a mind that's looking inward, it's looking outward. So he exhorts them to be likeminded, shows them what that looks like and then he gives them this exposition which is one of the most remarkable Christ-centered expositions in the whole of scripture. Of course, it is the humility of the Son of God who "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant." So be likeminded, likeminded is not looking in, likeminded is looking out to what extent? To the extent where the incarnate God who would not need to snatch equality with God but would release that to the point where even he would be prepared to be a servant. The application of that is later on in the chapter, "Wherefore," verse 12, chapter 2, "Wherefore," and he goes on to give them the application. "Look, if you're looking outward and not looking inward, you're to do all things without murmurings and disputings."

And then the exemplification of this comes a little later where he gives two men for an illustration. Number one is Timothy and look what he says about Timothy, verse 19, "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." "Look, I love you, Philippians, and I'm going to send you a man who I know, in fact, he's one of the few men that I know who will not come to you self-consumed but he's going to come consumed with you." "For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own." Isn't that true of us, right? We're not like Timothy. By nature, we're not selfless, we're selfish. It's all about us.

So you see the selflessness of Timothy and then notice the servanthood of Epaphroditus. He's another important name in terms of the Philippian church. Look at verse 25, "Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants." So the Philippians, they sent a love gift to Paul in prison and who is it brought by? By this man



Epaphroditus. Well, Epaphroditus gets to Rome, he delivers the gift and then he falls sick, terribly sick, and whenever the news gets back to Philippi that their beloved servant Epaphroditus is sick, they're heavy in heart and Epaphroditus is heavy in heart that they're heavy in heart about his state of health. That's the type of man he was. How sick? "For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow." He says, "Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation," notice this, "Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me." This man was given, totally given. All right, his own personal health was irrelevant because he had this selfless, like Timothy, servanthood attitude and what was this but an exemplification of the very thing that Paul starts off with, this likemindedness, right? The mind of a servant. The mind of one not looking in but looking out.

So selfless servanthood and the interest of others is what Paul is getting at, and how often did Paul identify himself as that? "I, Paul, the servant." And I mentioned to you this morning already from Corinthians, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you." So Paul, we know, was a selfless servant of God and a selfless servant of the church, and let's not lose the connection in between the fact that this is the man who can sing in prison. Christ defined his life. Christ defined his mind. What is the mind of Christ? It's exemplified in Timothy and in Epaphroditus. It's exemplified in Paul. Selfless servanthood. A life that's not all about me but a life that's about all those around me. I don't know about you but as I thought of this, I would have to conclude that the happiest people I know are those who are others-oriented, not self-oriented. Remember what Paul said regarding those who would give themselves to the cause of the gospel? And Jesus answered and said, "Verily I say unto you, there is no man that has left house or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my sake and the gospel's but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brethren and sisters, mothers, children and lands with persecutions and the world to come eternal life." A hundredfold now in this time. Well, I haven't seen that fulfilled because I know ministers that have very gladly spend and be spent and have died with not a whole lot of houses and riches and why they've died with the ability to sing in a prison.

And that's the blessing of God. The blessing of God is what Solomon spoke of when he said, "The liberal soul shall be made fat and he that watereth shall be watered himself." When your life is not inward but when your life is outward and you're focused upon the interests of God and the interest of his people, what ends up happening is you become a much happier person. Just like Solomon said, "The merciful man doeth good to his own soul and he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh." Notice the connection between what you do to others and how it comes back on you. The merciful man, here's the man who is outwardly oriented, he's looking after the interests of others but he does good to his own soul. And that cruel man, well, here's the man who's just consumed about me. What does he do? He troubles his own flesh. Lloyd-Jones said, "Now what really accounts for most of the troubles between man and man is there is trouble within man himself. The man who is arguing with himself generally wants to argue with everybody else. The man who is unhappy within in his own central life is the man who is ill at ease and therefore

touchy, and because of this everything in his environment becomes wrong and goes astray."

So how will we sing in the prison? By noticing that Paul was, first of all, a man of whom it was said that Christ defined his life and a man, secondly, who could be said of him that Christ was not only his life but his mind. Well, that leads us on to the third chapter of the book of Philippians and that is that Christ was Paul's goal. Notice a progression. Christ was Paul's life. Christ was Paul's mind. And now, thirdly, Christ was Paul's goal.

In chapter 3, you come and you'll see that Paul has a moment of self-reflection, he remembers times in his life where he didn't so think and he talked about those things that for him were once gain. "But what things were gain to me?" So he goes back in his mind and he thinks over previous days, "You know, I used to value that and I put stock in that and I esteemed this." And he's weighing these up and into the balance or into the scale he places the things that were gain and now he places Christ and immediately the scales tips dramatically to the point where he concludes that everything that was gain is now as but as worthy as dung. That's strong language. Doesn't that remind you of the parable the Savior told about the pearl of great price? We go through life like pearl fishermen, we're picking up pearls, things that are drawn to us, things that we're attracted to, you know, there's value here, there's value there, there's value there, but as life goes on and as we enter into our prisons, whatever they are, we start to sort through and we look at the things that we once thought were valuable and of significance and we conclude, "Do you know what? In life there is really not that many things that are of great value but here is the thing that is of utmost value."

And so this third chapter, then, is about this goal. Notice the goal of Paul's faith, chapter 3, verse 9, and he's talking about the knowledge of God, "And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." That is the goal of this man's faith, the righteousness of Christ. Everything else becomes irrelevant. Child of God, do you think today if you were to think about the righteousness of Christ and the value that has on your eternal existence, could you not be, would you not be prepared to say, "Now everything else in my life is totally irrelevant so long as I know that I have the righteousness of another, and if can be content in my mind to know that I have the righteousness of Christ and that when I stand before God, I'll not be judged by my lack of righteousness but by that righteousness that's been imputed to me so that when God reads the verdict, it will exonerated, justified." Heavenly righteousness has got to be our goal and if you don't have the assurance of such a thing, then you need today to seek the Lord.

What about the goal of his love? Look at chapter 3, verse 10, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." That I might know him. He's not talking about heavenly righteousness here, he's talking about heavenly fellowship. Isn't that something we learn as we're sanctified? Communion with God is even more important than communion with any man, any woman, right? The sweetness of that communion is something that becomes our goal and our devotions are driven not by our sense out of sheer duty, "I've

got to read my Bible today, then I've got to pray today." No, when we're oriented, when the mind of Christ is in us and when we're defined by Christ, our goals are going to start to change. We're being transformed to the point where we see there's to be more value in heavenly fellowship than even in earthly fellowship.

So the goal of his faith was a heavenly righteousness and the goal of his love was a heavenly fellowship, and the goal of his hope. Well, chapter 3 of Philippians ends with a great hope and Paul says, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Here is my future. What does that future look like? Look at verse 21, the changing of "our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Here is our hope. That hope became this man's goal. The goal of his faith was heavenly righteousness, the goal of his love was heavenly fellowship, and the goal of his hope was a heavenly future, and I wonder is this the case why, or is this not the case why we're so unhappy at times because our hopes and our ambitions are so fleeting, and in other instances they're so unattainable, and in other instances still, they're just so unfulfilling. I've got all these goals and when the goals are reached, they never give us the satisfaction that Paul had.

Paul is singing in prison because Christ is his life, because Christ is his mind, because Christ is his goal. Well, that leads us finally, then, to this thought, number 4, Christ was Paul's strength. "I can do all things." Right, we love to quote this, maybe you have it in your house somewhere, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." I told you before of Evander Holyfield, the boxer, and he had Philippians 4:13 on his shorts and he's lying on the canvas KO'd and what a mockery, right? "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me," even as he's knocked out cold. That's not what we're talking about. I. Who is I? He's Paul, the man whose life is defined by the gospel, the man who has the mind of Christ, and the man whose goals in life are Christ-centered. That's the man who can lay claim that, "I can do all things," right? There's macho? No, it's I am equal to anything. Equal to what? The context dictates, go back to verse 11 of chapter 4, "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

So that's what he's talking about. I just picture Paul sitting in prison, in a Roman prison hungry, sick, miserable, unhappy, uncertain. He's saying as I'm sure he did, "Lord, I can't do this." But now he's telling these Philippians, "Not only I can do it, but you can do it as well." Not because there was any super strength in Paul or that he thought there was any super strength in Timothy or Epaphroditus or that congregation, but he says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me." This fourth chapter is the hope that we have of singing songs in the prison. It's the reality of Christ as the help of his people. This fourth chapter is about Christ as the strength of his people. Christ is the secret of the believer's forbearance.

Look at verse 5, "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand." And we tend to look at that as an eschatological phrase. The Lord is at hand. He's almost going to come. That's not what the phrase means. It means the Lord is near his people. That's why we can keep going, because the Lord is near. Are you in the prison? I don't know what that prison is but the assurance of Paul in that prison was the Lord is at hand. The Lord is at hand is the strength of his people and thank God he is there as the strength of his people because we could not sing, we couldn't live, we couldn't exist. But the Lord is at hand.

He's not only the secret of the believer's forbearance, he is the secret of the believer's confident tranquility. Verse 6 and 7, we love this, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds." Isn't that a wonderful thought? Tranquility of mind. But this is through Christ Jesus. You can't have a mind like that on your own, especially if you're in prison.

And then victorious enablement in this 13<sup>th</sup> verse, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me." You know, Sidlow Baxter when he was describing this book of Philippians, he said, "What a triumphant little document this Philippian epistle is. Chains are clanging on the writer's wrists and ankles but he makes them sound like the bells of heaven." This is not just an epistle of joy but it is an epistle of overcoming our prisons to sing to the praise of the glory of God's grace even where we are.

So joy is not the center of the book of Philippians. I hope you've seen that Christ is the center. Christ is in chapter 1 as the believer's life. Christ is in chapter 2 as the believer's mind. Christ is in chapter 3 as the believer's goal. And Christ is in chapter 4 as the believer's strength. How on earth do you sing in prison? It's by getting close to Christ, to know him, to love him, to let him define your existence. There is no other noun that occurs more in the Philippians than the name of Jesus Christ. Philippians is not just joy, it's a particular joy, it's the joy of Christ and it is the joy from Christ.

As we go through this series, we're going to notice Paul in the prison of suffering, we're going to see him in the prison of strife, we're going to see him in the prison of seducers, we're going to see him in the prison of stress, we're going to see him in the prison of service. And as we see him in these prisons, let remember what Lloyd-Jones said, "The greatest lesson we have to learn is how to live without allowing circumstances to affect our inner peace and joy when ultimately matters in life is not so much the things that happen to us as the way in which we look at those things."

If Christ is our life, then he will be our mind. And if he is our mind, then he will be our goal. And if he is our goal, then he will be our strength. Think of the iconic vision of Paul and Silas in the prison singing praises to God and the prisoners heard them. That was a good service for Paul, singing is a wonderful thing, right? When you sing not because you have to but because you can't not sing, that fills your heart. It was good for Paul, I would suggest to you it was good for the prisoners. Notice how the scripture records, "And the prisoners heard them," and my thought is, "What are they singing about?"

When we lose our joy, we lose our testimony. When we lose our happiness, we lose our evangelistic usefulness.

The last thing, the world's an unhappy place and we need to teach the world by the power of the gospel how to sing even in prison. It was good for Paul, it was good for the prisoners, it was good for God because they were singing his praise because he did it, and thank God he can do it again. And Paul does not write this epistle to mock you and Paul does not give this to the Philippian church to mock them but because he believed that Christ having done it in him could do it in them, and we read it today thousands of years later believing the same thing. He can work it in us. May God teach us how to sing not when days are great but may he teach us how to sing when we're in the prisons that we find ourselves in from time to time. God is able.

Let's trust him and let's close and seek his face.

*Gracious Father, we confess to you today that what we've considered is beyond us, Lord, it's way beyond our strength. We would love to think that we could change our mind, we could change our heart, we could change our circumstances, we could change something, we could escape the prison that seems to be so hopelessly around us but, O God, you can break through even in that prison and teach us what it is to rejoice in you and to sing. Lord, what a hope there is for those whose prison can, in fact, never change. Lord, there are some things that take place in life that we cannot reverse, although everything in us would love to reverse them. We thank you, O God, that you don't hold a hope of a gospel that changes everything and can open every prison door, Lord, we know that in this instance Paul's prison door was opened but, O God, we know that there's other prison doors that have not opened and yet the song has not ceased. So I pray you would give all your people the ability to sing. Lord, let us not conclude as your children hopelessly did that we must hang our harps upon the trees, and in answer to that question how can we as the Lord's people sing in a strange land, come and apply the gospel week after week as we study this epistle and teach us and then work in us by the power of your great strength that which we cannot work in ourselves nor those that we love. We trust you and we pray, Lord, to sing your praise even more as we see this worked in us for your name's sake. For it is in your name we ask these things. Amen.*