

Unassailable Joy

Joy by Example Part 04

Philippians 1:12-18 1-31-2016

Summary: In the place where Paul would normally give the report about how he was doing, he gives a report about how the gospel was doing, because however the gospel was doing, that was how Paul was doing. He is showing by example how to maintain joy in hardship. His joy abounded even in chains, because through his chains 1) the palace guard and everyone else heard about the gospel, and 2) believers were emboldened to preach with courage. And his joy abounded when brothers were trying to hurt him in the way they preached the gospel, because his joy was tied to the preaching of the gospel, even more than to relationships.

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Philippians 1:12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. 15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice

Introduction

See what you think about this quotation from John MacArthur: “The measure of a person's ... spiritual maturity is what it takes to steal their joy. At whatever point your joy breaks down, that's the level of your spiritual strength. You can find out ... how Spirit-controlled you are, how spiritually virtuous 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 ...”¹

Some of you, whatever last little bit of joy you did have, you just lost it when I read that quotation. It's bad enough that you don't have joy, but now you have to feel guilty about it! I hope that's not how it

¹ MacArthur, Sermon “Joy in Spite of Trouble” on Php 1:12-14.

hits you, because whenever God exposes an area where we are failing, the purpose isn't to condemn us or make us drown in guilt. The purpose is to point us to the destination to which the Holy Spirit has promised to bring us! Every command in the Bible that points out a flaw in me should give me hope, because God has promised to produce those things in me by His Spirit and through his Word. And I pray that's what will happen this morning as we study this passage about joy in suffering.

We are studying through the book of Philippians, and we are looking today at verses 12-19 of chapter 1. And the bottom line of this section of Scripture is right there at the end of verse 18.

18 because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice

The whole rest of the passage is about his suffering. Basically he's saying, "I'm suffering, I'm suffering, I'm suffering, I'm suffering ... and I'm rejoicing big time." What circumstances could steal Paul's joy? No circumstances. Paul's joy was out of the reach of his suffering. Circumstances and people could hurt Paul, deeply, but they couldn't touch his joy. And the purpose of this section is to teach us how to have joy like that.

Paul's Example

Remember, what Paul is trying to accomplish in writing this book is to solve the unity problem in Philippi by increasing their joy. He wants the church to stand firm against error and attack, and to have unbreakable unity and oneness. And Paul's way of accomplishing that was to work for their joy. He knew that when a church loses its joy, the next domino to fall is always unity. And so his approach to solving the disunity problem at Philippi is right there in verse 25.

Philippians 1:25 ... I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow

That is his objective, and he has a few different things he is going to do in this book to accomplish that. His strategy in chapter 1 is to teach them joy by example. He is not talking about himself just to get them up to speed on his life. He wants them (and us) to follow his example.

Philippians 3:17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

You'll probably be tempted at some point this morning to think, "That's just Paul. I'm not Paul – I could never do that." Don't think that way, because the whole point of this is that it is for our example. Do you have a powerful God – a God that's just as powerful as the one Paul served? Then you can do all things through Christ who gives you strength – including joy in hard circumstances.

Paul's circumstances are horrible. He is in prison unjustly, Christian preachers are actively opposing him and trying to stir up trouble for him, people are abandoning him – horrendous circumstances, and yet his joy is off the charts. How do you do it, Paul? Answer: "I do it by tethering my joy to something other than comfort and ease. Comfort and ease aren't guaranteed. Paul tied his joy to something that was guaranteed. If you tied your investment portfolio to a stock that was guaranteed to always go up, then you would always be in a good situation financially. And if you tie your joy to something that always wins, you always have joy. So what is it? What is this sure thing that can bring me joy no matter how painful my life gets because it's guaranteed to win? It is the progress of the gospel. Look at the end of verse 18 again – why is he rejoicing so much?

18 ... Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice.

And if you tether your joy to the progress of the gospel, you are guaranteed to always be in a good situation emotionally, because the gospel is unstoppable.

Joy in Unjust Suffering

Gospel Report

So far in this letter Paul has followed the template of the normal format for writing a letter. First an opening greeting, then a report about thanksgiving, then what he is praying for them. And then what is supposed to come next is a report of his situation and how he is doing. But instead of that, Paul gives a report not so much about how he's doing, but about how the gospel is doing.

12 ... what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

14 ... most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

16 ... I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

18 ... The important thing is that in every way ... Christ is preached.

When it comes time to tell them how he is doing, he tells them how the progress of the gospel is doing. Why? Because however the gospel is doing, that's how he is doing. And so when he does finally get around to talking about himself, he doesn't say, "Pray for me, these chains are really cutting into my wrists." He doesn't say, "It's rough, because I'm chained to a guard all the time. I have zero privacy. I have no freedom – I can't go anywhere. The guards are mean to me." He doesn't say any of that.

This would have been such a prime opportunity for Paul to elicit sympathy. Some of us are so quick to announce to everybody how much we are suffering. The slightest hardship and up goes the "woe is me" post on Facebook. We make much of our suffering in order to get sympathy. Paul does the exact opposite. The Philippians are feeling sympathy for him, and he is trying to talk them out of it. He is in this horrendous situation, and the only thing he says about how he's doing is a report about his joy level. If you ask about Paul's life, the answer will focus not on the state of his circumstances, but on the state of his joy. He would report about the condition, not of his body, but of his heart. And the condition of his heart is that his joy is through the roof, because the gospel is making such great progress.

Surprising Fruit

And it's making progress by means of the very things you would think would hinder its progress.

12 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

The word **really** (your Bible might say **actually**) points to the opposite of what would be expected. The Philippians probably thought that his imprisonment was stymying the work. And that's normal. We have a tendency to assume that anytime there is opposition, the ministry is hindered. If things aren't going smoothly, then they are going badly. But that's not the case when it comes to church ministry. God has a way of making attacks on the work of his church backfire. A great example of that was the very first persecution of the church. Up through Acts 7, the church was still mostly just confined to a tiny little area of the world there in Jerusalem. But then:

Acts 8:1 On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered

The enemies of the gospel were trying to put an end to it. But the result was that they scattered the Christians all over the nation, and from there, all over the world.

Unstoppable Gospel

And their efforts to shut Paul up worked the same way.

2 Timothy 2:9 I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.

You can't hinder the ministry just by hindering the minister. If you are serving in some ministry in the church, I promise you, someone is going to come along and do something that's going to seem like a roadblock to your ministry. They are going to do things that make it hard for you to do a good job. They are going to mess things up that you put in order, they are going to do things wrong so you have to fix them, people in charge are going to come up with a policy that really gets in the way of what you're doing, people are going to move to a different system that is totally inefficient and ridiculous – all kinds of things that will make you feel like your ministry is being hindered. But if you respond with joy, it's amazing how often God will bring spiritual fruit out of the situation – even if it's different fruit than what you were shooting for. The ministry you were working at is ruined, and it has to shut down because of the problems. But the people around you saw your joy in the whole deal, and that affected them spiritually in far greater ways than your ministry program ever could have done. Joy in the Lord is a powerful witness.

Witness to Unbelievers

13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.

The **palace guard**, or the Praetorian Guard, was a group of 12 to 13 thousand elite soldiers stationed in Rome. They were the only military allowed in Italy, and they were Caesar's personal guard. They were a cross between a Navy Seal and a Secret Service agent. They got double pay and a huge pension, so they were wealthy, and they became more and more powerful, so that by the third century they were actually the ones deciding who became Emperor.² Most of them went on to become senators or significant leaders in the community. And they were the ones guarding Paul. They would have guarded him in shifts, so Paul would have been exposed to numerous different guards. And it wasn't long before the word spread throughout the entire Praetorian Guard about Paul. And not just to them, but to family, and friends, so that Paul's situation was known throughout the population in Rome. Everybody knew that he was in chains not because of any particular crime that he was accused of, but simply because he insisted on proclaiming that this man from Galilee who died about 30 years prior, had risen from the dead and was not only the Jewish Messiah, but Lord of all.

That advanced the progress of the gospel even more than his normal missionary work, because it showed Jesus to be worth suffering for. Worth dying for. What you get from Jesus Christ is so valuable and marvelous that it is worth more than your freedom, and it's even worth more than staying alive. His love is better than life. Finding Jesus is like finding a priceless treasure in a field that would make you super excited about selling everything you have to get it. And you can show that to people through the joy that you still have when you lose everything else. It's one thing to walk around making truth claims about Jesus. But when people see it cost you something, and your joy stays intact, that gets their attention. And that advanced the progress of the gospel because it showed Jesus to be worth suffering for. Worth *dying* for. It is one thing to walk around making truth claims about Jesus. But when people see it cost you something, and your joy stays intact, that gets their attention.

And it did get their attention. You have got to love the way Paul ended this letter. It is almost as if Paul is mocking Satan.

Philippians 4:22 All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

What kind of a plan could the church have possibly come up with to reach anybody in Caesar's household with the gospel? It's no problem for God. He says, "I know, I'll just create a situation where one of them is chained to Paul around the clock." It's one thing for Paul to be chained to a Roman soldier,

² Because of that, they were disbanded by Constantine.

but something else for the Roman soldier to be chained to Paul. Some of those soldiers get saved, and they end up bringing the gospel right into the very household of Caesar.

I'm sure that wasn't an easy living situation for Paul. It is so easy to get more focused on comfort than on the gospel. We get into a hard work environment, and we pray, "God, please let me have a job where I can work with Christians." Paul says, "Thank you, God, for sending me right into the heart of 13,000 pagan military types who never heard the name of Christ." That was a delight to Paul, because he knew it would just be a matter of time before some of them went from being members of Caesar's household to being part of the household of God.

Now, I realize that for most of us it's not quite that dramatic. Probably none of us are going to prison for the gospel anytime soon. But the principle applies to any kind of suffering for Christ. When things get really hard for you, but it doesn't affect your joy at all because you're just happy that the work of Christ is still making progress, what does that tell your family and everyone around you about the worth of Christ? Every single time we suffer, every single time things don't go our way, we have an opportunity to put on display the worth and value of Christ, because as long as his name is being proclaimed, we're still happy.

So how do you maintain joy in the midst of suffering? Hitch your happiness wagon to the progress of the work of Christ, and rejoice in the opportunities you have to maintain joy in the midst of suffering and loss.

So that was one way that Paul's incarceration advanced the gospel – by making it clear to unbelievers that Christ is worth losing your freedom for. Another way it advanced the gospel had to do with believers. It was a witness to them too.

Witness to Believers

14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

Paul's witness to unbelievers was that Jesus Christ is worth dying for. His witness to fellow believers was exactly the same thing: Jesus Christ is worth dying for. Unbelievers saw Paul suffer for the gospel and they became Christians. Believers saw Paul suffer for the gospel and they were emboldened to go out and speak the Word of God with fearless courage.

Courage is contagious. Paul's example of courage inspired their courage. It is amazing the impact that one courageous example can have. Jim Elliot and his friends laid down their lives to reach the Auca Indians in Ecuador back in the mid-50s. And after the men were slaughtered, the wives went back and finally penetrated that tribe with the gospel. And their courage inspired a whole generation of missionaries to fearlessly preach the Word.

Courage to Share the Gospel

But notice, the focus here isn't on career missionaries. He just says **most of the brothers have been encouraged to speak the word more courageously and fearlessly**. Not just the preachers – it's **most of the brothers**. Just the regular, average Joe church attenders in Rome were stirred up to start talking about the gospel to people.

It took Paul's chains to break their silence. What will it take to break ours – because very often we are silent when we should be speaking up. Why are we so afraid to share the gospel? What are we afraid of? Are they going to beat us or kill us? No, mostly we are just afraid that some people might think we're weird. Listen, don't worry about that - they probably already think you're weird. But even if they don't, so what? Right now all the unbelievers in your life think you are normal and non-weird. They think you're just like everyone else. So how's that working for you? Is your life filled up with joy because the unbelievers around you think you're normal? They think you're so cool – is that giving you the kind of joy that can carry you through sorrow?

Inspire People with Courage

And here is the point in this passage – your courage or cowardice will have an impact not only on the unbelievers in your life, but also on the believers around you. If you share the gospel with someone, that person you share the gospel with might totally reject it. But some other Christian sees you do that, and they are emboldened to share, and down the road they lead someone to Christ. And on Judgment Day you get rewards for that, and you didn't even know it happened.

And again, it doesn't have to be as dramatic as being thrown in prison. This applies to any time you need courage. Every time you get caught up with worrying about whether certain people approve of you or whether people like you, and then you hit that moment when doing what you believe God wants you to do means possibly losing their favor. That calls for courage. When God calls you to pour yourself into a friendship, where there is a lot of risk of getting hurt – that calls for courage. This is a huge issue in church leadership. Some prominent family threatens to leave the church if they don't get their way, or someone threatens to bring a lawsuit – that requires courage.

And when you face some scary situation like that, and you are unmoved in your commitment to doing exactly what God has called you to do no matter what the consequences, that will inspire everyone around you and give them the courage to do what's right. Cowardice and courage are both incredibly contagious. And the courage of Paul emboldened a whole generation of preachers in Rome to stand up against the persecution and preach the word of God with fearless courage. And when Paul saw that, he said, "Thank you God, for putting me in this prison!"

Why is it that my joy is so fragile? It's because I lose sight of the fact that the gospel is more important in my comfort. The gospel is more important than my freedom. It is more important than my temporal well-being, it is more important than my financial situation – it is more important than anything that might go wrong in my life. If you want joy, hitch your happiness wagon to the progress of the gospel. Then hard circumstances will never be able to reach your joy. And that includes the hard circumstance of painful relationships.

Joy in Painful Relationships

15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry

There were actually people in Rome who were Christians – brothers in Christ, preaching the true gospel, but they were not Paul's friends. They were using their platform to do two things: preach the gospel, and hurt Paul. Now, that wasn't everybody.

Good Ones (love)

15 ... some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

I love it that Paul can acknowledge the good and the bad. So often we get a kind of all-or-nothing mentality so that a situation is either bad, or it's good. But a wise person is able to see both the bad things and the good things and simultaneously be grieved about the bad things while being glad about the good things. So Paul acknowledges the good preachers. They were preaching Christ with a heart of love for Paul. That support meant a lot to Paul. A pastor or spiritual leader can endure just about anything if he knows his people love him and trust him, and they are on his side. That is so motivating, and so strength-giving to a leader. These good preachers understood that, and so they are going about ministry in a way that showed love for Paul.

And how did they do that? What did they do that was so loving? Paul only mentions one thing.

16 The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

That's how they express love to Paul – by acknowledging that he was **put** there in prison **for the defense of the gospel**. The word translated **put** here is a strong word. The Holman translation says **appointed**, and that's really the idea. Paul was put in prison, not mainly by Rome, but by God. Your joy will never survive hardship if you lose sight of the fact that hardship – even hardship inflicted on you by sinful people, ultimately comes from the hand of a loving God who is doing you good.

Many Christians lack joy because they lack a sound theology of suffering. In many cases the church has replaced the theology of suffering with a therapy of suffering. How can we make people feel better, how can we help them cope...? And that's sad, because all the therapy in the world will do nothing for your joy without a thorough understanding of what God's Word teaches about God's purposes in our suffering. That is what brings real comfort.

If Paul saw his chains as only coming from the Romans, and the hostile Jews, and the devil, he could never rejoice over them. But Paul knew that those chains were themselves the servants of God. God had a special assignment for those chains. God commandeered that Roman prison and those Roman chains and commissioned them to advance his gospel. Paul knew God well enough to know that God had a special assignment for every hardship that came his way. Never forget – all the ordeals that come into your life are the slaves of God, sent to you on special assignment from God for your good.

And since Paul's objectives were aligned with God's objectives, those chains were Paul's servants too. "Chains? Prison? Great – I'll use that to reach the Pretorian Guard with the gospel." Whatever trial Satan threw at Paul, Paul used it to his advantage in ministry. Here's the lesson we can learn from his example:

Don't cope with your suffering; use it.

Coping means hanging in there without falling apart. Forget about coping. We can go way beyond just coping. When a trial comes into your life, don't just cope with it. Take hold of it and force it into your service. Use it for your advantage in ministry.

I think it's a good idea to circle that word **put** in your Bible, because it shows that it was ultimately God who placed us where we are.

God does not strand his children; he situates them.

And so Paul didn't see the hardship and think, "Oh, God must be mad at me." He said, "Wow! God has appointed me to this!"

Galatians 1:15 ... God set me apart from birth and called me by his grace...

Paul knew that, and it meant the world to him when other believers acknowledged that. One of the most loving, encouraging things you can ever do for a fellow Christian is to affirm God's call on that person's life. Remind them that they are where they are because of God's placement, and that they are a servant of the King of kings. There were preachers in Rome who were doing that, and that was greatly encouraging to Paul.

Bad Ones (selfish hostility)

But there were others who are preaching Christ out of **envy and rivalry**. They were envious of Paul. Paul was famous. Paul wrote letters and everybody and all the churches studied them. Everywhere Paul went, he left a trail of new churches. Paul had become the most prominent leader in the church worldwide. Paul had followers. His crowds were bigger than their crowds, and they couldn't understand why. Paul was getting financial support. Some of those guys probably had to work a full-time job, and they thought, "If I could get support like Paul has, I could have a ministry like his. I could have a following like he has." And so they grew to despise Paul.

I think envy has to be one of the ugliest of all sins. Envy is not just wanting something that someone else has. Envy is more focused on wishing they didn't have it. **Envy** is when you are annoyed at someone else's success or giftedness or blessing. I was in a situation once where there were five or six of us who

had to sleep in one room, and there was only one bed. And there were some in the group who suggested, “How about everybody just sleeps on the floor? That way we all have the same situation.” So nobody slept in the bed. Think of the mentality behind that. I have to sleep on the floor anyway, but I’ll feel better knowing that you are also sleeping on the floor rather than being comfortable in a bed. How does that benefit me, for someone else to be just as uncomfortable as I am? If I had the slightest trace of love in me, I would rejoice with those who rejoice, and I could be happy knowing that somebody is comfortable in that bed. But envy is the exact opposite of love. Instead of rejoicing with those who rejoice, envy weeps over those who rejoice and wishes they weren’t rejoicing.

“If I can’t have it, I don’t want anyone to have it.”

So envy is hostility toward those who are being blessed. And it’s common in the church. Some new person comes in and starts serving in the same ministry area as you, and they have skills that outshine yours, or they have a lot more success, or they get a lot more attention than you ever got. And you find yourself finding fault with everything they do. Someone is more popular than you, and you start thinking, “That superficial showoff. He’s so full of pride...” Some woman comes into the church, and she’s supermom. She is the Proverbs 31 woman. She homeschools her kids and they are all in college by age 12, her house is immaculate; she has a three-hour prayer time every morning before her five mile jog – and what happens? You find yourself wanting to criticize her. Envy causes us to become negative toward the person, and if it’s allowed to fester, you will get to the point where if you hear one of her kids went astray, you’ll be glad. You feel vindicated.

That’s how these men were toward Paul - envious. The other word he uses is **rivalry** (your Bible might say **strife**). That word refers to relational conflict – being at odds with someone. These were Christian brothers who were against Paul.

17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition

The Holman translates that word **rivalry**, but I think **selfish ambition** is a good translation. It is a focus on advancing your own position. Lifting yourself up. This is the preacher who is focused on his career. It may be that he wants power and influence, or money, or prestige, or fame, or honor and respect in the eyes of people, or he wants the biggest following, but whatever it is, he wants it for his benefit. Or the person in the church who just wants a position of prominence. Maybe not an official title, but a situation where people listen to him and pay attention to him. Selfishness was a real problem in the church in Rome.

Philippians 2:19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon... 20 I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. 21 For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

I have to send Timothy because he is the only one here who is not selfish. The problem of selfishness dominated the landscape of the church in Rome.

And so they weren’t genuine. They **preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely... Not sincerely** means their real motives aren’t the same as what they say their motives are. He says it again down in verse 18 – they have **false motives**. They hide their real motives. They have to. If they come out and admit that the reason they are opposing Paul is because they’re jealous and envious, and they want to get a big following for themselves – that would make them look terrible. They can’t admit the real reason they are against Paul, so they come up with phony reasons. They were probably claiming that it was some doctrinal issue, and so they were standing for the truth. Or maybe there was some sin that Paul had committed, and they were ignoring his repentance and making a big deal about how that sin disqualified him from being an Apostle. Or maybe it was a false accusation – something that never even happened. Or maybe they were going after him because of his association with someone else who sinned.

“Paul’s a heretic because he is friends with so-and-so, and that guy endorsed an author who endorsed another author who had some false doctrine in one of his footnotes.”

It might have been the fact that some of the churches Paul had planted were now embracing a false gospel.

“Look at the fruit of Paul’s ministry – nothing but problems.”

Maybe they were saying that Paul was in prison because God was punishing him for something. We don’t know what it was they were saying against Paul. All we know was that whatever it was, it wasn’t the real reason.³ The real reason was envy.

And envy always creates hostility. Look at the end of verse 17.

17 ...supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.

The word **supposing** means they were consciously thinking this way. Their words and actions were calculated to hurt Paul. They wanted those chains not only to chafe his wrists, but also to crush his heart. We don’t know exactly what kind of trouble they were trying to cause him. It could be that they were publicly saying things about Paul that they knew would get him in more trouble with Rome. Or it could refer to internal trouble inside Paul’s heart. That word for **trouble** is used in other places to describe internal problems like anxiety or fear, or distress or sorrow.⁴ From the context, it sounds to me like they were probably questioning whether Paul was put in prison by God for the defense of the gospel. They were questioning the thing that the good preachers were acknowledging.

“Paul isn’t put here by God – it’s his own stupidity.”

One way or another, they wanted to hurt Paul.

This is one of the most painful things in ministry. It is one thing to be criticized by the world, but when fellow ministers of the gospel work to undermine your ministry through false accusation, the pain of that runs very deep. It hurts, because to be trusted is the stock and trade of the ministry. If you are a preacher, and people don’t trust what you say, you have no ministry. Undermining the credibility of a preacher is like breaking the fingers of a surgeon. You are taking away something he needs to do his job effectively. It takes a long time to earn people’s trust. But in a very short time someone who wants to hurt your ministry can destroy that trust with some carefully worded accusations or gossip.

Even the world recognizes the evil of this. In our culture, it’s actually illegal in some cases. If you can show a court that someone said something intending to hurt you, and it was false, and it ended up damaging your ability to make a living, that person will be found guilty of defamation. And even if you’re not a preacher, few things in life are more painful than having a brother or sister in Christ actively, intentionally trying to hurt you. They don’t like you, they are against you, and they say and do things for the purpose of hurting you. Some of you are going through that right now, and you know how painful this is. It’s a special kind of pain that really stabs deep. How could your joy possibly survive when Christian brothers and sisters in the church are intentionally trying to hurt you? Look at Paul’s response.

It’s All Good

18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Not even painful relationships stole his joy, because his joy was tied to the progress of the gospel. And the true gospel was being affirmed by these jealous, bitter, spiteful Christians. Paul, how do you maintain your joy even when brothers in the church are attacking you? Paul says, “Easy, I hitch my joy to the gospel wagon. That way, as long as the gospel is preached, I’m happy.”

They weren’t preaching a false gospel. Paul definitely would not have rejoiced over that. They were preaching the true gospel, but with evil motives. And so Paul says, **I rejoice**.

That is not to say what they were doing was okay. Everywhere else in his letters Paul strongly rebukes people who have selfish ambition or envy or rivalry or pretense or impure motives. In Galatians 5:21 he says that people who live like that, if they don’t repent, they won’t even inherit the kingdom of

³ Was Paul guilty of violating the prohibition in 1 Cor.4:5 against judging someone else's motives? No. There is no reason to believe that Paul was merely assuming bad motives. It could be that he knew these things for a fact simply from what these men said.

⁴ 2 Corinthians 7:5, 2:4, James 1:27.

God. So if Paul always rebukes people for being like that everywhere else, why doesn't he rebuke these people? Because he's not talking to them. He is talking to the Philippians. If he were talking to those preachers, I'm sure he would rebuke them. But his focus here is on teaching the Philippians how to maintain their joy. And he wants to show them how it's possible to grieve over sin and simultaneously rejoice over the good that God is doing through that sin. And you can do that when you understand that the truth is more powerful than the package it comes in. Paul understands that the truth is more powerful than the package it comes in.

I once heard a leader in a church tell me that if their preaching pastor ever fell into adultery, that church would burn all his books and destroy all the recordings of his sermons. That's a church that is too focused on the messenger and not on the message. If that man is preaching the Word of God, it will still be the same, powerful Word of God no matter what that man does. The message is more important than the package it comes in.

Some people get this completely backwards. They will forgive someone for preaching a false gospel just because he has good motives.

"His heart is good. He really does want to help people. So I can look past his false doctrines."

Again, that kind of attitude says the messenger is more important than the message. That's backwards.

Paul grieved over the sinful messengers, but rejoiced over the powerful message. And the rejoicing is greater than the grieving. Were they doing harm by having sinful motives? Yes, but the harm they were doing was far outweighed by the good accomplished whenever the true gospel is preached. Do you realize that maybe the only reason you are saved today is because of the influence of someone who first heard the gospel from one of those bad preachers?

So Paul rejoiced. Why? Because the gospel mattered more to him even than relationships. He kept his joy in prison because the gospel was more important to him than his freedom. He kept his joy in painful circumstances because the gospel was more important to him than comfort. And he kept his joy when brothers were attacking him because the gospel was more important to him than relationships.

Do you want unassailable joy? Retrain your heart to value the ministry of the gospel above everything else in life. It is so easy for us to lose sight of huge things because we're distracted by little things. Did you know you can block out the entire sun with a quarter? If you put a quarter close enough to your eye, you can completely block out all of the brightness of the blazing sun, which is 865,000 miles in diameter. The issues of this world are like that quarter. We put the trivia of life too close to our eyes and we cannot see the grand, glorious things. Move the quarter and look at the blazing sun of the gospel.

Conclusion

So what takes away your joy? The government? Is that the quarter that you have too close your eye? Do you listen to a talk show or read a blog and hear about all the terrible things bad politicians are doing, and you lose your joy? Do you have your joy wagon hitched to the United States government? That's a nervous breakdown waiting to happen.

What kinds of things have the ability to steal your joy? A cluttered house? A financial setback? Someone yelling at you at work? An irritating personality type? It takes some effort to clear those quarters away from your immediate field of vision and to spend enough time thinking about the progress of the gospel, and what an eternally important thing that is, and how much it benefits people, and how much it glorifies and pleases God – it takes some time thinking about that before the joy starts to rise. But if we will do that, we will have a joy that nothing in this world can ever touch. Because the gospel is unstoppable.

Benediction: Jude 1:1 To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ: 2 Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) What are some unreliable things you are most prone to hitch your joy wagon to (resulting in the loss of joy when things get hard)?
- 2) Have you ever been inspired by someone's courage? If so, share the story.
- 3) Has there been a time when some "hindrance" came into your life that actually ended up furthering the progress of your ministry? If so, share the story.