

## PAUL'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

### Philippians 1:12-20

During Paul's long confinement in Rome he was chained to a soldier of the Imperial Guard. That must have been a trying experience to one of Paul's sensitive disposition. However, his letter to his dear friends in Philippi did not contain any note of bitterness or any word of complaint. He was able to see the hand of God when things went against him or contrary to his personal wishes. While in the very midst of a difficult situation Paul said, "I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

In this letter Paul wrote very freely, frankly and intimately. This letter was unusual in that he began with himself. That is quite understandable when one recalls that the Philippians were concerned about him, they had sent a messenger to find out how he was getting along, and he was really replying to their inquiry and interest.

#### I. There Can Be A Bitterness That Can Spoil.

When you are in a difficult place it is easy to become bitter. But one thing is sure, namely, a person cannot be bitter and happy at the same time. Bitterness and happiness do not blend. If you are bitter, you are miserable, and not joyous.

In a wonderful way Paul had overcome potential bitterness; he had risen above it and was rejoicing. But potentially the bitterness was there. What was involved that could have made Paul an extremely bitter man?

##### 1. The sheer unfairness of his bonds.

In verse thirteen he referred to his "bonds in Christ," meaning the chain on his wrist which kept him fastened to a guard day and night.

Twice already Paul had heard the verdict of authority. When he was arrested the captain of the temple guard said, "This man has done nothing worthy of death or of bonds." When he was placed on trial before Festus, the new governor said, "This man has done nothing worthy of death." When he appeared before Agrippa and Festus they consulted and then said, "This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds." In the light of these statements, his imprisonment was unfairness and injustice of the worst sort.

It is not easy to sing when you have been treated unjustly or unfairly. You were due for promotion, but you were not promoted. You should be getting more pay, but you are not. You have been treated unfairly. You wanted to live in a certain place, but you had to move to another. The bitterness of resentment can easily creep into a situation that is stamped with unfairness and injustice. Are you a bitter person because of the sheer unfairness of the place where you are?

##### 2. The subtle unfriendliness of his colleagues.

"Some preach Christ even of envy and strife" (verse 15). Some of those who were preaching Christ at Rome were making the most of the situation in which Paul was placed, for their own ends. With Paul out of the way they were making the most of their own opportunity and getting into positions of influence. Elbowing Paul out, and rubbing it in, "supposing to add irritation and annoyance to my bonds." It was not just resentment, but jealousy. Paul might have thought of those men preaching Christ, where he would have been doing it if he had been free, and he could have hated them for robbing him of a place that was his by right. Is there somebody you don't like because deep down you are jealous?

### 3. The seeming unfaithfulness of his Lord.

Surely there must have been some doubt about the faithfulness of the Lord in the mind of Paul. Surely Satan must have used the weapon of doubt in his attempt to cripple this great warrior. What about unanswered prayer? Two years in Jail back there in Palestine, the long sea voyage as a prisoner, and now in bonds again for two years. Paul had prayed about it, and so had others, but God did not do anything about it.

In addition to that there was a great potential that was unused. This man who was confined in prison was the greatest preacher Christ had. Talking from a place far more difficult than yours or mine has ever been, Paul said, "I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

## II. There Can Be A Blessedness That Can Surprise.

The Christians at Philippi were perplexed as to why one so gifted to preach and so burdened for souls was a prisoner and had such a limited opportunity to preach the Gospel. Their concern was deep. They were eager to know the reason. They were more troubled over Paul's imprisonment than was the Apostle. The biggest complainers about the goodness and justice of God are the watchers, and not the sufferers. The Philippians expressed warm sympathy with Paul in his sufferings, their fear that the work of Christ was being obstructed by his being kept in prison, and their anxiety concerning his future prospects.

Paul discovered that those things which were considered so hurtful were actually helpful. He said, "The things which have happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel."

Paul sought to convince the Philippians that God had not made a mistake in permitting the things to happen to him as they had, because they had actually contributed to the progress of the Gospel. He wanted them to know that his sufferings were being used of God for His glory. He taught them that things come directly from God, or they reach us from some other source through His permissive will. Instead of Paul's imprisonment curtailing his missionary work, it had actually advanced it. His difficulties had become doors. Wherever he was, whether in pulpit or prison, Paul presented Christ to others as the One Who was sufficient for all their needs.

What was the blessedness of this difficult place in which Paul found himself, which both startled and surprised him?

#### 1. An opportunity was given for the gospel.

"My bonds in Christ are manifest in all the imperial guard" (Verse 13). What Paul has in mind is that he has discovered that he is reaching people from prison who might never have been reached otherwise. He was getting the gospel into the minds and hearts of the members of the picked imperial guard; the elite regiment of Rome was being evangelized from a room. The chain which deprived him of his liberty gave him his opportunity.

Maybe you don't like it where you are. Is it possible that somebody would never hear the gospel if it wasn't because the Lord brought you where you are? When God puts you or me in a difficult place it is because there are people to be touched there for Him. An opportunity for the proclamation of the gospel of Christ should make us sing.

The guards saw Paul in chains, wondered why, asked him and he told them. They soon discovered that he was neither a lawbreaker nor a political delinquent. Rather, they learned that he was a man who was suffering for his faith in Christ and devotion to

Him. His Christian joy and optimism were obvious to all who saw and heard him. They learned that Christ was the secret of Paul's joy.

These guards listened to Paul as he told them about Christ. They heard his conversations with those who visited him. They heard him pray. They listened to him as he dictated his epistles. They were impressed by his purity, his patience and his desire to get them to receive Christ as their Saviour. Those whom he introduced to Christ in turn became witnesses for their Lord in the distant areas to which they were sent.

## 2. A ministry achieved in the church.

"And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear" (verse 14). There is a ministry that you and I are to exercise towards other Christians. If Paul had not been in prison, the prison epistles would never have been written. When Paul was put in prison he began the greatest ministry of his life; he was not permitted to preach publicly, but he could write.

Paul's fearlessness in his testimony inspired most of the brethren with similar courage. Most of the brethren spoke out boldly, but a few of them held back. Some timid souls lacked the courage that attends a vigorous faith. Encouraged by his example, their zeal was quickened and they spoke the word without fear.

## 3. A quality secured in the life.

"For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (verse 19). The Apostle came to realize that he was in prison not only for the sake of the imperial guard and the church at Rome, but also for Paul's sake.

A quality of life was going to be secured by Paul that he could not have secured elsewhere or in any other way. It was a completeness, a maturity and a Christ-likeness he had never known. There may be qualities lacking in your life that God can secure only by putting you in a difficult place.

## III. There Can Be A Boldness That Can Sing.

Some of us sing as long as the sun shines, but the moment the clouds arrive we cease. Unlike many of us, Paul was brave and courageous. Courage has its place in Christian experience. So often, when we are up against it, we want to quit. It is fairly easy to be a Christian when and where everybody's singing, but it is not so easy when we are alone and the going is rough. Paul said, "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, whether it be by life, or by death" (verse 20).

Three things went into his boldness:

### 1. Concern for God's glory.

"Christ shall be magnified." Utterly forgetful of himself, Paul's one concern was that Christ might be magnified; not that Paul should be heard, but that Christ should be seen; not that Paul should be free, but that Christ should be found; not that he should be responsible for a great work, but that men should be reached with mighty blessings. His chief concern was that Christ should be preached.

### 2. Contempt for his own comfort.

The place Paul was in was not only difficult, but it was dangerous. The very threat of uncertainty hung over the whole situation. Life was possible, but equally so was death, and Paul did not care which came. Life could be fruitful, but death would be wonderful.

### 3. Confidence in God's control.

Paul said, "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (verse 23). "I am in a situation where I am quite helpless, I am hemmed in, but it is under control." Paul believed that the thing that was most needful would happen.