

Good morning,

A few years ago, I read the story of a young man, he was the son of a pastor, he was well educated, well versed in scripture as he had grown up in the church.

However, he really didn't have an idea of what God's will was for his life.

I have found that many in the church struggle with this same question – just like this young man.

Do I get involved in a ministry?

Do I hold a prayer group?

Should I go evangelizing out in the streets?

Should I start a small group fellowship at my house?

Well this young man came up with a plan.

Instead of waiting on God to reveal His will for him, he decided to make a list and tell God all he was willing to.

He locked himself in the church that his father pastored in and started to write.

Ok God, for the next five years, I am going to do the following.

Then I will move on to the following and so on. I will then promise to do this and that.

The young man had it all planned out. Every single detail meticulously pointed out.

At the bottom of the list, he proceeded to sign his name.

He then places the letter on the altar and waited.

As the time elapsed, he became more and more disappointed.

Maybe I forgot to write something he thought, so he proceeded to look at his list one more time.

Suddenly, he feels the voice of God speaking to his heart.

God tells him that he was going about it all wrong. He tells the young man to tear that piece of paper.

God then told him to get a blank sheet of paper and at the bottom of the sheet of paper, God told him to simply sign his name.

It was at this point when the young man realized his error.

You see, God is the one who fills the paper.

Our response is to be obedient to His will – signing on the bottom of the blank sheet of paper.

God dictates what His will is for us and He also dictates how it will be done. Not us.

This morning as we continue our study through the book of Philippians, we are going to look at the wonderful example that God gave us in the life of Paul. You see, Paul's entire ministry was one that allowed God to fill in the sheet of paper. Paul never knew how God was going to accomplish it – Paul was only sure of two things, that God was still in control over every circumstance and that his response was simply to obey. This is the message that he is about to give the Philippians as well as us.

Let's pray...

[Phl 1:12-14 NKJV] 12 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things [which happened] to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, 13 so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; 14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become

confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

So last week, as we started this wonderful book of Philippians, I had mentioned to you the theme of this book is “joy”.

I had explained the differences regarding happiness and joy.

Happiness is driven by the circumstances in our lives while joy is different – especially if that joy revolves around Jesus Christ.

Despite hardships, struggles, tribulations – it doesn’t matter what circumstances we are facing, as long as our focus is on Jesus Christ first, we can always rejoice...

The scriptures never guarantee happiness yet we are commanded to rejoice or to be filled with joy.

This past Thursday morning, my alternator went out on my car as I was headed to work. I had to call a tow truck, wait for the tow

truck, have it towed to a repair shop, take their shuttle to work – I was late for a meeting.

These circumstances affected my happiness that morning.

However, as I was sitting there in my car waiting for the tow truck – I found myself praising God.

You see, the night before we drove down here in a driving rain storm over Tubac.

What if this had happened on I19 during the rain storm or on our way back home that night?

Praise God that it happened when it did and where it did!

Despite our circumstances, as a believer, we can always rejoice.

This is the mindset of Apostle Paul throughout his ministry.

Turn with me to the book of **2 Corinthians 11**, here we have a brief summary of the circumstances that Apostle Paul had endured up to this point.

[2Co 11:22-29 NKJV] 22 Are they Hebrews? So [am] I. Are they Israelites? So [am] I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So [am] I. 23 Are they ministers of Christ?--I speak as a fool--I [am] more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. 24 From the Jews five times I received forty [stripes] minus one. So why 39??? – In the book of Deuteronomy, the law stated that you were only allowed to give 40 lashes and no more. The rabbis then changed it to 39 just in case the person doing the lashes lost count. It had not to do with mercy.

25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 [in] journeys often, [in] perils of waters, [in] perils of robbers, [in] perils of [my own] countrymen, [in] perils of the Gentiles, [in] perils in the city, [in] perils in the wilderness, [in] perils in the sea, [in] perils among false brethren; 27 in

weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness-- **28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.** **29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn [with indignation]?**

Look at verse 28 again. Despite everything he has endured, Paul was worried about the church.

In order for Apostle Paul to continue to rejoice through his circumstances, he either had to be crazy, he had to be lying through his teeth (meaning that he really wasn't joyful and it was simply the nice Christian to say) or just maybe, Paul figured it out.

Look at the words he writes to the church in Philippi,

[Phl 1:3-4, 18 NKJV] 3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ...

18 What then? Only [that] in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

Turn the page to

[Phl 2:17 NKJV] 17 Yes, and if I am being poured out [as a drink offering] on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

[Phl 3:1 NKJV] 1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you [is] not tedious, but for you [it is] safe.

So let's take a look at our first verse today.

[Phi 1:12 NKJV] 12 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things [which happened] to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel,

1. Paul offers encouragement by demonstrating God is still in control.

Despite all his hardships, we never get a sense of Paul writing these letters to the churches to receive sympathy.

The opposite was true – Paul’s letters were all about encouraging the church, correcting the church, exhorting the church.

The only reason that he states his circumstances is to set the example for the church to continue to persevere.

To continue to run the race.

You see the early church was persecuted. The Jews hated them.

The gentiles hated them as well.

They were outcasts because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Even today, there are regions throughout the world where Christians continue to be persecuted. Persecuted for having a bible, persecuted for sharing the gospel.

If you study church history, times of persecution were always times when the church grew.

In his letter to the Romans, which was written before he got to Rome, Paul wrote the following.

[Rom 8:28 NKJV] 28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to [His] purpose.

Does it say certain things work together or a few things work together? No.

It says ALL things. And the Greek word for “all” means “all”.

Paul understood that God is still in control and that everything happens according to His will. Everything has a purpose.

The life of Joseph,

In the Old Testament, we have the example of someone else whom endured great trials because he saw the big picture.

Joseph was one of the sons of Rachel, and Rachel of course was the wife that Jacob loved.

Now scriptures tell us that Jacob loved Joseph more than the other sons and he proceeds to make Joseph a tunic of many colors – this of course made his brothers mad.

Then God reveals in a dream to Joseph that one day he will rule over his brothers.

Joseph brags about this to his brothers and of course, this makes them even angrier.

They were ready to kill Joseph and then, it is decided that they will sell him into slavery instead.

Joseph goes to Egypt, where he is sold to Potiphar. Potiphar was an officer of Pharaoh in Egypt.

Joseph is given the title of overseer of Potiphar's house after some time.

Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce Joseph and Joseph flees – Potiphar's wife then accuses Joseph of rape and he is thrown into prison.

In prison, Joseph is given the gift to interpret dreams by God and after years in prison, the mighty Pharaoh calls him to interpret

one of his dreams – the dream had to do with an upcoming famine in the land.

Because Joseph was able to interpret this dream and because Pharaoh saw that the Spirit of God was in Joseph, he is appointed to the second highest position in all Egypt.

The famine strikes the region, just like Joseph had said.

Egypt was prepared for the famine and then Joseph's brothers come back into the picture because the famine has extended into Canaan.

Eventually, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and because of his position, he was able to bring his family into Egypt and rescue them from the famine and they prospered.

Sixty six people went down to Egypt and in 400 years, they become 2 million.

God used Joseph, through trials, to mold him, to prepare him for this very purpose.

Now turn with me to Genesis 50

[Gen 50:15-21 NKJV] 15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him." 16 So they sent [messengers] to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying, 17 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you." ' Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we [are] your servants." 19 Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for [am] I

in the place of God? 20 "But as for you, you meant evil against me; [but] God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as [it is] this day, to save many people alive. 21 "Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Never once, from the time he is sold into slavery to the time he was falsely accused of rape to the years that he spent in prison did Joseph complain to God.

You see, Joseph held on to the dream that God had given to him when he was 17. And he remained faithful, just like God was faithful to him.

Genesis 50:19 embodies the words of Paul that we read in Romans 8:28.

And this is what Paul is telling the church – that these evil acts upon the church, this persecution against the church, God is using it for good.

Now, to understand what motivated Paul, we only have to look at the first verse in our study today.

12 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things [which happened] to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel,

Paul's passion, his drive, his motivation can be summed up in two words – the gospel.

And we see this throughout this first chapter.

[Phl 1:5, 7, 17 NKJV] 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, ... 7 just as it is right for me to think this of

you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. ... 17 but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.

This is just in the first chapter.

Seventy two times in his letters, Paul mentions his drive, the gospel.

The amazing thing about Paul is that before the gospel became his driving force, he spent his entire time trying to prevent the gospel from being spread.

Paul was the main persecutor of the early church before his encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. The only reason that he was on the road to Damascus was to round up a group of Christians that were there.

Paul was there as they stoned Stephen.

So the question becomes, how does the number one opponent of the gospel become the number one proponent of the gospel?

And of course, the answer is, the gospel.

You see, the gospel changed Paul.

He had an amazing encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus and because of it, he surrendered his life to Him.

From that day, Paul's passion became preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Church, unless we have experienced true conversion, the gospel will never become our passion.

The gospel only becomes the passion of those who have seen its effect in their own lives, as it did with Paul.

Why would I share the gospel if it has done nothing for me?

However, if I know who I was prior to the gospel taking hold of me and see the difference in my life as a result of the gospel, of course I am going to be passionate about sharing the gospel with people.

This is what drove Paul. This was his joy.

And what Paul is telling the church in Philippi in verse 12 is that despite him being in house arrest there in Rome. God's will is still getting done. The gospel is still being preached.

Last week I had mentioned that Paul was wrongfully accused of trying to smuggle a gentile into the temple.

He was arrested and after pleading his case in front of the governors, Felix and then Festus and later on to King Agrippa, Paul

had finally had enough and because he was a Roman citizen, he appealed to Caesar.

So Paul gets an all expense trip to Rome paid for by Rome.

Turn with me to the book of Acts 9,

Here we have the Lord speaking to Ananias and telling him the plans that He has for Paul.

[Act 9:15-16 NKJV] 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

And this was all fulfilled as Paul was falsely accused in Jerusalem.

God used Paul's misery for His glory, for the advancement of the gospel. This is how the gospel got to Rome.

Paul knew that it was all temporary; he always had his eyes focused on the eternal and not his present circumstances.

His confinement was all part of God's assignment in the life of Paul.

[Act 28:30-31 NKJV] 30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

These two years that Paul spent under house arrest had the greatest impact on the church as Paul was able to write

Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and the book of Philemon during this time period.

Being in prison prevented Paul from physically going out to preach the gospel. However, he was still able to share it through his letters and everyone that came to visit him.

And this brings us to verse 13,

13 so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ;

2. The Gospel is still being preached.

During this house arrest, Paul did have some liberties; we already saw that he was allowed visitors.

However, during this time, Paul was to be chained to members of the elite Praetorian Guard.

This was like the secret service for Caesar.

Around-the-clock incarceration, no privacy.

Which means, for the guards - they'd had to listen to Paul. For six hours at a time.

Now, the visual: imagine being chained to Paul the apostle, for six hours, knowing the kind of guy he was.

I think there were probably some that didn't want to be there and there were others that couldn't wait to return to hear more about what Paul was preaching.

Makes you think regarding who was chained to who.

These guards had a front row seat as they heard Paul preach, they heard his many conversations he had with his visitors.

They were there as he was writing the letters to the three other churches.

Paul's imprisonment had opened the way for preaching the Gospel to the finest regiment in the Roman army.

All the Praetorian Guard knew why Paul was in prison - and many of them were touched by the Gospel.

How do we know?

[Phi 4:22 NKJV] 22 All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household.

There were many converts as a result of Paul's imprisonment.

No wonder Paul declared that his imprisonment had actually been for the furtherance of the Gospel.

The news spread from guard to guard, to the families of the guards, and then to Caesar's household.

Imagine you are in Philippi and you read that those around Caesar are believers, just like you.

And finally, our last verse,

14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

3. Paul imprisonment is giving others boldness.

Paul's imprisonment gave the Christians around him – who were not imprisoned – greater confidence and boldness.

- They saw that Paul had joy in the midst of such a trial.

- They saw that God would take care of Paul in such circumstances.

- They saw that God could still use Paul even when he was imprisoned.

Their thinking was that if God can use Paul while he is imprisoned, than how much more can God utilize them as they are free. It moved them to act. To not be afraid.

It has been said that our spiritual maturity can be measured by what it takes to rob us of our joy.

For many in the church, all it takes is a simple trial.

That is when we say – “I am outta here, Christianity is simply too hard”

And for many, they return to religion because it is easier to live a life of consecration.

However, God doesn't want us to live a life of consecration; He wants us to live a life of obedience. The young man at the start of the sermon – he was offering consecration.

Apostle Paul gives us that wonderful example of submitting to God in every way – to allowing God to fill in the paper so to speak.

I am not here to tell you the Christian walk gets easier as you mature because it doesn't.

One of the biggest errors that we make is to tell a nonbeliever that once they come to Christ, all their troubles will go away. That simply is not true – look at the life of Paul. Look at our own lives, we all have struggles.

However, only through Jesus can we experience this joy despite our circumstances.

And no matter what circumstances you might be going through, never forget that all things work together for good to those who love God.

God is still in control and His will, will be done. Amen.

In conclusion

I wanted to end today with an excerpt on the life of Robert Reid.

Max Lucado in his book *The Applause of Heaven*:

"I have everything I need for joy!" Robert Reid said. Amazing, I thought. His hands are twisted, his feet are useless, he can't bathe himself, he cannot feed himself, he can't brush his teeth, comb his hair or put on his underwear. His shirts are held together by strips of Velcro. His speech drags like a worn-out audio cassette.

Robert has cerebral palsy. The disease keeps him from driving a car, riding a bike, going for a walk. But it didn't keep him from graduating from high school, or attending Abilene Christian University from which he graduated with a degree in Latin. Having cerebral palsy didn't keep him from teaching at St. Louis Junior College or from venturing overseas on five mission trips. And Robert's disease didn't prevent him from becoming a missionary in Portugal. He moved to Lisbon, alone, in 1972. There, he rented a hotel room. He began to study Portuguese. He found a restaurant owner who would feed him after the rush hour and a

tutor who would instruct him in the language. Then he stationed himself daily in a park, where he distributed brochures about Christ. Within six years, he had led 70 people to the Lord, one of whom became his wife, Rosa. I heard Robert speak recently. I watched other men carry him up in his wheelchair to the platform. I watched them lay a Bible in his lap. I watched his stiff fingers force open the pages. I watched people in the audience wipe away tears of admiration from their faces. Robert could've asked for sympathy or pity, but he did just the opposite. He held his bent hand up in the air and he boasted, 'I have everything I need for joy!'

Max Lucado summarized the life of Robert Reid when he wrote. His shirts are held together by Velcro, but his life is held together by joy."

What a beautiful testimony. That is the joy that we get from Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Let's pray...

Dear Jesus,

Please forgive me of all of my sins.

I know that my sin has separated me from You and I am deserving of death.

I believe that you died for my sins and rose again.

I turn from my sins and I am asking that You come into my life.

Show me how to live my life that is right and pleasing to You.

I accept You as my Lord and Savior.

In Jesus name I pray.

