

Today we are beginning a new series entitled, Joy for Life. This series will be based on the book of Philippians, found in the New Testament and written by the Apostle Paul. Philippians is not very big, in fact it is only 4 chapters long, and it isn't really called a book, but a letter. The greek word for letter is "epistle." Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote this letter to the church in Philippi, a metropolitan city in Northern Greece.

Before we look at the background of this letter, let me ask you a question. ***Have you ever had plans or an idea that just didn't work out? Are you where you thought you would be at this age in life?*** Paul had plans too, that didn't work out. Writing to the church in Rome he says;

Rom 15:24-25 I plan..to go to Spain . I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. 25 Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there.

Paul never made it to Spain. He did make it to Jerusalem only to be almost killed. It's ok to make plans and dream dreams, but our life is in the hands of the Lord.

Prov 16:9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps. NIV

Prov 19:21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails. NIV

Everything in our life can has a purpose. God even takes our bad stuff and uses it for good stuff!

Back to Paul. While Jesus was doing his ministry, Paul was a Jewish Pharisee. He not only knew the Old Testament but could recite it completely by memory. He believed Jesus to be a fraud. He was nothing more than a magician to Paul and a blasphemer of the true God. The resurrection for Paul was nothing more than the disciples stealing Jesus' body from the grave and saying he was resurrected.

One day, Jesus appeared to Paul and knocked him off his high horse (literally.) Paul received Jesus and was baptized. As adamantly against

Jesus before, he was now for Jesus. He began planting churches all over the Mediterranean area. After 15 years he went to Jerusalem where he was hated and mobbed by the Jews who wanted him dead for his betrayal. If it wasn't for the Roman soldiers arresting Paul, he would have been killed.

For two years Paul waited in one of Ceasar's prisons outside of Jerusalem until he could be shipped off to Rome for trial.

When Paul was a Pharisee he was respected, had a place of honor, and lived in beautiful surroundings. Life was pretty good. He was in control of his life. But after he came to Christ, not so much!

2 Corinthians 11:23-27

I've ... been jailed more often, beaten up more times than I can count, and at death's door time after time. I've been flogged five times with the Jews' thirty-nine lashes, beaten by Roman rods three times, pummeled with rocks once. I've been shipwrecked three times, and immersed in the open sea for a night and a day. In traveling year in and year out, I've had to ford rivers, fend off robbers, struggle with friends, struggle with foes. I've been at risk in the city, at risk in the country, endangered by desert sun and sea storms, and betrayed by those I thought were my brothers. I've known drudgery and hard labor, many a long and lonely night without sleep, many a missed meal, blasted by the cold, and naked to the weather. (Living Bible)

Come to Jesus, and see the world! This probably is not the best way to market Christianity. Most of the TV preachers would not preach like Paul did. So how do we look at our trials and sufferings? Did God punish Paul with all these trials because he was stubborn and had to be broken down? Are your struggles because you are bad or good? Sometimes the challenges we face are brought on because of the bad choices we have made. But, it is never too late to follow God in the next step.

Deut 20:4 For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory."

Paul was thrilled to be a part in God's will. Paul wasn't scared he was joyful. It's interesting that Joy is the second fruit listed in God's attributes recorded

in the book of Galatians,....love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and self control. Paul's trials helped to expose the fruit of God's Spirit.

As I read the beginning of Philippians, picture Paul being chained to a Roman guard.

Phil 1:1-6 Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; NKJV

Phil 1:25-26 And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, 26 that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again. NKJV

Paul could progress in his "joy of faith" even facing his impending beheading by Emperor Nero. Paul never became bitter, the opposite of joy, even getting closer to death.

JOY = a : the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires; the expression or exhibition of such emotion : 2 : a state of happiness or felicity : 3 : a source or cause of delight (Merriam-Webster's)

Can you imagine what the guards were thinking as they watched and heard Paul. This was the Praetorian Guard. They were Emperor Nero's top body guards assigned to keep Paul in custody. Why was Paul chained to a soldier? The Romans heard about his miraculous escape in the past.

Acts 16:25-28 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and

was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" NIV

There it is again, Joy. Paul was a happy guy. Can we live like this? What can we learn from Paul?

1. Paul was Living a life of Joy because people were believing the gospel.

Phil 1:12-14 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. NIV

The guards of Paul were listening to his message and believing it. During their 4 hour shift Paul was not chained to them, they were chained to Paul. Paul probably wore the guards down.

2. Paul was joyful because he had fellowship with others who loved and prayed for each other.

Phil 1:3-5 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,...NIV

Phil 2:17 ... I will be glad and will share my joy with each of you.

Hometeams do this for us, friends who pray for each other and share their joy.

3. Paul was joyful because he understood the sovereignty of God.

Paul was at the right place at the right time, even though he would be killed. This is the sovereignty of God in the life of a Christ One. It was God who released Paul and Silas from prison. It was God who kept Paul in this prison.

Acts 17:26-28 (God) determined the times set for them and the

exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28'For in him we live and move and have our being. NIV

Paul's story can be our story. If joy was related to pleasures on Earth, Paul wouldn't have any joy. If his joy was related to possessions in this world, he wouldn't have had any joy. If his joy was related to freedom in this life, he wouldn't have had any joy. If it was related to prestige, he wouldn't have any joy...to outward success, he wouldn't have any joy. Paul's joy was not even connected to his dreams or goals. His joy was knowing God was really in charge of his life! God was the leader and Paul joyfully followed.

So do we jump up and down when we lose our job or find out that we have cancer? No, we rejoice in God being in it with us!

Phil 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

4. Paul had Joy because suffering made him more like Jesus.

1 Peter 4:12-14 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering , as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. NIV

Someone said that you can only tell where you are in your Spiritual growth in trials and suffering. James, Jesus' earthly brother, said it this way.

James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

For Paul, trials allowed him to experience what Jesus experienced in life. And, like Jesus, come through it stronger and more confident in God.

Neh 8:10 "Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

5. Paul's joy was a reflection of his sin being forgiven.

How do you really know that your sins are forgiven? When I was the children's pastor I had this one student who would answer every question with, "The Bible tells us so." Yes, we know our sins are forgiven when we accept Christ into our lives because the Bible tells us so. But, let's look at an example from the Old Testament.

Num 3:4 Nadab and Abihu, however, fell dead before the LORD when they made an offering with unauthorized fire before him in the Desert of Sinai.

1 Sam 6:19 But God struck down some of the men of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they had looked into the ark of the LORD.

If a priest didn't obey God's direction completely they would be killed in his presence. That is why they had rope tied to their ankles when they went into the holy of holies. In case they forgot a step in the offering of sacrifice they could be dragged out and buried.

How is this supposed to be encouraging to you?

Rom 6:23 the wages of sin is death,

In Christ, we would be dead the first time we sinned after receiving His Holy Spirit if we didn't have the forgiveness of sin.

Communion

Romans 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Rejoice, God is not involved in a few things in your life or several things in your life or even most things in your life. He is involved in everything. As we enter our communion time let us celebrate the Lord's presence and the joy that brings!