

Joy and the Philippians

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As we all know, we are given many admonitions in God's Work and God's Word. Some are easier to keep than others. We're going to begin this sermon with one of the toughest to keep, one of the toughest admonitions from God. Let's go to James 1:1; James, being the half-brother of Jesus Christ. We're going to read verses 1 and 2. I'll read this out of the New King James.

James 1:1 [James opens his epistle and he says,] *James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad:* (NKJV)

He is talking spiritually, he is not just speaking to the nation of Israel, he is talking to spiritual Israel. Notice what he says:

2) My brethren, [brethren in Christ] count it all joy when you fall into various trials ... (NKJV)

Count it all joy when you fall into various trials. The Expositor's Bible Commentary about the term "all joy" quotes it as "full and complete joy" when you fall into trials. Now that's a tough one. James, here, the half-brother of Christ, under divine inspiration from God, begins his letter to the New Testament Church—spiritual Israel—by telling us when we experience trials—guess what?—we should consider it a joyful experience.

I don't know about you, but I think for most humans it's not normal to like trials. Pain, loss, anxiety, fear, sickness, financial stress, and—historically in the Church, certainly going back to the time this was written—persecution, wondering where the next meal was coming from, fear of losing your life ... who likes these things? And here James is telling us to count it all joy. Such trials are horrible circumstances that we don't want to come for ourselves, for our families, for each other. When trials do occur and come our way we're told to count it all joy. The question is—how can that be? How does that happen, how does that work?

Today we're going to find out that God's Word has the answers to this question. We're going to find out that the answer is essentially the purpose of Paul's letter to the church at Philippi. That is the purpose for which he wrote the letter—to have joy in the midst of trials. The fact is, based on the New Testament record, Paul suffered more than any apostle or any disciple. Anyone in the New Testament of whom we have a record, other than Jesus Christ—Paul suffered more than any other apostle or disciple. So, what we

have here is a servant of God in the middle of his own severe trials—with his life at risk, as we will see—telling a church that is in the middle of their severe trials that they must have joy. The interesting thing is that he tells them how to get it—how to have joy in the midst of trials. So we're going to look into that today. The title of the sermon is:

Joy and the Philippians

The letter Paul wrote to the church in Philippi is filled with that admonition but with solutions, too. The first thing we want to establish, point number one:

1. **Paul suffered greatly.**

I know that in a fuzzy way we remember this, we've read about it, but let's go back and look and see how much suffering Paul experienced in his trials. Let's go to 2 Corinthians 11 and we'll begin in verse 23. Paul is put in the position of defending his apostleship against those who were critical of him and those who gossiped and slandered him. He felt as if he needed to defend the fact that he was a minister and an apostle:

2 Corinthians 11:23 [He is being a little bit facetious here] *Are they [his critics] ministers of Christ? [He says] I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often* [meaning the threat of death].

24) [Just rack these up on one body] *From the Jews five times I received forty stripes save one.* [Five times! Scourging and stripes like that were called a near-death experience. An unhealthy man could die of one incident; he had five.]

25) *Thrice [three times] was I beaten with rods* [How would you like to have just one swack with a rod? Maybe he had thirty-nine hits with a rod, we don't know]; *once was I stoned; three times I was shipwrecked* [once would have been enough]; *a night and a day I have been in the deep* [treading water or hanging on to some log, a piece of wood];

26) *in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils of the city, in perils of the wilderness, in perils of the sea, [and yes] in perils among false brethren* [they even stabbed him in the back, which was happening at this point];

27) *In weariness* [going through all of that, obviously, it would take a toll on the body] *and painfulness, in watchings often* [and on top of that], *hunger and thirst, in fastings often, [and then] in cold, [and then] in nakedness. ...*(KJV)

None of us have suffered like that, not one of us. Now let's go to 2 Corinthians 12 and begin in verse 7. Paul here is talking about a severe individual trial on his body that he had to live with.

2 Corinthians 12:7 *And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the*

messenger of Satan to buffet me [the Greek word for “buffet” means to strike with the fist; this isn’t some little tap on the shoulder, this is a doubled-up fist—it is a severe trial], lest I should be exalted above measure.

8) For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9) And He [Christ] said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory [if you look up that word in Strong’s Concordance it can mean also to have joy. He says I would rather have joy] in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me ... (KJV)

The Greek word for “infirmities” means *feebleness of mind or body*. After you have been shipwrecked and beaten with rods and scourged, and all of that, yes, you have a feeble body. You have a body that has really been through it. Not only has his body been though all that’s been described in chapter eleven, but he has this specific problem. To give us an idea of what that specific problem is, let’s go to Galatians 4 and we’re going to read the latter half of verse 15. This gives us an indication of what Paul’s thorn in the flesh specifically was.

Galatians 4:15 ... [The latter half. Paul is saying to the Galatians] *if it had been possible, ye [the Galatians] would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.*

This is an indication that he was struck with blindness, or semi-blindness because you don’t replace the eyes if they are mostly working okay. We can see here that Paul’s thorn in the flesh is clearly more than just an annoyance. It’s not a drippy nose, it’s not a sinus infection—it is the fact that he was struck with partial blindness. With this understanding of Paul’s suffering, there was an important event related to the writing of the letter to the Philippians, the book of Philippians. This was an event that had direct pertinence to the letter that Paul wrote. Let’s go to Acts 21 and begin in verse 26. This is another indication of Paul’s suffering. This is the first point—we’re establishing the fact that Paul suffered greatly. This relates to his writing the letter, but it also adds to his suffering. Acts 21:26 and I will read this out of the King James:

Acts 21:26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself ... entered into the temple to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

27) And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him [Paul] in the temple, stirred up all the people, and [they] laid hands on him. (KJV)

Now, they didn’t just gently walk over and touch him. They grabbed him and jostled him, and they may have punched him, or thrown him to the ground.

28) [These people who laid hands on him were] Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the

law, and this place [the temple] and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.

29) (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) (KJV)

So once again, Paul wouldn't bring an unclean person into the temple, but the fact is that these people are yelling so loud and are reacting to a rumor. They supposed this happened, they didn't know this happened, but this is a good example of what happens when people listen to rumors.

30) [As a result of this] And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.

31) And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. (KJV)

Now the commander of the garrison became upset because the last thing he wants is for his superiors to say you let Jerusalem get into a riot because you were not doing your job. So he jumps into the situation and the ensuing verses tells us that he can't get a straight answer as to what is going on. The Jews are yelling and screaming, and Paul can't get a word in edgewise, so he gives Paul a chance to address the crowd, which he does. After he speaks, let's pick up the story in Acts 22, the next chapter, and verse 22.

Acts 22:22 *And they [the Jews] gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. [That's the opposition Paul had. They wanted to kill him on the spot.]*

23) And as they cried out [can you imagine grown men doing this], and cast off their clothes and threw dust into the air [they were so upset; it was a different culture, obviously],

24) The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle and bade that he should be examined by scourging [another time]; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.

25) And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by [he just asked him a quiet question], Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? (KJV)

They assumed he was just a Jew from Jerusalem, not a Roman citizen, and that they could do with him as they wanted. But Paul was a Roman citizen. He was born in the Turkish province of Cilicia. Approximately one hundred years prior to the incident we are talking about, Cilicia was conquered and annexed by Rome, and it became a Roman province. If Rome delineated an area as a province, that meant that anyone who was born there automatically became a Roman citizen. Just as in the United States—if you are born in the United States you are automatically a citizen of the United States. The same thing happened in a Roman province. Cilicia was one and

Paul was born a Roman citizen. Going on in verse 26:

26) [This changes everything] *When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest; for this man is a Roman.*

27) [Then that got the chief captain's attention] *Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.*

28) *And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom.*

[This is important because he is talking about his citizenship. He bought his citizenship, this chief captain. We'll talk about this later.] *And Paul said, But I was freeborn [meaning I was born a citizen. I didn't have to buy it, I was born a citizen and I'm from Cilicia]*

29) *Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him [he could get into trouble just for binding illegally a Roman citizen].*

So instead of scourging and killing Paul, which likely would have happened since he was a non-citizen Jew, a nobody from Judea—he was instead sent to Felix, the governor, to determine what should be done. The problem was that Felix, the governor, dragged his feet. He procrastinated on making a decision about Paul and Paul's fate. He did so partially because he was hoping Paul would pay him a bribe. Obviously, Paul was not going to do that. Now let's pick up the story in Acts 24:27. Paul has been languishing in prison for two years.

Acts 24:27 *But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: [Felix still had not made up his mind] and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.*

Paul has been in limbo, in prison, for two years, and because Felix is not moving, Paul makes an appeal to Caesar, which was the right of every Roman citizen. If you are not happy with the current situation, you can appeal directly to Caesar. The only problem with that appeal is if Caesar does not rule in your favor, you are put to death. You have to be very sure of your appeal before you go before Caesar because the penalty is losing your life. Now let's go to Acts 28 and begin in verse 16 because now Paul has been transported to Rome, as he is awaiting an audience from Caesar.

Acts 28:16 *And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered [allowed] to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.*

17) *And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together, [and when they were come together] he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.*

18) *Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me.*

19) *But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought [anything] to accuse my nation of.*

20) *For this cause therefore have I called for you [he is trying to tell them, look, I'm not against Jerusalem, I'm not against the temple, I'm not against you; and he says I'm trying to explain that for this cause have I called for you], to see you, to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.*

30) *And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came unto him,*

31) *Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.*

Here he was, innocent, and he was imprisoned two years under Felix, and now two years imprisoned in Rome for something he did not do. He didn't do anything wrong. He has in his body all the—when we make mistakes as young kids and do things physically we shouldn't, we pay a penalty for it as we become older. Can you imagine everything that happened to Paul—the beatings, the scourgings, the shipwrecks—all of that, at this time in his life—my guess is he lived in quite a bit of pain. Not to mention the problem with his eyes.

He couldn't see very well; maybe not see at all. It was during this time of imprisonment that Paul wrote several letters. He wrote the letter to the Philippians and also to the Colossians. Just as an example let's go to Colossians 4:18. Let's read that one verse and I'll read it out of the King James, but this tells us Colossians was written during his time of imprisonment.

Colossians 4:18 [This tells us that at the end of the epistle, King James,] *The salutation by the hand of me Paul. [Notice what he says] Remember my bonds [I'm in prison]. Grace be with you. Amen. (KJV)*

The notation is written from Rome to the Colossians by Tychicus and Onesimus. The point here, as we close out point number one, is that Paul clearly, clearly knew about suffering, in his own body, and the penalty his body has paid for all of the abuse he has taken, plus this thorn in the flesh.

The second point we want to make—we're talking about the epistle to the Philippians—is that:

2. The brethren in Philippi were well aware of Paul's sufferings.

They knew what he had been through. As we are going to see, they witnessed some of them. Let's go to Acts 16 and we'll see that this is an account of Paul raising up the church in Philippi. Acts 16 and we'll begin in verse 11 out of the New King James.

Acts 16:11 [Paul arrives at Philippi] *Therefore, sailing from Troas [Luke is saying] we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day [coming] came to Neapolis. (NKJV)*

Remember, I gave a sermon awhile back on how little details tell us that this is inspired by God, because, if you go back and look at the nautical records, this was a common course to these cities.

12) and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. [Meaning, just as Cilicia, this part of Macedonia is a Roman colony and that is going to be important later. Just keep that in mind.]

And we were staying in that city for some days. [In Philippi]

13) And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. (NKJV)

We're going to see—we don't have time today, but if you do the research—women were the first converts. It is interesting, and true, and my wife and I have found out, that with any new teaching it is generally the women who get it first. Men are often too encumbered by tradition. Women seem to grasp it, and this is the case here.

16) Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling.

17) This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God [as Jack pointed out last week, demons know who God is; they have seen God and they know. This young girl, who is influenced by a demon, is speaking the truth], who proclaim to us the way of salvation."

18) And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. [Now Paul has unknowingly created a problem for himself...]

19) But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.

[jumping to verse 23]

23) and when they had laid many stripes on them [more beating Paul had to endure, and Silas, too], they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.

24) Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison [the most secure part of the prison] and fastened their feet in the stocks. (NKJV)

New converts witnessed this. There, some who were interested in the truth—they were out praying on a Sabbath day—and they saw what happened to Paul. For casting out this demon (and the demon said they know the way to salvation), they are cast into

prison. Many of the people in Philippi had heard of this and knew about this. Some of the new converts undoubtedly witnessed this.

25) But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

26) Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. [That is a miracle. It was not just an accidental earthquake.]

27) And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. [He would have been put to death, probably tortured first, because he allowed all the prisoners to escape—that's what his fear was. Notice what Paul did in verse 28:]

28) But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

29) Then he [the jailor] called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.

30) And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" [The jailor was impressed with what happened. He obviously had heard why they had come in and what they were saying before that led to their being jailed.]

31) So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

32) Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

33) And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes [their wounds]. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.

34) Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household. [How many other residents of Philippi heard this story, or this jailor's account after the fact, and they themselves became baptized because of what had happened.]

40) So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed. (NKJV)

We see here after the fact that Paul went to be with the brethren. The jailor was probably there, and they all described the miracles that happened, and it encouraged the brethren. We see here that Paul has suffered greatly, numerous beatings and imprisonments, and he had a severe health trial on top of it, and his sufferings were personally witnessed by the brethren in Philippi.

Because of his sufferings and this miracle, without doubt, brethren were drawn to the truth that God was calling. You see what happens—when we were first called if we had seen a miracle like that—yes, we would want to be baptized right then and there, too. That is what happened, certainly to this jailor.

Now the third point—first we have seen that Paul suffered; secondly, we’ve seen that the church in Philippi knew about his sufferings, and witnessed some of his sufferings. The third point we want to make is we want to look at:

3. Paul’s example to us of joy despite all he had been through.

Let’s look at Paul’s example to us today of joy. The key to having joy in trials is found in the letter to the church in Philippi. Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians roughly about ten years after the incident that occurred with the jailor and that miracle. He is writing back to Philippi—after he had established the church there—about ten years later. Let me read from the Expositor’s Bible Commentary. It says “Paul’s trial was evidently going on during the writing [the writing to the Philippians] and its outcome could bring either life or death.” At the time he wrote it he didn’t know if Caesar was going to rule in his favor or not. He just didn’t know. This was another trial, having death hanging over his head all the time he was in Rome. Going on: “Paul’s trial was evidently going on during the writing and its outcome could bring either life or death. Apparently, there could be no appeal from its verdict.” Once Caesar ruled, that was it—no appeal.

Now, let’s go to Philippians 1. If you have a marker you might want to place it here in Philippians because we are going to work our way through Philippians with the idea of looking at the joy Paul had while he was in prison—in house arrest in Rome, after all the beatings and sufferings he took, and after all the trials and troubles the church in Philippi was going through—the central theme is joy. One wouldn’t normally think that. Philippians 1:19 out of the New King James.

Philippians 1:19 [Paul says] *For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 20) according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.* [He did not know at this point whether he would live or die.]
21) *For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*
22) *But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.*
23) *For I am hard-pressed between the two [living or dying], having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.*
24) *Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. (NKJV)*

Not only was Paul suffering, but the brethren he was writing to were also suffering. To get an indication of that, keep your marker here and let’s go to 2 Corinthians 8:1. This tells us that in this whole area the brethren were under a lot of stress. They had severe trials.

2 Corinthians 8:1 [Paul says] *Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the*

grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: [Philippi was in Macedonia]

2) that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. (NKJV)

They had a great trial, a great affliction—they were also poverty-stricken, and yet they could make a liberal donation. Now let's go back to Philippians 1 and pick it up this time in verse 27 out of the New King James.

Philippians 1:27 [Paul says] *Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs [you notice what he wants of them], that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,*

28) and not in any way terrified by your adversaries [they had adversaries strong enough to cause terror], which is to them a proof of perdition [meaning those people were evil in the eyes of their adversaries], but to you of salvation, and that from God.

29) For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake [Christ's sake, they were suffering as a church],

30) having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.

We see here the members of Philippi had adversaries and they were suffering the same conflict that Paul was suffering. They were in this together. Despite all this, what was the central theme of the book of Philippians? It is joy! This would seem to the world to be crazy. In particular, we are going to see that the source of joy is not a function of our physical circumstances. That is the key. The source of joy cannot be a function of our physical circumstances. If the only time we can have joy is when we get a new car, or some new clothes, or some money or a house, then we're in bad shape. What this letter shows us is the source of joy cannot be, is not, a function of one's physical circumstances. Despite all the trials and sufferings of Paul himself and the Philippians—in the book of Philippians there are fifteen explicit references to some form of either the noun "joy", which is the Greek word *chara*, or the verb "rejoice" which is the Greek word *chairō*. Fifteen references in this letter about joy. Let's go back to verse 3 of Philippians 1 and we'll see some of these, again out of the New King James.

Philippians 1:3 *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,*

4) always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy [Paul is praying with joy for the Philippians, despite knowing that the Philippian brethren were struggling, they still brought Paul joy as he prayed for them],

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. (NKJV)

Despite all the struggles, despite everything Paul went through, he could rejoice—why? Because God's will was being done. What a lesson that is for us. Despite opposition, despite troubles, if God's will is being done we can have joy.

25) *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)*

We see here that the Philippian brethren rejoiced for Paul, despite the fact that if he lost his appeal to Caesar, he would be a dead man. They were rejoicing for him in his bonds, in his house arrest. Let's go to Philippians 2:1, again out of the New King James.

Philippians 2:1 *Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy [he says if there is any of this],*
2) *fulfill my joy [how would they do that?] by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. (NKJV)*

We see here that Paul is saying my joy is predicated on your conduct. If you are like-minded, and if you have love, and if you look out for one another, this will bring me great joy. Paul is saying my joy isn't related to my imprisonment, my joy isn't related to the fact I am facing death; my joy is related to looking at you and if you are Christ-like, that brings me great joy. The source of Paul's joy was a spiritual thing, not a physical thing.

17) *Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering [if God allows him to die] on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. [If I die, and it helps you, I rejoice.]*
18) *For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me. (NKJV)*

Paul is saying despite the fact that he may die, he rejoices in them and they should rejoice in him—because of their relationship, because they're going down the same path, because they're all looking to God ultimately for salvation. Now let's go to Philippians 3:1 out of the New King James. These are all examples of Paul having joy and the Philippians having joy, despite horrible trials.

Philippians 3:1 *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. (NKJV)*

Despite their physical troubles, their joy was in their relationship with God. Think about that. It wasn't on the possessions they owned, it wasn't the comfort they had or the safety or security they had. Their joy was dependent on their relationship with God. Huge, huge lesson for all of us. Now let's go to Philippians 4:4 again out of the New King James, and he is closing his epistle.

Philippians 4:4 *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! (NKJV)*

These are not flowery words. They are encouragement for the Philippian brethren to be filled with joy all the time because of their relationship with God, which is consistent and constant.

10) [Paul says] *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.*
(NKJV)

Paul is rejoicing because the Philippian brethren, in their attitude of service and sacrifice towards Paul brought him great joy in his imprisonment, despite the threat of death. What an example to us of joy under trying circumstances, both from the Philippians and from Paul. What an example! The fourth and last point—this is where the rubber meets the road and it gets down to us—how could we have joy in trials? How could we follow Paul's and the Philippians' example?

4. How can we have joy in trials?

Let's see what we have learned so far. Clearly, Paul's focus was on his joy and not his physical circumstances. His focus was on the joy that the brethren can have despite their physical circumstances. The second thing that is abundantly clear when you read these accounts in Acts and Philippians, is that joy is not a function of physical circumstance. Joy is not a function of our physical circumstance. The physical circumstances of Paul and the brethren of Philippi were very bleak. Paul was in prison; the Philippians were in poverty and they had enemies who filled them with fear; and both parties had incredible trials. How can this be? How could Paul and the church members be filled with joy despite all the things that happened to Paul?—the pain and the suffering, and the beatings and imprisonment, and the trials that were coming upon the church in Philippi. How can they have joy? Let's answer it with a question.

To the people who lived in the city of Philippi—I'm not talking about just church brethren, but anyone who lived in the city of Philippi—or, quite frankly, anyone who lived within the Roman empire in any city whatsoever, what was the single biggest focus of the average person living in the Roman empire in those days? In particular we are looking at Philippi. It was their citizenship. That was the average person's prime focus. If you were a Roman citizen you had everything. If you weren't a Roman citizen you didn't have much hope in life and you didn't have much future. Remember, we read earlier in Acts 22 where the Roman centurion said with a large sum he obtained citizenship. That was his focus; that was what he wanted. If he became a Roman citizen (as we would say today) *he had it all* as compared to someone who was not a Roman citizen.

As a Roman citizen, an individual could freely travel about the empire with no restriction whatsoever. A Roman citizen could own property. A Roman citizen could make a will. A Roman citizen could inherit property from relatives without any problems at all; it was not confiscated. A Roman citizen could vote. A Roman citizen could participate in government and could participate in the judicial process. In other words, if they weren't

satisfied with something they could seek a remedy through the judiciary system, to which a foreigner could not and had no right at all. They could even appeal to Caesar, which Paul, as we know, did. Foreigners and slaves were not even allowed to marry a Roman citizen—can you imagine that—two people fell in love, one was a Roman citizen and one wasn't. The only way they could marry was for the one who wasn't to become a Roman citizen.

You can see why it was such a focus for people. The fact is that slaves had no rights whatsoever. They were treated as property, not as human beings. It was perfectly legal for a slave owner who was a Roman citizen to torture and kill his slaves at his whim, and nobody would raise a finger. Foreigners and slaves had no rights within the Roman empire.

Let me read from the Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown's Commentary: "Philippi was a Roman colony." (We read about that in Acts 16:12.) "A colony was in fact a portion of Rome itself, transplanted to the provinces; an offshoot of Rome." If Rome designated part of their empire as a colony, it was as though that was Rome. Going on, "Its inhabitants were Roman citizens, having the right of voting, governed by their own senate and magistrates, and not by the governor of the province, with Roman law and Latin language." Remember, Judea and Jerusalem were not provinces. They were governed by a Roman governor, and sometimes those governors were very cruel and very selfish. The point being, to the average citizen in Philippi, or in the Roman empire, Roman citizenship meant everything to them. It could change their life entirely. If you were born a citizen, or if you could buy your citizenship, you had hope for the future; you had a life. You could make a life for yourself and your family. If you weren't a citizen you had nothing. You lived at the whim of other people. You were not viewed as a Roman citizen, hence you were not viewed as equal with a Roman citizen. You had no rights.

Many residents of Philippi, even Church members, were citizens. The ones who weren't citizens in Philippi had a prime objective to become a Roman citizen, so they could have a life for themselves and their family. For the residents of Philippi Roman citizenship was a tremendous treasure. If you had it, it was highly valuable. It was a priority and focus to get citizenship if you didn't have it. Let's see what Paul said, despite that emphasis and the desire to be a Roman citizen. Remember, his Roman citizenship saved his life. Otherwise he would have been scourged and stoned in Jerusalem. He made the appeal to Caesar and that saved his life, and it was due to the fact that he was a Roman citizen. So let's see what Paul says about that. Let's go to Philippians 3:17. Let's see how focused Paul was on being a Roman citizen. I'll read this out of the New King James.

Philippians 3:17 *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.*

18) For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:

19) whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things [such as Roman citizenship].

20) [Notice what he says] For our citizenship is in heaven [not Rome], from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ... (NKJV)

Paul told the members of the Philippian Church that to have joy, and despite their trials, there was a way to have joy in spite of their trials, and that was to not focus on physical citizenship. Not focusing on the physical circumstances that we find ourselves in, but rather focusing on our spiritual citizenship; being part of the God Family.

How much more valuable is being part of the God Family than being a Roman citizen? Or being a Canadian, or Australian or United States citizen? There is no comparison! Paul is saying my citizenship is in heaven. Therefore I can have joy because look what I have to look forward to! Even if you were a Roman citizen and had all the benefits of being a Roman citizen, you're going to die someday. You could get some horrible disease; you could have an accident; you could lose a limb; but the spiritual citizenship which is in heaven is eternal. When you compare the two, there is no comparison. Paul is saying if our focus is on physical things, physical citizenship, things of the flesh (earthly things which we read in verse 19) it is impossible to have joy in trials. If our focus is on the physical and the physical isn't going so well, and that is our focus, we aren't going to have much joy. Paul is saying if you focus on the physical, given the world we live in you aren't going to be very happy. You won't be happy for very long if you focus on the physical.

If one's focus and priority is on the spiritual—in other words, if our citizenship is in heaven and our focus is on heaven—then we can have joy no matter what happens to us, no matter what is going on around us, because it is all physical. That is going to go away. The point Paul makes is your spiritual citizenship, if we can attain it, is not going away. That is eternal. That is what we have to look forward to, and therefore, the chaos going on in the world today, or even in the Church today, that kind of chaos is irrelevant when compared to our citizenship in heaven and what that means eternally. Let's summarize now.

Conclusion

How can we rejoice in trials? What we need to do is daily focus on our eternal future. That is where our focus has to be. Once our focus is there then whatever our concern is for that day is diminished and minimized because of our eternal focus on the Kingdom of God and our citizenship in heaven.

Now let's look at Christ's example that we have recently memorialized and celebrated—the last night of His life. We've been over that during these days. Sometimes we don't appreciate the fact that Christ knew exactly what He was about to experience. We are told that God created all things through Jesus Christ, so Christ was hands-on in creating the human body, and the nerves and brain, and He created pain. This was not going to

be something unknown to Jesus Christ, what He was getting into. He knew what He was going to physically experience. Christ was a human being, and if you look at it strictly physically, Christ should have experienced fear, panic, stress (and we know He sweated great drops of blood), and He called out to God because His mind was on what was going to happen afterward. Humanly speaking, you would want to run and hide. You would want to escape everything that He was about to face.

We have to ask the question—during this very stressful time for Christ (he was a human being)—what was His overriding emotion? Was it fear, apprehension, dread, knots in stomach, all of that? Or was it something else? What was the overriding emotion the last night of His life? We'll break into the story—Christ at this point has washed the disciples' feet; they just finished dinner; He was now giving them instruction because He had only a few short hours before His death, and had only a few short minutes with them. Let's go to John 15 and read verse 11. Notice what Christ's focus was:

John 15:11 *These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full ... (NKJV)*

He was telling them on this night that He was filled with joy! He says I want to give you My joy so it can stay with you and it can be full in you because you are going to have some trouble going forward. They didn't understand that all but John were going to die a grisly death. Shortly after He finished His instructions, Christ said a prayer. He said it for Himself, He said it for the disciples, and He said it for all of us who would come later. His prayer was to His Father. Look at chapter 17 and verse 13. Notice again the point of His prayer:

John 17:13 [He's going to be taken very shortly] *But now I come to You [referring to God; I come to you, God, My Father], and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves ... (NKJV)*

The fact is that He had only eighteen hours to live, and yet His overriding emotion, His overriding focus was joy. He was filled with joy because He had finished the job. He had completed what God had called Him to do. He knew, at that time, that He had conquered sin. He had led a sinless life. He knew that after His death the veil would be rent, and the Holy Spirit would be available to those who followed Him and to us today.

He knew His faith, throughout all of His trials, and all the opposition, could now reside in His followers. The faith that Christ had could reside in His followers. He knew that as His time was winding down He had set the ultimate example of love. He set that example of love by dying for His brothers and sisters. He could have joy despite knowing that within a few minutes the beatings would start, the torture would start, the scourging would start, and then His death would come. All these things brought joy to Christ because He knew He had fulfilled His mission from God, and He knew He had set the stage for all of us to come along afterward.

Let's go to one final scripture in Hebrews 12:1. All of these things brought Christ joy. I will read this out of the New King James.

Hebrews 12:1 *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight [and living in the world we live in there is a lot of weight on our shoulders; from seeing what is going on and what people do, Paul is saying], let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*

2) looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross [He knew the joy that was coming after His death and resurrection—the incredible joy, and He is saying that joy got Him through. That joy, that anticipation; knowing where He was going to wind up, allowed Him to endure the cross], despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (NKJV)

The point is that after we go forward now from Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, let's strive to have the same mind that Christ had, the same mind that Paul had, the same mind the Philippians had, regardless of our physical circumstances; regardless of the physical—it's all temporary. Let's ensure, as we go forward, that our citizenship is in heaven and not on this earth; that our focus is in heaven and not on this earth. None of us knows what our trials are going to be like—we just don't know. We know we are going to have trials going forward. No one is going to have a free pass this coming year. We're going to have trials. Though they are painful, the fact is they are temporary. That is what we have to keep in mind. Our future as sons and daughters in the family of God, and the joy that comes with that, will last forever. Let's keep our focus on our citizenship, which is in heaven, and let's keep our focus on God Almighty and Jesus Christ, His Son.