**Philippians 1:12-18 – Using Difficult Times For Good Things**

As we continue in Philippians, we pick up at **Phil. 1:12**. When life throws us curveballs, we can respond really one of two ways. We can complain about life and what is happening to us, or we can learn and use the situation to grow and further God’s work. It is not always easy to do the second choice, is it?

Well, as Paul is in prison and in a tough situation, he chooses to do something good out of what is happening. He uses the opportunity to tell others about Jesus. After all, that is why he is in prison to begin with, because of his preaching the Gospel. So, he might as well continue doing what he can to further the kingdom. We know that how people respond to what we say and do is on them. Our job is to just do what God wants us to do.

Also, as we continue, we want to ask a question - **“How big is our God?”** We live in challenging times. We live in a cancel culture. We know what many people think about Christianity, and it is not very kind. We do live in a land that allows us to voice our opinions, well, we did, but that is slowly being taken away.

Regardless, the question of how big our God is, is important. If I am not careful, when circumstances are not what I would like for them to be, it could be easy to act as if God packed a suitcase and left town. He has not and He is at work in every situation.

In some countries, being a Christian can mean imprisonment or death. In this part of **Philippians 1**, we learn that God can take a very difficult situation and use it for His glory...if we are willing to allow Him to. And our attitude and mindset, as we have noted before, play a huge role in that happening.

In this portion in **Philippians 1**, Paul challenges us to see the “good things” happening in life. We all know people who live with the glass half-empty. They can never find anything good, or so it seems. In all honesty, that is because they do not look hard enough.

In **Phil. 1:12-18**, Paul is not telling us to be blind to the world around us. Far from that. Again, it has to do with our mindset, our attitude. God never did say life would be easy or perfect. But Paul chose to look at a tough situation and to use it to reach out beyond himself to others. That is what is challenging when we are in a tough time. Reaching out beyond ourselves. But that is important here. Let’s follow Paul’s advice as he shares with us some pretty good stuff that happened with him even when things were challenging.

**1) Look for opportunities even in the most difficult of circumstances.** Paul was most likely under house arrest wherever he was imprisoned, which was probably Rome. He may have been chained to a guard, or a guard was with him constantly as he was under house arrest. He was allowed to see guests when imprisoned at Rome **(Phil. 4:18)**. As noted he had Roman guards **(Phil. 1:13)**. He was sharing the message with Jesus with those who were watching him.

There is some discussion over whether Paul was imprisoned at this time in Rome, Ephesus, or Caesarea. But there are enough differences noted in Acts and the prison epistles as they are known, that I think lean towards Paul being at Rome at this time. It is not a salvation matter but it does make a little difference in the fact that Paul seems to have more freedom as a prisoner at Rome.

Though **Acts** mentions Paul being under arrest in Caesarea, there is no evidence he was ever imprisoned in Ephesus. I think Rome is the best fit for the background of this letter.

Paul says in **vs. 12** that what has happened to him has actually been used to advance the gospel. Whatever we may be going through, do we have that same outlook that Paul did. I like the phrase, **“really served to advance the Gospel.”** The word **“really” has the idea of so much more**. Paul could have sat silent, and complained and brooded about his situation. That was not on his mind.

He was in circumstances that were not the best, but he took opportunities to reach out beyond himself and how he could have responded. Who would have thought that Paul’s imprisonment would have led to so many people trusting in Christ. That probably blew Paul away but brought a smile to his face.

His situation had not changed. He simply refused (attitude, mindset) to be controlled by what was happening to him. He was in prison, okay. He decided to use that time to let others know about the Christ He loved. The circumstances allowed Paul to further the message about Jesus.

I like the word **“advance”** in **vs. 12**. This is a good word. Progress, advancement, furtherance in the teaching of the Good News about Jesus took place in a rather tough situation. Some think the word, though we cannot say for sure, had the idea of those who cut a way before an army, clearing the path, moving trees and debris, as it marched.

It is not easy to always see the opportunities. In all honesty, when we are in the middle of something difficult, we can be so focused on ourselves and the situation that we do not see what could be an opportunity that God has given us.

Maybe our kids are struggling at school. It may give you an opportunity to talk to a teacher about your life and what you hope for your children. Or at work, where a boss is relentlessly unkind, or hard on us, and we have a chance to show other co-workers what it means to reflect Christ in those moments.

**Point:** Look for opportunities to share our story, our life, the truth about Christ, with people even when we are going through tough times. God may want to use us to help someone else. Paul, instead of allowing the situation to totally control his life, analyzed it and made a choice - to let others know about Jesus. But again, it is a choice. Think of ways we can do so.

**Point, continued:** One example is social media. It can be a good or bad thing depending upon how we use it. But we can touch the lives of others through that tool. Share with them your story or about Jesus.

**2) Others may benefit from our decision to not be controlled by the situation.** This fact is not always on our minds or one of the first things we think about. Look at **vs. 13**. Paul notes that the whole imperial guard, along with others, know why Paul is imprisoned. He is not complaining. He is letting the Philippian believers know that the opportunity given to him was one that he would take in spreading the message.

So, who was the imperial guard? They made up the garrison of Rome. It would include thousands of soldiers. Or it referred to an elite group of soldiers. The **NET** notes,

**“*The whole imperial guard* (*Grk* “praetorium”) can refer to the elite troops stationed in Rome or the headquarters of administrators in the provinces (cf.** [**Matt 27:27**](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNET.Mt27.27)**;** [**Mark 15:16**](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNET.Mk15.16)**;** [**John 18:28**](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNET.Jn18.28)**,** [**33**](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNET.Jn18.33)**;** [**19:9**](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNET.Jn19.9)**;** [**Acts 23:35**](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNET.Ac23.35)**).”**

The Greek word can describe a camp of soldiers, the palace where a governor resided, soldiers at the Roman emperor’s place, or elite soldiers who guarded the emperor. The Praetorium guard originally numbered close to 10,000, concentrated in Rome by the emperor Tiberius. They had double pay and special privileges. Their length of service was originally twelve years and then increased to sixteen.

Obviously, some of those soldiers guarded Paul who was in a house in Rome. Paul was not living in Caesar’s palace but was he was guarded by the elite troops.

And Paul was clear that he was in prison because, first of his faith and desire to spread the Gospel, and second, he had appealed to see the emperor Caesar **(Acts 26:32; Acts 27:1; Acts 28:16-30)**. He wanted to make sure everyone heard about Christ. Billy Graham had no problem sharing the message of Jesus with world rulers.

Imagine being one of the soldiers who was guarding Paul. It is said that a guard did a four to six hour shift. So, think of all the guards who heard the message of the Gospel and saw how Paul interacted with people. And no doubt some of those guards were converted. Others simply told other soldiers about Paul’s teaching to them. And they knew he was under arrest because of his belief in Christ. The Jews definitely wanted him out of their hair.

As we have noted, others heard the message as well. Note the phrase in **vs. 12, “all the rest.”** This had to do with those who came to see Paul while he was in this house in Rome under arrest **(Acts 28:30)**. He was determined to make a difference. And this spread all the way to Caesar’s palace where people had become believers.

Did Paul have an impact, or should we say, did the message make a difference - look at **Phil. 4:22**. It reminds us that our job is to plant the seed of the Word of God and let God do the rest. But we have to make sure to get the message out.

Now, note **vs. 14**. Others were emboldened in sharing the message as they looked at the life of Paul. Here he was, under difficult circumstances, not allowing that to control him. Others heard and saw Paul’s life and it gave them the strength, the encouragement, to do the work they needed to do.

Note that those mentioned in **vs. 14** were willing to speak the word **“without fear.”** They saw in Paul a fearless determination. This only comes from the Holy Spirit and depth of our relationship with God. These believers saw an example in Paul, and they, through the Lord’s help, were willing to stand up and speak regardless of what the results might be. Are we ready to do the same?

I like the word **“much”** in **vs. 14**. Paul says that others were “**much” (in a greater degree, most earnestly, more exceedingly, more bold)**, not being afraid, to speak. This could be a challenge in Philippi because of the city itself, steeped in Roman tradition.

**Point:** What do others see in us when it comes to our faith in Christ? Are we afraid of what others might think? Do we allow circumstances to dictate how we act and respond as Christ followers.

Fear freezes us. It stops us from moving forward, of doing what God wants us too. It frustrates us, and at times, others, who may be depending on us to make a decision. When it came to sharing the Gospel, Paul’s willingness to do so in tough circumstances was used by God to help other believers carry on the mission. We can look to others as a positive input and role model for us and allow the Holy Spirit to use them in our lives.

I think this boldness spread outside of Rome. No doubt other believers in other cities knew that Paul was under house arrest so he could not travel and spread the Word. Someone had to continue the message, carrying it as Paul was in prison.

**3) At times, the message is more important than the messenger.** This does not mean by any stretch of the imagination that I can just live like I want, and not be concerned about being a testimony for the Lord. Or that we should not be discerning when it comes to what people are teaching. That is not what we mean as we look at **vss. 15-18**.

Paul had obviously received word about what we are looking at in **vss. 15-18**. He had two choices in his personal response. Since we know he could not face the troublemakers, he had to make a decision that was probably tough - he saw the one good thing that was happening with these individuals and focused on that - The Good News about Jesus was being proclaimed by people who were bozos.

These were not Judaizers or legalists (with their set of manmade rules) as some may think. Those individuals believed you had to keep the law to be made right with God. Paul is pointing out that these individuals were preaching Christ, yet with wrong attitudes and ulterior motives. But Christ was getting taught to others.

There are two words that are in **vs. 15** that we need to look at. The reason is that this is a problem even in churches today or in the Christian world I should say. There were those in Paul’s day, as there are in 2023, who are jealous of others and what their ministries are doing. We get into the comparison game, not a healthy thing to do. We can learn from others, but we need to be careful.

**Note:** Paul says that there are those who were proclaiming the Gospel, but their motives were not the best. Paul notes that they were **“envious” and “rivals.”** The word **“envy” means just that or jealousy (Gal. 5:21 - envy is a work of the flesh)**. The idea of what we call the “works of the flesh” means that we are allowing sin to be in charge of our life, not the Holy Spirit. That was true of these teachers Paul is noting.

This word is never used in a positive way in the NT. There were those who most likely were envious or jealous of Paul’s ministry but were still sharing the Gospel with others. God used them despite their sinful attitude. That does not excuse their attitude.

God does not condone their envy. It is just a fact. **1 Peter 2:1** tells us to guard ourselves against envy along with other sins. So, this is not a good thing, to be envious or jealous of others and what they are doing for God.

The other word to note is **“rivalry.”** It is also a work of the flesh **(Gal. 5:20)** and **means “contention, contentious disposition, strife.”** Some who did not like Paul tried to take advantage of the situation he was in to get more well-known or to show that they were just as good as Paul.

Paul does say that the Word was still being preached though these individuals had lousy attitudes. But not everyone had wrong motives.

Paul does say at the end of **vs. fifteen** that there were those who were preaching Christ from **“good will.”** The choices these individuals made had a **“kindly intent”** to it, prompted by good will. Their choice to do what they did had the right motives. Their intentions were good.

**Vs. 16** tells us that this latter group taught the Word out of love for God and Paul and others. They understood Paul’s situation, that it was for the defense of the Gospel, the opportunity to spread the message. They continued the work God had given them from a heart of love.

Their motives were totally different than the ones mentioned at the beginning of **vs. 15**. Look at **vs. 17** where Paul clearly notes the attitudes of the envious and rivals. These teachers **“proclaim” (make known, declare, announce)** Christ out of, **first**, **“selfish ambition.”**

The word for **“selfish ambition”** is one we can see in our world. It was used for electioneering for an office. **It has the meaning of putting one’s self forward, and having a factious spirit that is willing to do what is necessary to get what they want, just like a politician**. They will be less than ethical. They may lie, they may slander and gossip. They are contentious. Paul notes this as a work of the flesh **(Gal. 5:20)**.

For these preachers, it was not about promoting Christ. It was about drawing people to themselves while downplaying Paul, whose sole goal was to glorify Christ.

Note Paul says they are not sincere, their motives are not pure. Instead, by what they are saying and doing, these teachers with lousy attitudes are simply trying to make life harder for Paul. They were **“thinking” (presuming, supposing, expecting)** to make things worse for Paul. They wanted to **“afflict”** him. They wanted to make things worse for Paul, maybe causing him to get anxious and worry.

**One of the words used here to describe “affliction” means “to press, a pressing together, distress.”** It is like being squeezed into a narrow place. They were trying to make life difficult.

Who knows what they are saying about Paul? I do not know whether these are true believers or those who are preaching the truth about Christ but do not have Him in their life. I do not know. But I know that they were probably being slanderous towards Paul to others, saying things that were not true, trying to undercut his ministry out of jealousy and they felt threatened possibly by what Paul had done in starting so many churches. They could not accept that God used Paul.

His conclusion and his mindset is seen in **vs. 18**. Whether in **“pretense” (that which is put forward to hide the true state of things, a fair show, to put on the appearance of something not true)**, which was the attitude of these jealous teachers or in **“truth” (the ones speaking out of good will and kindly intent)**, Christ was being proclaimed, and in that Paul rejoiced and would continue to rejoice.

How hard would that be? Let us just say that we know that people are out there saying less than kind things about us, in fact, they may be jealous of us and see our ministry as a rival to them, yet Christ is being taught, it would be tough to rejoice knowing that we are possibly getting thrown under the bus.

In closing, what can we learn from this portion of Philippians?

**1) We are not in competition with anyone else.** We have said this before, but do not compare Oakridge to other churches. We can learn from others, good and bad. But we are not rivals. Churches that teach the Bible are all headed in the same direction - we want to honor Christ.

A way to guard against envy and strife is to focus on doing what God wants us to do. We all have spiritual gifts. We all have abilities and interests. Instead of comparing ourselves or feeling competitive with others, we need to focus on doing what God wants us to.

**2) Allow God to use us to encourage others even when life is hard for us.** This can be tough, but it was our first point. Attitude means everything. Paul saw opportunity when he was imprisoned. When life throws a curveball, how do we respond. **Rom. 5 and Jam. 1** talks about us growing in patience and character as we deal with trials.

People do watch us. We do not have to be perfect, in fact, people want to see us as humans but also showing that what we believe does guide our life. They may mock us, but they cannot deny that we handle things different when it comes to situations and circumstances.

For example, maybe we did not get the promotion we hoped for. Smile and keep moving forward and doing a good job or find a place where we can grow and learn. At church, do not allow someone’s negative attitude to get to us. And take the high ground when some people try to make life hard. We do not have to always be silent but when we speak, let us not act like those who trying to cause trouble. Be Christlike.

**3) Warn others about certain teachers of the Word.** They may be preaching Christ, but they may be bullies, vulgar, showman, controllers. We need to warn other believers about certain teachers and Christians because we care for and love the church. We can be thankful that Christ is being preached, but there is also the issue of integrity and Biblical living.

Paul only commends them that Christ is being preached, not for their attitudes of envy and rivalry.