



Last Sunday we talked about the joy that is threaded through every word of the book of Philippians. We reminded ourselves that joy and happiness are not the same thing. Happiness depends on “what happens.” Joy depends on if we have a relationship with Jesus. We talked about the fact that we are each a “work in progress.” We are “under construction.” God is not finished with us, but rather as we submit to the Holy Spirit, He will continue to work in and through us until the day of Jesus Christ; until He comes again. I encouraged the congregation to give yourselves a break because He’s not done with you yet.

On Wednesday we talked a bit about Paul’s prayer for the Philippian church. He did not pray for physical things for them, but rather he prayed for spiritual things. He prayed that they would grow in the grace and peace of the Lord Jesus. We talked about the grace of God which enables us to discover love. When we experience God’s love and He pours His love into us, it fills to overflowing, which in turn pours out that love on others. This can’t help but lead to joy. And in this chapter Paul is pouring out his love for his little congregation in Philippi. This reminds me of a song we used to sing when I was in college at A&M. It was written by a guy named Kurt Kaiser in Waco, Texas. We never knew who wrote it, but it explains so well how the love of God is contagious. It spreads like wild fire. At the BSU, or at InterVarsity Christian Fellowship or at Canterbury House, we would sing together the following:

Verse 1

It only takes a spark
To get a fire going
And soon all those around
Can warm up in its glowing
That's how it is with God's love
Once you've experienced it
You spread His love to ev'ryone
You want to pass it on. ¹

Whenever and wherever God calls you, He’ll give you that grace you need to do whatever it is that He has for you to do. Paul prays that their love would abound in knowledge and in discernment. Paul is praying something very related to this love that we spread.

Thankfulness and Prayer – Have love with knowledge and discernment.

¹ https://hymnary.org/text/it_only_takes_a_spark_to_get_a_fire_goin

⁹ And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, ¹¹ being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11, NKJV).



Paul was telling them that they won't just be having a "blind love." That's often the kind of love that a mother has for a child. I remember when I was doing the criminal defense docket, I had a client who was horrible. His head was shaved and his scalp was covered with awful sinister looking tatoos. But weirdly enough, they were only on half of his body. Half of his body was tatoosed with gang symbols and weird stuff. He was so frightening that I went out and bought my first automatic handgun. I was afraid if the case didn't go his way, he might hunt down my family and do violence to us. I wanted to talk a little about mothers today because it's Mother's Day, so I want to tell you a little story about a mother's love. At the hearing, his mother turned to me and said, "Denny is such a good boy. He's just fallen in with the wrong crowd." I was shocked. Denny WAS the "wrong crowd." This mother had blind love. She had no knowledge or discernment concerning the love she had for her son. It's the same kind of love we've all witnessed where a woman falls in love with someone who everyone else knows is a bad guy. But the woman ignores the knowledge about the guy because she lacks discernment, and she doesn't want to see the danger that lies ahead. In a church, the same kind of love can happen when we may see someone involved in some activity of sin, but in our blindness, we give them a pass on certain conduct. Remember Paul talked about a guy that was having sex with his stepmother, and he was outraged because the church was boasting about it. They were probably boasting about their tolerance. Paul told them "your boasting is not good." A little bit of sin can course through the entire church. The church had love but they did not have discernment.

Paul prayed that the little church in Philippi would have a love that was full of knowledge and discernment. Love says things that are difficult to say. We are being told by the world that tolerance and love are the same thing. They are not. We are to have knowledge and discernment in our love, "So that we may approve what is excellent."

His imprisonment has benefits. Christ Is Preached – Focus on Him and not on what others are doing.

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; (Philippians 1:12-13, NKJV).

Paul was telling them that all these things (even being arrested again and sent to Rome) have brought about a furtherance of the gospel. Paul was able to look BEYOND his own condition and rejoice that despite his own incarceration, he was able to have an opportunity to speak boldly of the love of Christ. I am sure that the Philippians were a little confused. They remembered that God had come along and freed Paul and Silas back when they first came to know them. They were probably wondering now where the power of God was in Paul's imprisonment. But Paul was letting them know that the power of God is still working

powerfully, even in his imprisonment. It is easy when things don't look like anything is going on spiritually to give up. But God is sovereign, and Paul realized it and got excited in knowing that even when he was locked up, God had NOT forgotten him, AND God had a work for him to do in the prison where he had landed. And you who are locked up and reading this, God has a work for you to do there as well. Become bold in your defense of the gospel and in your devotion to Jesus. Spread the good news of how He came into your life and has begun a good work in you. He's not done with you. It is not over.

Paul was in prison talking about how Jesus had changed everything about him. He was telling the Philippians that God's work was still going on. Remember church that our circumstances may limit us, but they do not limit God. Paul was not saying, "Well UNDER the circumstances I'm okay." He was saying, "I am depending on Him who is above the circumstances, and this is where He has put me for a reason and for a season. I love how Pastor Michael has taught us to think outside of our circumstances. Sometimes you might ask someone, "So how are you doing?" They'll start off saying, "Well, under the circumstances, I'm doing okay." Well guess what? **You and I are never UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. We serve a God Who is OVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES**, and He is working His will and His way out in our lives. Right now, several people in our own congregation are in jail. Unlike Paul, they are not in jail for preaching the gospel, but like Paul, they each have had an encounter with Jesus. They are now in jail, but they are not UNDER THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES. They serve a God that has a purpose for them, EVEN WHILE IN JAIL. Paul speaks to this in the next verses explaining that his being in chains had brought about good things.

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. ¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: ¹⁶ The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; ¹⁷ but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. 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. (Philippians 1:14-18, NKJV).

Paul was saying that because he was in prison, some had become bolder. They were speaking out without fear. Some had even been moved to go out and preach the gospel. He mentions that others were doing it perhaps out of competition. It's interesting that they saw opportunity to move in on Paul's territory so to speak and were motivated to go out and preach all the more. But Paul was saying that he wasn't bothered by that at all. He was just delighted that the gospel was being preached. Some Christians today, sort of do that same type of thing. A church will do this or that trying to outdo some other church. That's not what we're about. It's not about competition. We should never be doing anything motivated by trying to be better than some other church or trying to outdo some other group. Larry, Michael, and I should never preach the gospel here at the Grove or anywhere else out of rivalry or to be better than others. Paul was saying, it doesn't matter! What was important was that the gospel was preached. Some do ministry saying it is "for Christ," but in reality, they are doing it with the wrong motivations. Let's always be true to just do what God wants us to do here at the Grove regardless of what goes on in churches around us. Paul then talks about how he was wholly consumed with his faith in Jesus and how in reality little else mattered.

To Live Is Christ – We need not fear death. To die in the end is gain.

¹⁹ 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. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

And then he explains that statement.

²² But if I live on in the flesh (if I stay alive), this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ For I am hard-pressed between the two, 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. 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. (Philippians 1:22-26, NKJV).

Paul was talking about whether he'd live or die. He's addressing whether he'd get out of his current circumstance or not. If he lived, he'd have more opportunity to spread the gospel. Then, he says if he died it would just be an upgrade. He realized that death would be a promotion. He had the attitude that if he stayed alive it was going to be all about loving and serving the Lord, but dying wouldn't be at all bad. This is a hard attitude to have, but we can indeed have it. This is a chance for us all to investigate our attitudes and to really take a look at what is important to us. We should come to the realization that our lives should be all about Christ. Dying isn't to be feared, for it is indeed a promotion. Paul said it so clearly that any living that is left in us should be about Christ, but the physical human end of dying will be a promotion with great reward. Paul then ended this part by saying he thinks that he is going to live.

Striving and Suffering for Christ – Let us stand fast in “one spirit”.

²⁷ 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, 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, which is to them a proof of perdition, 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, ³⁰ having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me. (Philippians 1:27-30, NKJV).

He was urging them to conduct themselves in a way that was worthy of Jesus regardless of what was happening around them. From the context of the letter, we can tell that they were obviously battling something and Paul was encouraging them to stand fast in one spirit and with one mind and to strive together for the faith of the gospel. In verse 29, we see that following Jesus isn't always an easy thing. Paul was telling them that sometimes they'll be granted the privilege of suffering for Jesus. He told them that when they suffer, it would be an opportunity to not react like the world, but rather to embrace it. It is hard for us in the United States to even conceive of suffering for our faith. But, in some ways we can see it coming. It

comes now in being cancelled or marginalized or becoming the focus of anger for our beliefs. It is an opportunity to not react like the world would react, but to respond in a Christ-like way.

Over in Acts chapter five, Luke tells us that the Pharisees and Jewish elders were so furious at the gospel being preached that they were in a frenzy about it all. This is when they came to the great rabbi Gamaliel (who had been Paul's teacher), and they asked him what they should do to stop this movement that was spreading. He went on to tell them that if it wasn't from God it would die down on its own.⁴⁰ *And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.*⁴¹ *So they **departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.***⁴² *And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:40-42, NKJV).*

And as we know, the gospel did NOT go away. It was of God and could not be overthrown. However, it must have been hard for those early Christians who suffered so much and even suffered death for what they had come to know was true. But what was their response to the persecution? *"**they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.**"* (Acts 5:41, NKJV).

On this Mother's Day morning, I want to talk about godly mothers. I talked about that mother whose love was blind to the bad her son did, but I want to thank those of you who have loved with knowledge and discernment. I want to thank you for being persistent to pass on the gospel to your children and to your grandchildren. You are the cornerstone of God's work on earth. There are some great mothers in this room. There are some great mothers in the Body of Christ. You love but you do so with knowledge and discernment. You are the ones who risk your lives in bringing a child into the world. You are the cornerstone because yours is the first face that a little child sees. You are the ones that show unconditional love. You are the ones that whisper the first words to an infant. You are the ones who give the first drink. You are the ones who give the first food. You are the ones who dry the first tears. You are the ones who took the first opportunity to explain the love of God and the fellowship of Jesus to us when we were little ones. Many of you have suffered not for your own sakes but for the sakes of your children. Not all mothers, but many, have shown us in a tangible way how joy can be experienced in any and all circumstances. Thank you. Today let's learn from these mothers that show us that even in the difficulties of motherhood, joy can come through loving Jesus.

Not only is motherhood hard, but life is hard. Joy comes when we stay focused on the gospel. I'm reminded of that line in a great gospel song, *"How sweet to hold a newborn baby, and feel the pride, and joy he gives; but sweeter still the calm assurance, this child can face uncertain days because He lives".*² You and I are that child. We can and will face uncertain days because He lives.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by

² Bill Gaither <https://namethathymn.com/christian-hymns/because-he-lives-lyrics.html>

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