

REJOICING IN HARD TIMES
Philippians 1:12-18
3/24/13

Read Philippians 1:12-18

It is difficult to rejoice when we are going through tough times.

We often try to hang our happiness on very fragile things.

We try to hang our _____ on the very thin wire of _____.

happiness	possessions
peace	job security
joy	health
contentment	marriage & family

If your happiness is based on these things it can be wiped out very quickly.

By a loss of job, car accident, stroke, disease, or old age

By death, betrayal, or divorce

In our passage this morning we find the Apostle Paul rejoicing in spite of his circumstances.

His ministry plans had been cut short by false accusations.

He is in prison, facing a possible death sentence.

He is poor, impoverished and deserted by most of his friends.

Some opportunists were bad-mouthing him and were trying to take over the churches that Paul has started.

What is it that causes him to rejoice in spite of his circumstances?

What kept him from becoming bitter and discouraged?

Paul is rejoicing because his circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.

1. Difficult Circumstances Can Provide Opportunities To Proclaim The Gospel. 1:12-13

Paul saw himself as an ambassador in chains. (Ephesians 6:20)

His imprisonment allowed him to witness to the Praetorium Guard.

These were Caesar's elite troops. (about 10,000)

This Imperial Guard got double pay, high rank, good retirement benefits and other special privileges.

For two years Paul "handcuffed" to one of these guards 24 hours a day.

There was a shift change every 6 hours

It was impossible for these Roman soldiers to avoid hearing the gospel and witnessing Paul's Christlike behavior.

His graciousness, patience, humility, convictions, and genuine love for them

Both His message and his character had a profound impact on those elite, hardened, influential soldiers.

Some came to Christ

Some took the gospel to Caesar's own household. Cf 4:22

Paul's imprisonment led to the furtherance of the gospel.

It provided him with opportunities to witness for Christ.

We in America prize our religious freedom

But most of the great spiritual revivals throughout history have come during times of opposition and persecutions.

China and the Arab world are examples in our day.

Christian "prisoners" have often been greatly used of God.

In the 17th century John Bunyon's preaching was so popular and so powerful that he was jailed in order to silence him.

So he preached in the prison yard where not only the prisoners heard him, but several hundred citizens of Bedford would come to the prison daily and stand outside to hear him.

When the guards tried to silence him by putting him in the inner prison, God used him to write *Pilgrim's Progress*.

It has ministered to 10's of millions throughout the world.

For several centuries it was the most widely read and translated book in the world next to the Bible.

During World War II German soldiers wouldn't entered the prison barracks that held Corrie Ten Boon because it was so lice infestation. This allowed Corrie and other Christians to worship God, study a Bible and share the gospel with others.

During the days of the Soviet gulag Boris Kornfeld came to Christ and lead Alexander Solzhenitsyn to Christ a Russian prison camp. (Loving God pp. 29-33)

I am praying that it will be the same for Saeed Abedini, the Boise pastor who is now imprisoned in Iran.

2 Timothy 2:8-10 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, ⁹ for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned. ¹⁰ For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *and* with *it* eternal glory.

God is able to turn the schemes of Satan and of men's evil to accomplish His purposes.

Other types of difficult circumstances likewise provide opportunities to proclaim the gospel.

Two of our families had great opportunities to minister to other parents when their own children were hospitalized with serious problems (Forsythe and Smith).

Joni Earickson Tada has had great opportunities to reach others with the gospel because of her paralysis.

A Chicago man is blind, diabetic, and a double amputee

He is single and lives with his elderly mother.

Because of his victory over his handicaps he is able to share the importance of his faith in Christ to high school assemblies, service clubs and professional organizations

Places no pastor would get in to proclaim Christ

We can rejoice that God often uses our difficult circumstances to provide opportunities for us to proclaim the gospel.

2. Persecution and Suffering Often Embolden Other Christians To Proclaim The Gospel. 1:14-17

14 Paul's imprisonment ironically emboldened other Christians to proclaim the gospel.

Christians often catch courage from others.

There is a wall at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago that is engraved with the names of former students who have been martyred for their faith.

It has emboldened countless future generations of students to step up to take their place.

"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

15-16 Many proclaimed Christ out of a love for Christ and love for Paul.

When they saw their comrade disabled, they desired to pick up the flag and continue the charge.

15a, 17 Some proclaimed Christ out of envy and strife

These were not heretics who were proclaiming a false gospel.

The problem was not their message; it was their motivation.

They were motivated by envy, jealousy, and selfish ambition.

Envious and jealous people often do good things for wrong reasons.

They get upset by the successes of others.

They resent it when others get more recognition than they do.

There was a group of envious and contentious "Christians" who desired to cause Paul pain and distress in his imprisonment.

They wanted to "rub salt in his wounds."

They were trying to take over the churches that Paul had planted.

They perhaps made false accusations against Paul in order to promote themselves.

Perhaps they said that prison was God's punishment for some secret sin in Paul's life.

They may have said that Paul was too old fashioned and that they had a fresher more relevant ministry.

Paul didn't let them bother him.

Rather, he rejoiced that the gospel was being proclaimed.

3. We Can Rejoice Knowing That God Uses Difficult Circumstances To Provide Opportunities To Proclaim Christ. 1:18

Note what is important to Paul.

- Christ over comfort.
- Christ over circumstances.

- Christ over personal vindication and justice.
- Christ over vengeance.
- Christ over his reputation.

Paul rejoiced because he had faith that God is ultimately in control.

Paul rejoiced because he had faith that God is working all things together for good. Romans 8:28

Paul rejoiced because what really mattered to him was the progress of the gospel and the proclamation of Christ.

More important than his:

- ♦ reputation
- ♦ physical comforts
- ♦ material possessions
- ♦ ministerial “success”
- ♦ personal vindication

What was most important to Paul was the purpose, plan, or people of God.

4. What Does It Take To Rejoice During Hard Times?

a. To rejoice during hard times takes faith.

- Faith that God is in control and is working all things together for good

b. To rejoice during hard times we must care more about glorifying Christ and the progress of the gospel than we do about our own goals, comforts and reputation.

Charles Spurgeon wife, Susannah, became an invalid early in her husband’s ministry

Yet this gave her time to found and supervise a “Book Fund” which provided thousands of pastors with tools.

c. To rejoice during hard times we must have the certainty of heaven.

1 John 5:11-13 And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. ¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may **know** that you have eternal life.