

Today is the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church

- We will be praying
- Hebrews 13:3 (NLT)

Remember those in prison, as if you were there yourself. Remember also those being mistreated, as if you felt their pain in your own bodies.

Since the beginning of Christianity there has always been persecution

- Paul (in our text) is experiencing that (Imprisoned for preaching)
- More Christians are currently persecuted for their faith than any other time in history
- But even in this God is working good (which is the ultimate show of power)
  - That is what we will see in our text today and what we will pray for today

### Verses 12-14

Paul is testifying that even though his circumstances **stink** and he is **suffering** and **restrained**

- It is working out for **the greater progress of the gospel**
- Even though this is not the way he wanted to take the gospel to Rome...
- And yet this way God was able to do more
  - **The praetorian guard** (v. 13)
  - **Caesar's household** (4:22) (A Christian Rome in the future)
  - More Christians had **far more courage** (v. 14)

Paul knew that Christ was in full control

- All the factors of time and space were in His hands (Nothing happened by chance)
- All the varied threads of circumstance were being woven into a pattern that would result in Paul's ultimate good and God's glory

Not till each loom is silent,  
And the shuttles cease to fly,  
Shall God reveal the pattern,  
And explain the reason why

The dark threads were as needful  
In the weaver's skillful hand  
As the threads of gold and silver  
For the pattern which He planned. (Author Unknown)

Paul is more concerned about the cause of Christ than his own comfort

- Paul is willing to suffer injustice and hardship for the greater **cause of Christ**
- **We trust God's purposes, so we don't fear present circumstances.**

**"Self-pity is of the devil and if I wallow in it I cannot be used by God for His purpose in the world."** Oswald Chambers<sup>1</sup>

I just want to testify to the sovereignty and goodness of God in my own family's trials...

- Like Paul's experience:
  - The gospel going forth
  - People gaining courage
  - Joy (**Kate in the car last Sunday**)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://bit.ly/mu1110>

## Here is why this was possible for Paul (and why it is possible for you too):

The Gospel tells us that we bring nothing to the table when it comes to our relationship with God

- That is not bad, that is good (like a potluck at a LifeGroup)
- The **good news** is that our relationship with God and its benefits are dependant on what God brings to the table in Christ
  - Everything is **by grace** (underserved)

Paul understood that he was not entitled to anything he had—God held the title to everything

- When he lost his freedom it **didn't ruin him** because his joy was nor dependant on circumstance but on something greater
- When people were wanted to advance themselves at Paul's expense and were happy to cause him pain it didn't **shipwreck him** because his identity wasn't based on being better than other people but on being accepted by God through Christ

If foundation of your **identity** is your things:

- "The thing that makes me who I am is this position, these relationships, having this name, having this money", and so on
- Then **suffering will be pulling you away** from the foundation of your joy—and that will make you mad, bitter, and sad.
- But if your **identity is anchored in Christ**, so that you are able to say, "Everything I need I already possess in Him", then suffering drives you deeper into your source of joy.

**Suffering, in other words, shows us where we are locating our identity**

- Our response to suffering reveals what we're building our life on and what we're depending on to make life worth living.

This means that suffering itself does not rob you of joy—wrong affections and allegiances do

- I.e. Idolatry
- If you're suffering and you're angry, bitter, and always joyless it means you've idolized—and felt entitled to—whatever it is you're losing.
- Entitlement and self-pity stem from our belief that we deserve more than what we're getting—love, attention, respect, approval.
- **The gospel, however, frees us to revel in our expendability!**
- The gospel alone provides us with the foundation to maintain radical joy in remarkable loss.
- Joylessness and bitterness in the midst of pain happens when we lose something that we've held onto more tightly than God.

As Paul Tripp so probingly asks, "How is your present disappointment, discouragement, or grief a window on what has actually captured your heart?"

- = Depending on anything smaller than God to provide us with the security, significance, meaning, and value that we long for<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This whole page's content borrowed from my friend Tullian Tchividjian  
<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tullian/2010/11/11/suffering-does-not-rob-you-of-joy—idolatry-does/>  
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## Verses 15-18

While Paul is imprisoned in Rome other people are carrying on the task of preaching the Gospel

- Some people had good motives (the glory of God and an encouragement to Paul)
- Some people had bad motives (the glory of self and to spite Paul)
  - This is true today of almost all that we do (not just ministry)

v. 15

- **good will** = to preach the Gospel out of a sincere desire for the well-being of others
  - Refers here not only to the desire to see people saved but also to bless and encourage Paul (Cf. v 16: **out of love**)
- **Strife** = factious rivalry (Cf. **out of envy**)

v. 17

- **Out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives** (Literally = **not sincerely**)
  - Carries the idea of precious metal mixed with base alloy
  - They were mixing the pure gold of the Gospel with the base alloy of their jealousy and selfish ambition
- Basically they were jealous of Paul and saw his imprisonment an opportunity for them to **advance themselves**
  - **Ministry (and business, and life, and relationships) are rife with this attitude**
- But Paul refused to join the drama—instead he was gonna be happy the name of Jesus was being proclaimed and not worry about the name of Paul

The gospel tells us we don't need to spend our lives earning the approval of others because Jesus has already earned God's approval for us

The gospel frees us to realize that while we matter, we're not the point

v. 18

- They were not preaching a false Gospel (Paul would not have rejoiced in that)
- It was the right message with the wrong (and malicious) motives
- But you couldn't get Paul down about that—he was concerned about the Gospel going forth—not his reputation or standing before others
  - **When you understand that your significance and identity is anchored in Christ, you don't have to win – you're free to lose.**
  - This gospel understanding of self and what is truly important allowed Paul to sincerely **rejoice** (2x) even though it was **at his expense** in some ways

The gospel explains success in terms of giving, not taking; self-sacrifice, not self-indulgence; going to the back, not getting to the front

## Verses 19-26

### v. 19

- Paul believes prayer changes things

### v. 20

- **Shall not be put to shame** = he is not going to compromise
- **Whether by life or by death** = no matter what God does
- Cf. Daniel 3:16-18—**God is able, God will, but even if He does not**

### v. 21

- **For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain**

### v. 23

- This is not a **morbid desire** to die because life is so hard (though many of us could relate to such a feeling)
- This is rather a **sincere desire to be with** Jesus (I wonder how many of us can relate to such a feeling)
- ... **to die is gain** (v. 21)
  - **What we gain most in the gospel is Christ Himself**
  - Jude 24  
Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless **with great joy**

## But if Paul couldn't be **with** Christ, He was going to live **for** Christ

- v. 22<sup>a</sup>  
If I am to live on in the flesh this will mean **fruitful labor** for me...
- And in living for Christ he would be living for others
  - v. 24-25  
to remain on in the flesh is more necessary **for your sake...** I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.

The gospel tells me my identity and security is in Christ—this frees me to give everything I have because in Christ I have everything I need

Knowing that Jesus has covered my past and secured my future, I am now free to give away my present.

**What is keeping you from being able to give yourself away?**

**What is your supreme purpose in your life?**

### v. 20<sup>b</sup>

- **Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body** whether by life or by death

And this is a real situation for many of our brothers and sisters: **IDOP (SHOW VIDEO)**

Prayer points:

- Joy in the midst of pain
- Comfort in affliction
- Deliverance from bondage
- Boldness for believers
- The greater progress of the gospel
- Conversions of government officials
- Grace to glorify Christ in life or death