

## **OUR CHOICE TO REJOICE** **(Philippians 1:18b-26)**

You and I live in a world created by a God who has chosen to reveal Himself, and He had done so in many ways. Some people argue that there is no convincing evidence that God exists. I believe such people are very poor detectives because if we considered creation to be the crime scene, God's fingerprints are found all over it. Whether you look at the heavens with a telescope or the cellular world with a microscope, the intricate design of a Grand Designer is undeniable.

God has also made Himself known to the conscience and to the reason of those who will deal honestly with the evidence He has given us.

God has especially made Himself known through this book we call the Bible. I think it is important to note that God gave us a book to read rather than a video to watch. A video consists of images. Images have a way of bypassing the mind. You can sit and watch a movie or television show without ever really thinking.

A book, however, is made up of words, and those words are meant to be studied, dissected, and meditated upon. The Bible says we are to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. We love God with our mind when we interact with the Scriptures and seek to understand them.

I think that in heaven we just might get to watch videos produced, directed, and starring God. There might be a movie theater in every neighborhood of heaven. Wouldn't it be great to go to your local neighborhood theater, get buttery popcorn, a heavenly pop, take a seat, and watch God at work through the significant events of history?

You are walking down the street, you look up, and on the theater marquis sign. It says, "The Creation: Day 1." You say to yourself, "I got to see that." You sit down in that dark theater. The screen is dark. As the movie begins it is still dark. The narrator speaks: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth . . . And God said . . ." and then, you hear the voice of God Himself thundering, "Let there be light." Immediately, an explosion is heard, and light fills the screen. I want to watch the creation of the universe in living color. Don't you?

I can just envision a *Best of God* series. One video is entitled, *Moses and the Exodus*, starring not Charlton Heston but Moses. It is followed by, *Fire on the Mountain: The Giving of the Ten Commandments*. You get to see exactly what took place when Moses was up on that mountain with God, and what the people were doing down below (Viewer Discretion Advised).

Wouldn't it be wonderful to see all the great events of the Bible and history replayed? Maybe that will happen one day in heaven, but here on earth, we get to read about it. God's goal is not to entertain us but to enlighten and teach us. That is why we need to pay attention to what the text says.

With that in mind, turn to Philippians 1. Last week's message ended with v.18. Today's passage starts with the last part of v. 18. In v. 18, Paul said that he rejoiced over the fact that Jesus was being preached. It didn't much matter to him the motivation of those who preached. He was just glad they preached Jesus.

This is the first of 9 times that the word *rejoice* shows up in Philippians. The word *joy* is found 5 times in this letter. It has already been used once (v. 5). Philippians is, without any doubt, the most joyful letter Paul wrote of the 13 letters he penned that show up in the NT. The letter drips with joy despite the fact that he wrote it while being incarcerated in Rome. He was under house arrest and chained to a Roman guard 24-hours a day.

The second time *rejoice* shows up in the letter is in the later part of v. 18, and this where we begin. Paul wrote, “Yes, and I will rejoice.” Paul is saying, “I have made a choice, and that choice is to rejoice.” We can make that same choice to rejoice. From this passage, I intend to give you three reasons why you and I can rejoice. Let’s read vv. 18b-26.

We have said before that there is a difference between happiness and joy. Happiness is purely circumstantial. The same word that gives us happen is the word from which we get happiness. If things happen just right and go our way, we can be happy. When circumstances happen to go in a different direction, our happiness will go with it.

Joy is far more durable. It is not tied to circumstances. That is why Paul and Silas could sing at midnight in a jail in Philippi after having been severely beaten with rods. Their joy was present even though the circumstances didn’t warrant such joy. Years later, Paul could write a letter filled with joy even though Paul has been unjustly held for years.

Happiness is borne of fortunate circumstances while joy is a fruit grown in us by the work of the Holy Spirit.

There is also a difference between the words joy and rejoice. Joy is a noun. It is something we have while rejoice is a verb; it is something we do. To rejoice is to celebrate. I want you to catch three reasons while Paul, you, and I can make the choice to celebrate.

### **We Can Choose to Rejoice Because of Our God-based Confidence**

Look at the kinds of words Paul uses in vv. 19-20. He says, “I know,” “my deliverance,” “my eager expectation and hope,” and “full courage.” Paul was fully confident that when he stood before the Emperor, he would get a favorable response, and then he would be freed.

Paul gave two reasons in v. 19 as to why he was so confident. First, the believers in Philippi were praying for him, and second, the Spirit of Jesus was helping him. If you need deliverance, you need the prayers of God’s people and the help of the Holy Spirit.

During the early years of my ministry as a pastor, I saw people getting saved. There were boys and girls along with men and women of different ages. I wondered, “What is the common denominator between these people who are very different from one another?” I realized that everyone who was getting saved and baptized had two things in common. One, people were praying for them. And two, they were hearing the Word of God. The Bible says that the Word is the Sword of the Spirit. That is what the Spirit uses to do His work.

James Montgomery Boice says that the word *ashamed* in v. 20 carries the idea of *disappointment*. Paul was confident that he was not going to be disappointed with how

things turned out. Boice laid out three verses from the NT in which the word ashamed is used and shows how those are three things about which we need never to be disappointed.

- “I am not ashamed of the gospel,” wrote Paul in Romans 1:16. The gospel is the power of God. God uses the gospel message to change the lives of others and our own life.
- We read in 2 Timothy 1:12, “I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard until that Day what I have entrusted to Him.” Paul uses a banking metaphor. Your bank may fail, but God’s won’t. We have deposited all that we have and all that we are, even our very souls in His heavenly bank. We won’t lose a single dime. In fact, He pays dividends in the form of blessings we weren’t expecting. He will not disappoint us.

The third text that Boice covered was the one in our text, v. 20. He was convinced that Christ would be honored and magnified by his life or by his death, either one. He believed that God’s will was perfect. He couldn’t improve on God’s plan; so, Paul was good with whatever God chose.

Do you have that kind of confidence in God, or are you afraid that God is going to disappoint you with what He chooses? Do you think God needs your help in deciding what is best for you? Sure, there are going to be some sorrows in our lives, but I can guarantee you that there will be more sorrows if we insist on running our own lives.

One of the ways to increase our confidence in God is to reduce the confidence we have in ourselves. Why should you and I rely on God if we are relying on ourselves? Life has led me to realize that I am not nearly as clever, and as wise, and talented as I would like to believe I am. We need to right-size ourselves so that we can right-size God.

I like what John the Baptist said. It is recorded for us in John 3:30. He said of Jesus, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” This is what happened in Paul’s ministry. As he kept putting the spotlight on Jesus, his confidence in God’s ability and God’s plan for him grew and grew. As a result, he had reason to rejoice and celebrate.

We can and will celebrate, too, if we learn to put our confidence in God.

### **We Can Choose to Rejoice Because of Our God-given Perspective**

Paul makes an astounding statement in v. 21. This is a verse worth memorizing. Paul says, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Paul begins by personalizing this statement: *For to me*. “This may not be true of you yet, dear believers in Philippi, but I have come to this point.” I believe this is a point that all of us would do well to get to, as well.

Paul is saying two things. First, there is purpose in life. Second, there is profit in death.

Paul lived a Christ-focused life. Jesus was the center, and everything else was on the periphery. Paul was consumed with Jesus. He trusted Jesus. He loved Jesus. He obeyed Jesus. He preached Jesus. He followed Jesus. This was a reciprocal relationship because

Jesus loved Paul. He taught Paul. He inhabited Paul. He directed Paul. He used Paul to accomplish His purposes.

The Greeks had a motto: *Zane chrastos*. It meant, "Life is good." Paul coined a different model. Instead of *Zane chrastos*, he wrote, *Zane Christos*. It meant, "To live is Christ."

For Paul, to live meant Christ, and to die meant more of Christ. For him, whether he lived or died, it was a win-win proposition. When Paul's case came to the Emperor and he stood before Nero, it would go one of two ways. The Emperor might say, "I sentence you to time served. You are free to go." If that happened, Paul would have said, "That's great. I will have more time to serve Jesus." If the Emperor said, "Tomorrow at sunrise, your head will be separated from you neck," Paul would have said, "That's great. I'll be with Jesus." Either way, he won.

I remember reading a story told by a pastor. He went to see one of his church members who was dying of cancer. To her credit, she didn't pretend that everything was fine. She hurt. She wanted to live. But she knew that either way her faith would sustain her.

The pastor wrote, "She looked at me and said something I will never forget. She said, 'Either way, live or die, with faith you win.'"

How did Paul get to that point? How can you and I get to the point? I think most of us aren't there, yet.

Fill in the blank. "For to me, to live is \_\_\_\_\_, and to die is \_\_\_\_\_." How would you state that? Some might say:

- For to me, to live is to have a good time, and to die is the end of the party.
- For to me, to live is to make money, and to die is to lose it all.
- For to me, is to spend time with my family, and to die is to be all alone.

Paul was able to get to where he was because God gave him perspective. We talk about wanting God to give us comfort. How does God do that? Does He reach down with a long arm and a big hand, pat us on the head, and say, "There, there"? Is that how God gives us comfort? No. He gives us knowledge, and He gives us perspective. The words know, knowledge, know, and knowing are used 13 times in this letter. Five of those uses are in the first chapter. It shows up twice in today's text (vv. 19 & 25).

Perspective is critically important for the enjoyment of life. Let me illustrate that.

Before Boone Pickens gave hundreds of millions of dollars to the OSU athletic program and before the football stadium was re-done and became Boone Pickens Stadium, it was Lewis Field. Between the west wall of Gallagher-Iba Arena and the east endzone of the football field, there was a very unimpressive set of bleachers. On one occasion, I took my son to an OSU football game, and we sat in those bleachers and watched the game or rather, we tried to watch the game. We sat barely above ground level, and when the play was on the west end of the field, we could barely make out what was happening.

Through the years, I have watched OSU games from the east end zone, the west end

zone, the north side, the south side, and from club seating high above the field. The best vantage point I have found to watch an OSU game or any other game is from my sofa, just a few feet away from my flat screen TV. From that vantage point, I get replay, close up camera angles, and refreshments don't cost an arm and a leg.

When you have a better perspective of what is going on, the game of football and the game of life is far, more enjoyable. I have also discovered that when you are filled with grief, or anger, or fear, your perspective is distorted. It is like trying to watch a game from the bleachers on the east end of Lewis Field. You can't make out what is really happening.

Recently, my wife told me about a movement that is sweeping across America in which, instead of making New Year's Resolutions, people are encouraged to choose one word and focus on that one word for a year. Several months ago, she went to a workshop. A merchant opened up her shop in downtown Enid. She supplied paint, stencils, wood, and participants chose a word and painted that word on a block of wood. It can serve as a house decoration. The person can see his or her word daily and keep that word in the forefront of their thinking. Let me show you my wife's word. It is the word *Perspective*. I like the word she chose.

When we have a God-given perspective, we can see life and truth for the what they really are. We will have reason to celebrate. Conversely, when we lack a proper perspective we will grouse, complain, and throw a pity party. Which would you rather do? Which would you rather hear?

### **We Can Choose to Rejoice Because of Our God-ordained Assignment**

Had it been up to Paul to choose life or death, he was at a loss as to what to choose. The reality, however, is that it wasn't up to Paul to choose. He was simply to accept whatever assignment God had for him. The same is true for you and me, as well.

Look at vv. 22-23. The word *depart* in v. 23 is a military word. It meant *to break camp*. When soldiers set up a camp, they realized that camp was not their permanent camp. They were there until they received orders to move on or move forward. Paul was ready to break camp and move upward. That, however, wasn't his call, and it is not ours. We are to stay where we are until God moves us. Our assignment comes from God.

Paul came to an understanding of his assignment. Look at vv. 24-26. Paul believed that God still wanted to use him for the benefit of His people in Philippi and elsewhere. In v. 25, Paul said that he was convinced of this, and because he was, he knew he would remain for their progress and joy in the faith. Paul knew what his assignment was.

Do you know what your assignment is? You have one until God takes you home to heaven. As long as He leaves you here, you have work to do. God has no retirement program. You may retire from your career or your job, but you don't get to retire from serving God.

The NT teaches about spiritual gifts. These are God-given abilities we are to use to glorify God and build up His church. Spiritual gifts are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. In 1 Peter 4 we learn that there are two categories of spiritual gifts:

speaking gifts and serving gifts. When we exercise speaking gifts, we use our tongues. We will use them to teach, preach, evangelize, encourage, and lead. When we exercise serving gifts, we will use our hands to nurture, to help, and to provide whatever is needed.

It is hard to know what your exact assignment is until you know what your particular gifts are. Our broad assignment is to glorify God and bless His church. How we do that is based on how we are gifted and wired. Ask God to make you gifting and assignment clear to you. As He makes that known, serve Him faithfully, and you will know great joy.

Bruce McIver was the pastor of the Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas for 30 years. Several years after his retirement he wrote a book entitled, *Stories I Couldn't Tell While I was a Pastor*. I read that book as a young pastor. In that book, he tells about the time he was facing heart surgery. From his hospital bed on the eve of open heart surgery, he asked his cardiologist, Dr. Dudley Johnson, "Can you fix my heart?"

The physician, who was known for being short and to the point, answered, "Sure." Then he walked away.

After the 12-hour surgery, McIver asked Dr. Johnson, "In light of the blocked arteries that I had when I checked into the hospital, how much blood supply do I now have?"

"All you'll ever need," replied the doctor, and he walked away.

As he was being discharged from the hospital, McIver's wife, Lawanna, asked the doctor, "What about my husband's future quality of life?"

Dr. Johnson looked at her and said, "I fixed his heart; the quality of his life is up to him."

Part of one's quality of life is the ability to rejoice and celebrate. Our Great Physician is Jesus. He communicates with us more than Dr. Johnson. The Bible teaches:

- He healed you by giving you a new heart.
- He lives inside of you by His Holy Spirit.
- His Holy Spirit is about the business of teaching you and growing you.
- He has equipped you to serve Him and His Church.
- He has given you an assignment.
- He has promised to be with you to the very end of the age, and to make a home for you in heaven.

Now, I would say, the quality of your life is up to you.