

# HAPPY FOR WHAT?

## PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18

*If We Can Learn To Conform Our Will To God's Will,  
And If God Is Certain To Accomplish His Will,  
Then We Should Be Able To Rejoice In All Circumstances.*

## OUTLINE

### **I. HAPPY WHEN GOD USES ME (VS 12-14)**

*If We Can Understand That God Uses Difficult Circumstances As Well As Pleasant Circumstances To Accomplish His Will In Our Lives, ... We Can Learn To Rejoice Even During Difficult Times.*

- A. HAPPY TO BE USED BY GOD (12)
- B. HAPPY TO ENCOURAGE UNBELIEVERS (13)
- C. HAPPY TO ENCOURAGE BELIEVERS (14)

### **II. HAPPY WHEN GOD USES OTHERS (VS 15-18)**

*If We Can Learn To Be Focused On God's Will, ... We Can Rejoice When God Uses Others, ... Even If They Don't Always Agree With Us.*

- A. HAPPY FOR THOSE WHO AGREE WITH ME (15-16)
- B. HAPPY FOR THOSE WHO DISAGREE WITH ME (17)
- C. HAPPY THAT GOD'S WILL IS ACCOMPLISHED (18)

### **III. EPILOGUE**

# HAPPY FOR WHAT?

## PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18

This morning's text is going to be a little bit challenging for me to preach. Some of it has to do with the vagueness of Paul's relationship with the church in Rome and some of it has to do with understanding the full ramifications of what Paul is saying.

I think what Paul is saying is simple and straightforward. He is saying that he lives for only one purpose and that is to see the message of the gospel to reach as many people as possible. If people are hearing the gospel because Paul is in prison, then Paul is happy with that. If people are hearing the gospel message preached by people that Paul doesn't necessarily like or agree with, he is still happy that people are hearing the gospel.

Here is the secret of Paul's happiness. He wants what God wants. And as long as God is in control, and as long as God's will is being accomplished, then Paul is happy. Since God is always in control and since God always accomplishes His will, Paul always finds reasons for being happy, even in jail.

Can we say that about our lives? I don't know that I'm always happy when people find a church family. Let me give you an example. You know that I'm kind of a dress-down type of guy, and our church tends to dress-down as well, although some of you do dress nicely. Well one summer, I kept visiting a neighborhood family and encouraged them to come to church.

The father said, "Pastor, we'd love to come to church but we don't have nice clothes. We wouldn't feel right coming to church if we couldn't dress up.

I got some friends together, and we took the whole family shopping. We bought them suits, ties, dresses, and shoes. The next Sunday, I was looking forward to seeing the whole family come to church, but they didn't show up. The next Wednesday, I went to visit them again and asked why they didn't go to church.

The father said, "Oh pastor, we did go to church. When we got dressed up and saw how good we looked, we decided to go to the First Presbyterian Church in Evanston, where everybody dresses up."

I guess I should feel happy that I helped get them to church. Maybe we're not always happy because perhaps our agendas are not in line with God's agenda.

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I don't think this morning's concept is so hard to understand. In fact it's simple. However, I don't think I can even envision what it would look like in my everyday life. I don't think happiness or joy is a hard emotion to trace. We start with a desire. We want this or that. We want to achieve some desired goal. For example, we may want a promotion at work. We may want a certain car. We may want a particular boy or girl to like us. We may want a certain job or to get into a particular school. If we get what we want we are happy. If we don't get what we want, we are sad. If someone prevents us from getting what we want we become angry. I don't think this is too complicated.

And further, we have been accustomed to seeking pleasure. So when we receive pleasurable things in life, we are happy. When we receive difficult circumstances or painful experiences in life, we are unhappy. Pretty simple.

Here is where this morning's text comes in. Just think if we constantly desired something that we were guaranteed to get every time. Then we would always be happy. Here is the main idea of this morning's text. **IF WE CAN LEARN TO CONFORM OUR WILL TO GOD'S WILL, AND IF GOD IS CERTAIN TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL, THEN WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO REJOICE IN ALL**

**CIRCUMSTANCES.** God is sovereign. There is nothing that happens without His permission. God's will is certain to be accomplished. Remember, last week Paul said that he is certain that God will complete the good work He started in each one of us. If we conform our will so that it matches God's will, we are certain to receive what we desire. And if we continually receive what we desire, then we will be filled with happiness and joy.

### **I. HAPPY WHEN GOD USES ME (VS 12-14)**

*IF WE CAN UNDERSTAND THAT GOD USES DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES AS WELL AS PLEASANT CIRCUMSTANCES TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL IN OUR LIVES, ... WE CAN LEARN TO REJOICE EVEN DURING DIFFICULT TIMES.*

I don't think this concept is hard to understand. I think it's hard to swallow. Let's see how it worked out in Paul's life. In verses 12-14 we learn to be happy when God uses us. In other words, **IF WE CAN UNDERSTAND THAT GOD USES DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES AS WELL AS PLEASANT CIRCUMSTANCES TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL IN OUR LIVES, ... WE CAN LEARN TO REJOICE EVEN DURING DIFFICULT TIMES.**

#### **A. HAPPY TO BE USED BY GOD (12)**

Verse 12 challenges us to ask if we are really happy to be used by God. Most of us are happy to volunteer at church and do godly things, as long as everything else in our lives are going smoothly. But let's think about verse 12. Paul is a highly educated man. He was entitled to the best of his Jewish world and his Roman world. Paul came from a wealthy and influential family. Yet he is writing this letter from a Roman prison, chained to a Roman guard. In Roman prisons, you were dependent on your friends and family to bring you blankets, clothes and in some cases even food. Here is Paul, the Apostle appointed personally by Jesus Christ to be the apostle who would bring the gospel message to the Greek and Roman world, sitting in prison. Don't these people know how educated and how important Paul is? Evidently not, he is chained to a Roman guard.

How would you feel in this situation? How would I feel in this situation? I'm sure I would be angry. I would be trying to get all sorts of high-powered lawyers together. I would be preparing my lawsuit against them. I would be angry and bitter and whine, "Why me?"

Verse 12 starts out with the common letter writing phrase, "*Now I want you to know.*" This is the common phrase used in ancient letters that acted as a transition between the introduction and the body of the letter. We would say something like, "I want you to know that I am fine and I hope this letter finds you the same." This section will go through verse 26.

Here is where Paul differs. Instead of talking about how he is, he talks about the progress the gospel is making. But as we will see, for Paul, talking about the progress God is making with the gospel is directly related to how Paul is doing personally.

We would expect him to say, "The jail is damp, the food sucks, and I can't even go to the bathroom alone without this Roman guard chained to me. I'm cold, tired, and upset." But look at verse 12. He says, "What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel." The word advance is a military term. It means to go forward despite all obstacles. The obstacles are being cleared away and the gospel is advancing. Paul has an interesting perspective here. He is the one in chains, but his perception is that the Roman government and the enemies of Christianity are the ones on the defensive.

That is a perspective that we must keep in our minds. I think we as Christians feel that we are on the defensive. We think the world and culture is so powerful, that we are timid. Jesus gave the "keys to the kingdom" to the Apostle Peter and referring to the church said, "The gates of Hell cannot prevail against you." We always have this defensive posture in our minds. We are hiding behind the gates, pushing with all our might to keep the gates of hell from swallowing us up. We miss the whole point.

We are the Army of Jesus Christ. We are armed with the gospel message that sets people free. We are on the offensive, and the gates of Hell cannot hold us back. We will break down the very gates and strongholds of hell. There is nothing that can stop us.

We have the message that sets people free. People think sex will bring them love and a sense of belonging. People think guns and weapons will bring them security. People think getting money and power will bring them satisfaction and meaning in life. These things only bring addictions, broken lives, and a hunger far more that can ever be satisfied.

We know that what everybody really desires can be found in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We feel truly loved when we come to realize that God loves us so much that He sent His Son Jesus to die for our sins so that we could be in a love relationship with Him. We feel secure when we realize that we are no longer alienated from God and that we are no longer His enemies. We are His children when we receive Jesus Christ. And we find true meaning and purpose in life as we help others find freedom from all their fears and enslavement to the things of Satan and this world. We have a powerful message.

## **B. HAPPY TO ENCOURAGE UNBELIEVERS (13)**

Paul's goal is to see the gospel message advance. And now he finds himself unjustly accused and unjustly jailed. But look at verse 13. He is happy to encourage unbelievers. If this was Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, then here was his situation. He was in a privately rented house. He was involved in a high profile case. He was chained to a guard 24 hours a day. The group of soldiers that was assigned to guard him was the Praetorian Guard. They were a group of elite soldiers that were ultimately assigned to guard the emperor. As time went on this group of soldiers became so powerful they became known as "emperor makers" since they had so much power in deciding who the next emperor would be.

Since the guards would see Paul going about his everyday routine, Bible reading, singing, praying, writing letters to churches, counseling people and leading people to salvation, they would certainly get a good solid dose of the gospel. And to be certain, by their sheer numbers, there were soldiers who gave their lives to Christ in faith. At any rate, the stories of Paul and the message of the gospel would be being talked about among the palace guard.

Here is the point Paul is making. All sorts of people, including Paul acted freely. Several groups of Romans, Greeks, Jews and others opposed Jesus and the message of the gospel. Through certain events, Paul was falsely accused and jailed. Paul used his Roman citizenship to appeal to Caesar, and now found himself in jail awaiting trial. Had not all this happened to Paul, the Palace Guard and all the people associated with them may never have heard about the gospel. God allowed all these people to exercise their free will, yet at the same time, God orchestrated this whole thing so that these people could hear the gospel. God's sovereignty ensured that the gospel advance throughout the Praetorian Guard. Again, let me point out the irony. Paul is a prisoner in chains. Keep in mind the military nature of the word advanced. God advanced the gospel forward into the elite Praetorian Guard through the Apostle Paul ... and for this Paul was happy.

## **C. HAPPY TO ENCOURAGE BELIEVERS (14)**

And further, as verse 14 illustrates, Paul was happy to encourage his fellow believers in Rome. So far, Christianity was considered to be a sect of Judaism and Judaism was a legal religion. However, there was an uproar in Rome about 15 years earlier. It seems as if Jews and Christians were arguing and the Emperor Claudius kicked them all out of Rome. By the time Paul writes his letter to the church in Rome around the year 57 AD, it seems as if they are all trickling back. And in the year 64 AD Nero starts to persecute Christians. It would stand to reason that the Christian Church wanted to maintain a somewhat low profile.

But now it seems that when some of the Christian brothers and sisters saw how Paul handled his imprisonment as an opportunity to further the gospel, they too gained some courage and boldness and started becoming more vocal about spreading the word of God.

From this section I'd like to challenge us with two points. First of all, we must be aware of the fact that younger Christians are often not only listening to what we say we believe, they are watching how we live our lives. That means that if we are leaders in the church, we need to be extra diligent to make sure what we profess we believe is consistent with the way we are living our lives. There would be nothing more disheartening for young people to see their Sunday School teachers renting pornography, or being sexually immoral, or cheating or lying or being downright nasty. If we are going to be leaders in the church, then we need to be leaders in holy living. That goes for Christian parents as well. Our children will see the way we live. That speaks much louder than any verse we quote at them. My prayer is that when people see the way we comport ourselves, they too will become more bold and serious about living out their faith.

Secondly, we must keep in mind that if we are truly disciples of Christ, we will need to follow in the way of the cross. God will often use difficult and trying circumstances in our lives. We will all be treated unfairly. We will all experience sickness, loss of loved ones, and betrayal. We will all experience disappointments in this life. But the question is, are we solely focused on serving God and being conformed to His image or are we still looking for happiness in the things of this world?

I have to say that I understand this concept, but I am still a long way from implementing it fully into my life. I have the desire now to live this way, but still when things go wrong, I'm not always looking for what God is doing in and through me right away. Usually I'll get it over a period of time, but until I finally get it, I'm not usually joyful. My goal is to start to recognize God's hand right away. If we can learn to be single-minded for God's will, we can be joyful always. **IF WE CAN UNDERSTAND THAT GOD USES DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES AS WELL AS PLEASANT CIRCUMSTANCES TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL IN OUR LIVES. WE CAN LEARN TO REJOICE EVEN DURING DIFFICULT TIMES.**

Let me just add this so there is no mistake. Paul is not saying that suffering is good in itself. What he is saying is that no matter what happens to us in life, God will use it for good: for our good, for others good, and for the good of His Name.

## **II. HAPPY WHEN GOD USES OTHERS (VS 15-18)**

*IF WE CAN LEARN TO BE FOCUSED ON GOD'S WILL, ...  
WE CAN REJOICE WHEN GOD USES OTHERS, ...  
EVEN IF THEY DON'T ALWAYS AGREE WITH US.*

Verses 15-18 present us with a concept that may be a little more difficult to swallow. Can we be happy when God uses others? This doesn't have to do with the lazy people in church who are glad to see others doing all the work. This has to do with people who sometimes irritate us or disagree with us. Here is what Paul is after in this section. **IF WE CAN LEARN TO BE FOCUSED ON GOD'S WILL, WE CAN REJOICE WHEN GOD USES OTHERS ... EVEN IF THEY DON'T ALWAYS AGREE WITH US.** Even though Paul gets to this place, we can tell that's an emotional stretch for him as well. Here is another place he uses poetry to express his passion. He is going to use a double Chiasm. A chiasm is where the poet states two things. Then the next time he reverses them. Paul does this twice so it would look like a zigzag if we diagrammed it. Look at verse 15. He first mentions those who preach Christ out of envy. Then he mentions those who preach out of goodwill. Then in verse 16 he describes the goodwill preachers first and then secondly in verse 17 he addresses the ill-willed preachers. And then in verse 18 he reverts back to mentioning the ill-willed first then the good-willed.

### **A. HAPPY FOR THOSE WHO AGREE WITH ME (15-16)**

In verses 15-16 Paul is happy for those who agree with him. He describes them as preaching Christ out of goodwill. In other words, they have no ulterior motive. They love God, they love Paul, and they love the lost. Their desire is to partner with Paul while he is spreading the gospel within the Palace Guard; they are spreading the gospel throughout the city of Rome. Keep in mind that Paul is writing this letter to the church in Philippi, so he is also including them in these goodwill preachers.

## **B. HAPPY FOR THOSE WHO DISAGREE WITH ME (17)**

But there seems to be some dissension in the church in Rome concerning Paul. Sure, it was easy to be happy for all the people and churches in spreading the gospel who were in complete agreement with Paul. But as verse 17 challenges us, can we be happy for those who disagree with us? Here is where we have to be careful not to read too much into the text. First of all, these are not Judaizers. These are not the groups of people following Paul around trying to convert people to Judaism before they became Christians. These were not false teachers. Paul admits that they are preaching Christ. He seems to be indicating that they have a grudge against Paul, and they are using his imprisonment as an opportunity to make themselves more prominent. He questions their motives. They seem to have personal agendas. We don't have enough information to determine who these people were or what disagreement they had with Paul.

## **C. HAPPY THAT GOD'S WILL IS ACCOMPLISHED (18)**

The important point is found in verse 18. We need to be happy that God's will is accomplished. It seems to me as I read these verses that even though it is hard for Paul to swallow; nevertheless he is ready to swallow it. Look at verse 18. Paul says, "It doesn't matter what their motives are. What really matters is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is being preached."

Now look at the end of verse 18. He says, "And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice." Let me just point this out. Bible translations differ as to the punctuation of this verse. Keep in mind, when this letter was written, it was a letter. There were no verse divisions, and not always punctuation. The NASB and the NLT make this whole verse part of the sentence. In other words, Paul is saying, "Because of this I rejoice ... Yes, and I will continue to rejoice."

The NIV and ESV make this last phrase, "Yes, and I will continue to rejoice," as a phrase that leads into verse 19. Here again, I'm going to take a bold stand. I think they are both right. I think Paul could be punctuating what he just has emphasized that the gospel of Jesus Christ is going forward, and transitioning to thanking them for their partnership in the next verse.

Paul is full of joy because the message of salvation is going forward unhindered. The gospel is going forward to the most unlikely places. It is reaching the Palace Guard and all people the soldiers come in contact with. Jesus may be being discussed in the palace, in the barracks, in taverns, in brothels, and in homes. The soldiers' wives may be talking with others. Prisoners may be talking with other prisoners. Prostitutes may be talking to other prostitutes. And all because Paul is in jail.

On the other hand, people that may have had preconceived notions of Paul may now be hearing the same message from Paul's rivals. When Paul thinks about it, he smiles, he laughs, he rejoices.

What do we learn from this section? In our culture, there are thousands of churches. Some are very much like us and some are very different. Our tendency is to be jealous of other churches' success. We need to catch a world-wide vision of the church. Devon Church is not the only legitimate church. I am not the best pastor in the world. We need to be happy when we see people coming to faith in Christ. I think I can honestly say this. I am glad to see churches succeed.

One of the fastest growing churches in our area is Willow-Creek. I know many people are anxious about Willow-Creek planting churches near our churches. I personally am glad for Willow-Creek and for what they are doing. I would be happy to see them build a branch in our neighborhood. After all, I'm not reaching anybody here with the Gospel. We are not seeing people being converted by the hundreds. I can honestly say I would rejoice if Willow-Creek built a church across the street from ours. I do want to see this neighborhood won for Christ. If we're not doing it, I'll be glad to see somebody who is.

It's easy to criticize other churches for what they're doing. I think we need to continue to be faithful to the mission we have been given. And we should rejoice when we see people giving their lives to Christ and

going to church. I know I am. Let's use our energy to pursue what God has given us to do and let's rejoice when God uses others as well.

Let's even make this a little more personal. We are not to be jealous of other people when God is doing good things in their lives. Sometimes when we don't like someone, we are secretly happy when things go badly for them and we are jealous when things go well for them. But that should never be. I know this is hard, especially if there is some sort of rivalry, hard feelings, or egos involved. But **IF WE CAN LEARN TO BE FOCUSED ON GOD'S WILL, WE CAN REJOICE WHEN GOD USES OTHERS, EVEN IF THEY DON'T ALWAYS AGREE WITH US.**

### III. EPILOGUE

I know this passage is hard to swallow because it doesn't match our experience. I don't give a whole lot of thought to the Kingdom of God as I live my everyday life. If my kids find a good job, if my wife is healthy, if my mom and aunt are doing well, I'm happy. If I find a good parking space, if I get a card in the mail, if I find some unexpected cash in my bank account, I'm happy. You see, I think I'm more self-centered than I am God-centered, and that's why this passage is so hard for me to digest. However, I do know that the truth of this passage is certain. **IF WE CAN LEARN TO CONFORM OUR WILL TO GOD'S WILL, AND IF GOD IS CERTAIN TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL, THEN WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO REJOICE IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES.** You see, my happiness will no longer be dependent on circumstances. I will learn to expect both good and bad circumstances. But I will also expect God to work in me and through me during all circumstances. I don't know who wrote this story, but I think it gives us some perspective.

"Sometimes we wonder, 'What did I do to deserve this,' or 'Why did God have to do this to me?' Here is a wonderful explanation!

A daughter is telling her Mother how everything is going wrong, she's failing algebra, her boyfriend broke up with her and her best friend is moving away.

*Meanwhile, her Mother is baking a cake and asks her daughter if she would like a snack, and the daughter says, 'Absolutely Mom, I love your cake.'*

*'Here, have some cooking oil,' her Mother offers.*

*'Yuk,' says the daughter.*

*'How about a couple of raw eggs?'*

*'Gross, Mom.'*

*'Would you like some flour then? Or, maybe baking soda?'*

*'Mom those are all yucky!'*

*To which the Mother replies: 'Yes, all those things seem bad all by themselves. But, when they are put together in the right way, they make a wonderfully delicious cake! God works the same way.'*

Many times we wonder why He would let us go through such bad and difficult times. Many times we become discouraged when others seem to be doing well and we are struggling. God is building His kingdom.

When we can truly learn to pray, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth (in my life) as it is in heaven," we will start to find happiness in all circumstances and we too, with Paul will rejoice. Yes, we will continue to rejoice!