

Message Series: **'Fulfilled? Experiencing Joy in Unexpected Places'**

Message Series: **'A Fresh Look at Current Circumstances'**

Scripture Source: **Philippians 1:12-30**

Date: Sunday, January 18, 2015

Speaker: John Gamer

'Under the Circumstances'

Who of us hasn't used this phrase to explain why we are 'down' or discouraged? We often view certain circumstances as a 'culprit' to be blamed for why we feel the way we do and why we struggle with a negative perspective. Illustrate:

Not so with Paul. He expressed an unusual perspective on personal circumstances. As we listen to his story, be open to insights for you and your unique circumstances!

Where You'd Rather Not Be...what will you choose?

Let me read a succinct assessment of where Paul has landed in his adventure.

"This is the man who wanted to go to Rome as a preacher in order to testify of his faith before the Emperor Nero. Instead, he wound up in Rome as a prisoner...he was illegally arrested in Jerusalem, misrepresented before the court, incorrectly identified as an Egyptian renegade, entangled in the red tape of political machinery, and finally granted a trip across the Mediterranean, only to encounter a storm and be shipwrecked...arrived in Rome, he was incarcerated and virtually forgotten for two years." (C.Swindoll Laugh Again pg. 52)

This is the man behind this 104 verse letter that drips joy, contentment, purpose and fulfillment. How did he pull this off? He made an ongoing choice to find joy and purpose in his relationship with Jesus.

Here he is, chained to a Roman guard for hours on end. His movements are greatly constricted. Chains chaff at his wrists. He could be negative, sour, and self-absorbed, but he is anything but. He chooses joy and purpose, and hope flows as a result. Before we delve into his circumstances and choices let's pause and look at our circumstances.

Any 'chains' clanging? Are you constricted and limited because of specific circumstances? Are you in a 'place' or circumstance that really annoys or aggravates you? That is draining life out of you? Where are you?

- A lingering and debilitating illness
- A loveless marriage
- Uncertain job future
- Concerns over the choices of loved ones
- Emotional struggles
- Spiritual uncertainty
- Relational strains
- Financial difficulties
- Is there something you would add to the list?

What choices are you making? Worrying chronically? Avoiding critical conversations? Taking full responsibility to deal with issues? Getting and staying angry? Blaming others? Seriously, when you are where you wish you weren't, how are you responding? Cursing the darkness or lighting a candle?

What can we learn from Paul's choices, convictions, concerns, and challenges for others?

Circumstances re-Defined: Philippians 1:12

This is amazing and profoundly counter-cultural in perspective. It is like he is saying, 'I don't see my circumstances as a culprit to be blamed for unhappiness; no, what is unfolding is an opportunity for

the message of the grace, love and power of Jesus to get air time. That excites me. That infuses me with purpose.'

In Paul's situation, a steady procession of Roman soldiers are a 'captive audience' to the prisoner! Regarding the palace guard, 9000 soldiers. I am sure that Paul smiled often at the irony of the situation. Illustrate: military image "progress...used to denote the progress or advance of an army that has to make its way through forests and over mountains." (Muller)

What about you and me? Are you in a circumstance that could be an opportunity to give voice to the grace, power, and truth of Jesus...in how you are coping, responding, and talking? Illustrate:

Consequences: Philippians 1:13-14

Spiritual seekers are being confronted with the potent message of Jesus, and some are becoming followers of Jesus. That is a fantastic consequence. But, it would never have happened if Paul had become sullen, cynical and withdrawn. Christians are inspired by how Paul is handling his current circumstances and greater expressions of bold, courageous, and fearless Christ following are popping up all over the place.

Folks, let's take full responsibility for how we act, respond and speak. There are people in your world and mine watching and listening to us. To you. What is 'becoming clear' to people in your world? Are my words and actions building 'bridges' to God...or 'barriers'? Starting with our families and close friends. 1 Peter 3:15-16, Psalm 40:3 Read

Cheerleaders and Critics: Philippians 1:15-17

Some people stood with Paul, others took pot shots at him, hoping to advance their own 'name' and agenda. See Message rendering. Paul appreciated supportiveness but was not devastated by his critics. He took them in stride.

Be thankful for the people that cheer you on...and give over to God the critics who really don't like you!

Convictions: Philippians 1:18-19

As long as the message of Jesus gets 'air time' Paul is thrilled. Even if the motives of a messenger are tainted, the message matters more. This message of forgiveness of sins, strength and wisdom for the journey of life, the hope of heaven, a changed life...this message touching and transforming lives gives great joy to Paul. Why? Because Jesus meant the world to Paul for the profound change he experienced by encountering Jesus. Remember...joy is both a choice and consequence; it is not a circumstance. Paul lived this truth with conviction.

What of you and me? Can we taste joy and fulfillment when life is hard because an opportunity to personally experience and then express to others in word and life the grace and power of Jesus is given us?

Resources and Resolves: Philippians 1: 19-26

Humility leaks from these words. In his arduous circumstances Paul needs and appreciates the prayers of others and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life. He knew he couldn't live triumphantly in isolation or on will power alone. He so appreciates the ongoing prayers of fellow Christians. And, the empowering work of the Spirit of God is massively important to Paul. Compare Romans 8:10-11, Galatians 5:16-18. No wonder he later states: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." 4:13

This may be one of the most important insights of the message. Don't hide your hard circumstances from a few trusted people and God. Share selectively, but share. Ask for prayer. Ask God for strength and perspective in your hard reality. Illustrate: Women of Impact prayer team

Is there a brutal circumstance that you need to talk about with a trusted person? Please do...God often works through people to encourage and direct us. 2 Corinthians 5:7

Will you humble yourself to a trustworthy person and talk about your painful circumstance? Who might that be? If we can help, please talk with us. Don't overlook this invaluable resource.

Paul also articulates specific resolves in this section of Scripture.

Resolve # 1: vss.20-21 – A bold, courageous following of Jesus that is evident, in life and in death.

"Christ magnified" The character and conduct of Jesus made tangible in my here and now life. In your life. At the heart of Paul's mindset and heartbeat is Jesus. "for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

A daily resolve that is a choice made, regardless of emotions or circumstances. Begins with trusting in Christ as Saviour. Identifying with Jesus publicly through Baptism. Have you?

Resolve # 2 Vss.22-26 – This is an incredibly unselfish perspective. Paul is resolved to be a person whose life and actions actually help other people experience progress in their life of joyous faith in Christ. He is willing to forego being with Jesus which is all 'upside.' He yearns that his life enriches their lives.

Let's pause for a moment...are we that mindful of others and our opportunity to spiritually enrich them, even when we are in tough circumstances? Who can you encourage spiritually? Does your presence with others give them reason for hope and joy? I think these are very important questions, what about you?

A Bold Challenge: Philippians 1:27-30

Live in a way that reveals the reality of Jesus, in message, character, and conduct...individually and as a church family. We live in a culture that is increasingly antagonistic towards speaking about and living out the Christian faith. We are called to not only believe in Christ but at times to suffer for our allegiance to Him and His message. We will be opposed at times. Don't be intimidated or become cowardly. Ask God for strength to be bold and fearless, without becoming obnoxious and harshly aggressive. God will give us strength to be faithful to Him and His life changing message. Yet, we must learn to appreciate and respect each other, being mindful that purposeful cooperation can be a potent force for God and his mission.

A Fresh Look at Your Circumstances

Is there a specific circumstance you need to identify as painful and difficult? _____

Will you surrender that circumstance to God and ask Him to teach you, refine your character, and deepen your trust in Him?

Will you share that circumstance with a trusted person and ask for their prayers and help?

Will you ask God and a trusted person for wisdom to know what you need to learn, understand, and do...and learn to understand what only God can do?

Your circumstances...culprit to be blamed, or an opportunity to grow, serve, experience the nearness of Christ and share Him with others? Your choice. My choice. What will it be today?