

A GOSPEL ORIENTATION

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-18

Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: the former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

For centuries a tradition let observant Brits know when their Monarch was in residence at Buckingham Palace.

When her Royal Standard, the Queen's own personal flag, flapped from the mast atop any of her palaces, it meant the Queen was in the house. When the flagpole was empty, it meant the Queen was visiting elsewhere.

To this day, the Royal Standard is never flown at half-mast. There is always a monarch on the throne, so the royal flag is never lowered as a sign of mourning or grief.

The first time I studied Paul's letter to the Philippians I read a commentary that used this as a illustration.

It noted, *the theme of Philippians is joy* - then suggested *joy is the flag that flies from the mast of our lives when Jesus is residing in the palace of our hearts.*

Certainly, that's true - but I never liked the illustration, for its summary of Philippians is woefully incomplete...

Time and circumstances though, have now rounded out the picture... In 1997 Princess Diana, the most beloved of the British royals, died while trying to escape the paparazzi. She was a victim in a terrible car crash.

Diana's death was a crushing loss to her people. The entire United Kingdom was brokenhearted over what had happened to Princess Di. In fact, the public grew angry when Buckingham Palace refused to fly a flag at half mast. *It seemed wrong that there was no public sign of mourning.* But the Queen was in Balmoral, hundreds of miles away, and in keeping with the tradition, no flag was to be flown when the Queen was not in residence.

Well in the end, *the royal slight* created such a controversy that Queen Elizabeth offered a compromise.

The Royal Standard continues to flap from the flagpole only when the Queen is present. But now, Great Britain's national flag (*the Union Jack*) flies at Buckingham Palace when the Queen is not in residence.

And if the Queen decrees, the flag can be lowered to half-mast as a sign of grief - and in honor of a deserving person. This is what happened during Princess Diana's funeral, as well as on multiple occasions since.

Thus, a new protocol has been implemented, *and it makes for a far better way to illustrate the theme of Philippians...* It's true, as the Queen's flag is evidence that she resides in her palace, joy is proof that Jesus lives in a life. **Where Jesus rules, joy will reign.**

But there are times in a believer's life when we do suffer, and grieve, and experience loss - but that doesn't mean Jesus has abandoned us. King Jesus still resides on the throne of our heart. And His presence always brings joy - just at times, it's a joy tempered with sorrow.

In short, **the joy of Jesus can fly at half-mast.**

The book of Philippians *is* about joy - but the joy we find in Jesus isn't just *good times* and *happy feelings*.

Paul writes this letter from prison. He's on death row. *Yes, in his heart there is a great joy* - even though the circumstances in his life are painful and excruciating.

Here's the true theme of Philippians, **joy at half-mast.**

Because Jesus rules in good times *and* in troublesome times, joy still reigns despite our outward circumstances - even in difficulties, and heartbreaks, and tragedies - even when the flag is lowered to half-mast.

It's amazing, that a letter who's theme is joy, begins with two men in jail. We read 1:1, "**Paul and Timothy, bondservants** (or literally **slaves**) **of Jesus Christ...**"

This is what led to Paul and Timothy's arrest. The reckless abandon of their faith to go anywhere, do anything to spread the Gospel got them incarcerated.

They were truly Gospel-oriented people.

It was the year 62 AD. Paul is awaiting his day in court before the wicked emperor, Nero. Whether he lives or dies - whether he gets the thumbs up or the thumbs down - Paul's plight is about to be decided by the whim of a egomaniac. *And it could go either way...*

Yet throughout this letter, the man remains jubilant.

Philippians is one of four letters Paul wrote - along with Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon - that we call "**The Prison Epistles.**" They were written during Paul's

imprisonment in Rome. He's behind rusted bars, yet bursting with joy. *Philippians is joy from a jail cell.*

But we're going to discover that *Philippians* is also about *joy from a doctor's office, where you've just been diagnosed with a cancer - or joy in the unemployment line, after being fired from a job - or joy at a friend's funeral, alongside a grieving family - or joy in the principal's office, where your child is trouble - or joy at the mailbox, after receiving a foreclosure letter...*

Joy at half-mast is the theme of *Philippians*! Even in suffering, joy is still the proof that Jesus is in the house.

And finding that joy in the midst of such dire situations is the secret revealed in these four chapters.

Paul addresses his readers, **"to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi..."** We'll discover by the affection he shows the *Philippians* that this church was Paul's favorite. The saints in Philippi were the first believers in Europe. They were pioneers of the Gospel.

In 52 AD Paul set out on his second missionary journey... He was fresh from the Jerusalem Council, where the apostles had decided that the Gentiles didn't need to observe the Sabbath, or be circumcised, or keep kosher to become pleasing to God. In essence, *they didn't have to become Jews to be Christians.*

A right standing with God is achieved apart from the Law - *in Christ alone, by faith alone, thanks to grace alone.* What a shot in the arm this was to Paul's evangelistic efforts! He now ministers to Gentiles with the full authority and support of the

Jerusalem Church.

Paul traveled westward, first to Galatia to visit the churches he and Barnabas started on his first trip.

He then wanted to go south to Ephesus... then north into Bithynia... but in both cases he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit. God had even greater ambitions for the Gospel than Paul. The vast pagan hordes of Europe, and the capitol of the empire, the great metropolis of Rome - desperately needed the Gospel. The Holy Spirit's prohibitions funneled Paul westward toward the coast - toward the Dardanelles and the town of Troas.

And it was there along the Turkish Straits that Paul had a vision. He saw a man from Macedonia calling for him to cross over the Aegean Sea and help them.

Paul immediately concludes the vision is God's way of saying, "*go west young man... with the Gospel!*"

And the first place they settle in Europe is this Greek town of Philippi. It was a smaller city, maybe 10,000 people, in the region of Macedonia. Acts 16 recounts the start of this church. *And what a cast of characters!*

Apparently, there were few Jews in town - *not even the ten men required to have a synagogue*. But there were a few Jews and God-fearers who met by the river outside of town for Sabbath worship and prayer.

As soon as Paul learned of their assembly he paid a visit, and a leading businesswoman - her name was Lydia - became Christianity's first convert on European soil. She and all her household came to faith in Jesus.

After Lydia's conversion came the demon-possessed girl who pestered Paul with unwanted advertising. She followed Paul and Silas shouting "These men are servants of the Most High God." She was a disruption.

Finally, Paul cast out the demon and eased her pain. I suppose she too became a member of the Church.

Of course, the girl's handlers didn't like what Paul had done. Without the demon she could no longer tell fortunes and make them a profit - so they dragged Paul and his sidekick Silas before the city magistrates - had the two men beaten with rods and thrown into prison.

Yet as this letter will testify, nothing dampened Paul's joy - not even a Roman beating - for at midnight he and Silas were singing praises to God. They must've been rock songs for an earthquake rocks the prison, swings open the doors, and loosens the prisoner's shackles.

In the aftermath, the jailer and his family give their lives to Jesus - again, adding members to the church.

Thus, "*the saints in Philippi*" Paul writes of, included a successful businesswoman, a slave girl and former Satanist, and a bruising jailer and his family. Later we'll learn of two contentious women, and a faithful pastor.

This was the surprising beginnings of the Church.

The Philippians were a diverse group - most from unsavory backgrounds. But they had one commonality, their lives had been radically changed by the Gospel.

What a contrast to *modern* church growth methods that implore pastors to narrow their focus to a targeted demographic - *usually white, middle-class, thirty-somethings*. This was not how Paul grew the church!

He trusted in the power of the Gospel to reach anybody and everybody. He believed it had the power to bring folks together - and even keep them together.

This is why he was so proud of what God had done in Philippi... a successful business woman, a delivered demoniac, a tough-as-tacks jailer... *can you imagine three more diverse people?* Yet the glue that bound them was the realization they were *"saints in Christ..."*

And this was not just theoretical. Their unity in Jesus was more than sweet, feel-good sentimentalism.

They were living out their unity in an organized community. That's why Paul words it, *"to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi with the bishops and deacons..."* The Philippians were living life under a common leadership. They were functioning practically.

The word *"Bishop"* means *"overseer"* - *"Deacon"* means *"servant."* These were the two categories of leadership in the early church that helped the pastors.

The *"bishops,"* or *elders*, concerned themselves with the spiritual needs of the fellowship. The *"deacons"* were *designated doers*. They served material needs.

These officers were proof the Philippians valued their togetherness. They realized all of life has to have a structure. Thus, they organized to promote their unity.

I hear people say, “*Hey, I believe in Jesus, I just don’t want to have anything to do with the organized church.*” Well, the only church you read about in the NT is an organized church. God saves us spiritually, but then guides us practically, through elders and deacons.

The Philippians shared in the life-changing good news of Jesus. They wanted to live it out and spread it around, so they embraced leaders to help them.

And to this church Paul writes, “*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

My daughter, Natalie, has twins - a boy and a girl.

Before Kate and Luke were born, Natalie revealed their gender to the family. She served us cake, and when she cut it the slices were *half pink* and *half blue*.

There were two colors per slice. And this is true of the good news of Jesus. It’s a slice of God’s blessing in two colors: *grace and peace*. Grace - *God’s unmerited love* - drew Jesus to the cross. Now peace reigns in its wake. But to know God’s peace you first have to be a recipient of His grace. It’s one slice, but in two colors.

Then Paul writes in verse 3, “*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now...*”

When Paul thought of the Philippians - *Lydia, the girl, the jailer, the others...* his mind was flooded with fond feelings. He was endeared to them - but not because they had grabbed a cup of coffee one morning, or gone to dinner at the

other's house, or chatted after church.

Their fellowship was more than casual socializing.

Paul calls it, *“your fellowship in the gospel.”* These people were held in the grip of the Gospel. Their lives had been altered by the same change agent. They all sensed the same commitment. The Philippians were in this new life together. They had made many of the same sacrifices, and shared similar experiences. They were all satellites orbiting around the same Gospel.

It's sad when a Christian hops from church to church looking for a fellowship that *“feels”* right - where they *“fit”* in. That's not real fellowship. It's just socialization.

I suppose it's okay to find some people you like... *a few girlfriends, or card partners, or fishing buddies* - but don't mistake that for the *“fellowship of the Gospel.”*

It's not going to bring you the fulfillment you desire.

Once in a GQ interview NBA superstar, Kobe Bryant, was asked about his friendships. He said, *“I have “like minds.” I've been fortunate to play in Los Angeles, where there are a lot of people like me. Actors. Musicians. Businessmen. Obsessives. People who feel like God put them on earth to do whatever it is they do.*

Do we have time to build great friendships? No. Do we have time to socialize and to hang out aimlessly? No. Do we want to do that? No. We want to work.”

Later in the article Kobe mourns a lack of committed friends, but in a sense I understand what he's saying...

What was vital to the Apostle Paul wasn't hanging out and socializing with lots of people, *as much as it was finding folks who were committed to doing what God put us on earth to do, and working with them to fulfill that goal.* The **"fellowship of the Gospel"** isn't as much about being **"buddies"** as it is finding **"like minds."**

This is what binds people in deeply committed ways... *Two soldiers in a foxhole fighting the same enemy... Stakeholders in a business pulling for the same prize... Teammates facing the same challenge...* not just folks sitting around, and chewing the fat.

This is why every recollection of the Philippians stirred in Paul a deep and fond affection. His thoughts of them spawned *a prayer and a smile.* From the first time they met, to that moment, their fellowship had been more than pats on the back - they had co-labored in and for the Gospel. They were **Gospel-oriented.**

They lived, and fought, and sacrificed for the Gospel. If you've been church hopping, hoping to find good vibrations, find a church **that's Gospel-oriented** and regardless of the feel good effect, make it your home.

Eventually you'll create deep bonds in the Gospel.

And here's what also brought Paul great joy when he thought of the Philippians... *his confidence was in God not the Philippians.* He writes, **"Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ..."**

One of the reasons Paul could rejoice - could literally *take*

joy - in any circumstance is that He was totally confident that what God had started He would finish.

I for one I'm notorious for starting projects I don't finish. I have jobs that keep rolling over to the next honey-do list. I can take you on a tour through my garage, and show you dozens of half-finished projects.

But I'm not the only one... Michelangelo was a genius - a sculptor and painter. His statues of Moses and David are among the world's masterpieces.

Yet today, there's a entire museum in Florence, Italy that's dedicated to [Michelangelo's unfinished works](#). Not so though with Jesus. [What He starts, He finishes](#).

I know you're discouraged - you've failed countless times - but take heart, Jesus didn't begin a work in you to leave you high and dry. He doesn't abandon us in midstream. He intends to *hang in there with you*, so you *hang on to Him*. Jesus has no unfinished projects!

Verse 7, [“Just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.](#)

[For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.”](#) I love this beautiful statement Paul makes of the Philippians, [“I have you in my heart.”](#) Paul's life was full of joy and here's a reason why - [His priority was people](#). Not stuff, but people.

Paul wasn't concerned with the clothes on his back, or the roof over his head - there's no joy in stuff.

His life revolved around the people in his heart. The “like-minds” in which he had fellowship in the Gospel.

At his retirement party, a man made this statement, “As I look back on my career my fondest memories are not of the money I made, or the goals I accomplished, but of the relationships I formed.” ... as Paul said of the Philippians, “*because I have you in my heart.*”

Life gets drained of its joy, not when we go through tough times, but when we go them alone. The road is hard, but don't let it get lonely. Keep your heart open to your friends in the Gospel - fellow partakers of grace.

I think this is a truth that's hard for people today to grasp. In our materialistic world we grow up assuming that joy is to be found in a house, in a promotion, in possessions - *people in our life end up throw-aways.*

“*Hold onto your stuff... that's what matters. You can find new friends.*” When was the last time you made a decision based on sheer loyalty to a friend? This is so out-of-the-realm for most folks, Paul assures them of his love with an oath, “*For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus.*”

And Paul prays for his partners in grace, “*And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment...*” As your pastor I have a very real fear that the more you get to know me the less you'll like me. Folks see me in front of the church, and think, “*That Sandy is a really cool guy.*”

They come up afterwards, and make nice comments, and I smile - *but in the back of my mind I'm thinking...*

“What's going to happen when this person realizes I'm not the perfect pastor. I make mistakes. I pick my nose. I fight with my wife.” Letting you get to know me is risky business, and the same is true for each of us.

That's why we should pray that *“our love would abound still more and more... in all discernment.”* That we'll give each other the benefit of the doubt. That we'll show each other the same grace we've been shown. That God will extend His mercy to you through me.

And in light of verse 9 I think it's helpful to remember that Jesus is the only person of which we can say, *“The more you get to know Him, the more you'll like Him!”*

Jesus has no downside. He is thoroughly cool all the time!... Remember that when you pray for someone.

It makes your praying for that person easier. Realize, all that keeps your friend from falling head over heels in love with Jesus is to know Him better. *Our love for Jesus abounds, as we grow in our knowledge of Him.*

“God, reveal Your Son to him! Show her Jesus!” this is how we need to pray for people who are lost in sin.

Paul also prays, *“that you may approve the things that are excellent...”* It's easy to choose *good from bad*, but it's more difficult to pick *the best from the good*.

When you first become a Christian God calls on you to clear out the obvious evil, and replace it with what's pure. You chose between good and bad, right and wrong, clean and

dirty - and the choices are clear cut.

But God wants more for you and me. Not just good things, He desires the best that life can bring us. And it's the good things that can get in the way of the best.

Too many good things can crowd out and leave little room for what would be the best use of our time and energy. "The good is often the enemy of the best." This is why we should pray for ability to "*approve the things that are excellent*" - to pick out the *best* from the *rest*.

"That you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ..." Here's another way Paul prays for the Philippians - that God will give them a lingering, lasting sincerity. Hey, pray this for me, and I'll pray this for you.

In every Christian's life there is a gap between what *we are* and what *we should be*. At first, our goal is to shrink that gap. We want a genuine and sincere faith.

But over time we tend to ignore the gap, or become content with the gap as it is, or even deny a gap exists.

Paul prays that God will keep the Philippians on the cutting edge of their commitment... that they won't grow dull to either *where they're at* or *where they need to be*. He prays they'll maintain a sincere faith.

He continues his praying for the Philippians in verse 11, "*being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*"

Recently, the Supreme Court ruled that a Minute Maid fruit drink, "*Pomegranate Blueberry,*" had been deceptively labeled. In fine print at the bottom it warns, "*Flavored blend of*

five juices” and in still smaller print, “with added ingredients and other natural flavors...”

But who would’ve thought the drink was only half of one percent pomegranate and blueberry juice - while it was loaded with cheaper juices like apple and grape.

The juice didn’t live up to its label. But Paul prays that you and I will. That as Christians we’ll be what we say we are - filled with the fruits of righteousness.

Our lives should be stamped with God’s fingerprints.

And if the police checked your life for prints, who’s would they find? *Your’s... the world’s... a friend’s... the devil’s... or would they find God’s prints on your life?* Would your life show evidence of God’s touch?

We say we know Jesus, but would the contents of our life support what’s on the label? As Paul prayed for the Philippians, let’s pray for each other that it will!

When we pray, let’s pray like Paul... *that our love for Jesus abounds as our knowledge of Him grows... that we’ll discern the best from the good... that we’ll stay sincere... and that our contents will match our label...*

Verse 12, “**But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ...**” Here's another reason Paul takes joy in his difficulties - *God is in charge!*

God saw to it Paul’s imprisonment advanced the Gospel. God turned *prison into a platform.* At every opportunity Paul

preached Jesus to the palace guard.

And Roman soldiers got saved by the droves.

The imperial or palace guard consisted of 9000 handpicked soldiers. One of the duties of this special detail was to detain the emperor's personal prisoners.

Imagine, if you were chained to Paul for four hours. *Think you'd hear a compelling witness?* I'm certain.

Each time a legionnaire was assigned to the prison, it was another opportunity for Paul to share the Gospel.

I'm sure the apostle didn't personally evangelize all 9000 palace guard, but imagine the impact a couple of dozen new converts would have had on their ranks.

The word "*furtherance*" in verse 12 is a translation of the Greek word, "*prokope*" which referred "*to a group of woodcutters clearing the way through a dense forest for an advancing army.*" Paul saw his jail time as an opportunity to take the Gospel to people who otherwise would've never heard. "*His chains*" were Christ's will.

Paul's incarceration took the Gospel, born on the outskirts of the empire, to the very heart of its capitol.

The emperor's most trusted men were born again.

Most of us would be bummed if we'd suffered Paul's plight and were thrown into prison. We'd moan and whine - accuse God of being unfair - of forsaking us...

Few of us would see our unlikeable circumstances as an opportunity for "*the furtherance of the Gospel.*"

This is why we need to re-evaluate our attitude. *Are we*

Gospel-orientated in our outlook on circumstances?

A friend of mine turns his dialysis regiment into time spent witnessing to other patients and the nurses who treat him... Another person I know uses the time he seemingly “wastes” on brainless tasks at work as an opportunity to pray for missionaries around the world...

I once missed a flight - *thought it was the end of the world* - but the next day my neighbor came over and asked if I'd share Jesus with her daughter. It was an opportunity I would've missed had I made that flight...

As Christians we need to retrain our thinking to view our inconveniences as God's opportunities.

Cliff Barrows was Billy Graham's right-hand man for sixty years, but it's interesting how they teamed up.

Barrows and his newlywed bride were on their honeymoon. They had scraped together enough money to buy two train tickets and hotel reservations.

But when they reached their destination they found the hotel where they were staying had shut down. They ended up in a vacant room over a grocery store.

The next day the owner of the store heard Cliff playing Christian songs on his trombone. He told him about a rally being held that night. A young evangelist named Billy Graham was in town. Barrows went...

That particular night the man in charge of the music didn't show up, and Cliff was asked to help out... The rest is now history. What seemed like disastrous circumstances *at first*

ended up *“furthering the Gospel.”*

When you get delayed, or sidetracked, it could be God is actually rerouting you for the Gospel’s sake.

You’ll find great joy when you remember that your God in heaven is in charge of your circumstances.

Verse 14, *“And most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”*

Not only had Paul’s prison time created opportunities for him to share the Gospel with the palace guard, it inspired other Christians to come out of the closet with their own testimony. *“If Paul can witness behind bars, we should be willing to share our faith in the open.”*

This is my reaction to the Gospel witness of courageous Christians today... The Turkish or North Korean who hosts a secret Bible study... a teenager on a college campus who dares to stand for the truth...

People willing to make heavy sacrifices for Jesus, provide inspiration to the rest of us to step across the street and invite our neighbor to church, or share God’s love with a waitress, or do a kind deed in Jesus’ name. **The faith of a few emboldens the faith of us all.**

Paul writes, *“Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will...”*

It seemed that Paul’s imprisonment had spawned a sudden acceleration of Christian witness. And it was obviously coming from a mixture of motivations...

Some of the preachers were truly inspired by Paul.

But other preachers plotted that while the Apostle Paul was out-of-commission they could make a bigger name for themselves. They saw Paul's imprisonment as a opportunity to increase their own popularity.

He says, “The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains. but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.” There were sincere pastors in the early church who saw Paul’s trial and wanted to step up their efforts to fill the void.

They were inspired by love for Paul and the Gospel.

But there were other pastors who’s intent was to pour salt on Paul’s wounds. They were jealous of his fruitfulness, and wanted to agitate him. They would’ve been happy if they could cause Paul to drop out.

Can you imagine, a pastor with a grudge - who uses the Gospel to compete with another man’s ministry?

It’s amazing how territorial pastors can become. They resent it when another pastor moves into their area, as if the Gospel had a no-compete clause... as if there weren’t enough sinners in need to go around...

Woe nelly, this sounds ugly, but it happens far more than you think. Jealousy in the ministry is one of the biggest problems in today’s Church. Pastors are tempted to compare themselves with each other... *the size of their congregations, buildings, outreaches...*

But comparison is a killer. It drowns out your joy. It’s a *killjoy*.

It's been said, "Jealousy is the art of counting somebody else's blessings instead of your own."

Paul knew there were Christian workers who were jealous of His ministry. They were hoping to promote themselves and one-up Paul while he was behind bars.

Yet notice Paul's amazing response to these jealousy-driven ministers, verse 18, "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice."

Don't misunderstand, Paul isn't suggesting motive doesn't matter in ministry. 1 Corinthians 3 teaches that it's not the **quantity** or **quality** that counts, but it's the heart behind our service. In all that we do for God it's our **motive** that determines our reward. G. Campbell Morgan put it, "Motive is everything in the Kingdom."

Surely, in God's eyes the right motive is a must, *but it may not be that important to the person receiving the ministry.* Where the Gospel is preached people come to Christ, even if the preacher's motives are suspect.

The power is in the message not the messenger.

Isaiah 55:11 reads, "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it." The Bible is a supernatural book, and one of the proofs of its power is its ability to shine the light, despite some of the shady people who preach it. Not every pastor has the best intentions.

Just because God chooses to use a man to share His Word doesn't mean He's placing His stamp of approval on everything else going on in that man's life.

A mouth can *speak*, while the heart still *reeks*...

That God would let *corrupt preachers* preach His *incorruptible Word*, just means that God loves people enough to use any means available to reach them.

Regardless of a minister's motive - either *because of him* or *in spite of him* - Paul rejoices that the Gospel is preached. He says, **"I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice"** - he *double rejoices* over any proclamation of the Gospel.

We've learned this morning Paul was *all about the Gospel*. His *fascination with the Gospel* - his *dedication to the Gospel* - colored all Paul did and thought. As one commentator puts it, **"He was Gospel-intoxicated."**

Think of it... his relationship with the Philippians, was shaped by the Gospel - his approach to circumstances, was shaped by the Gospel - even his evaluation of other men's ministries, was shaped by the Gospel.

As we'll see next week... even Paul's attitude toward life and death was oriented around the Gospel.

But what about us... our attitude toward friendships, and circumstances, even the aspirations of others... are all these issues in our life shaped by the Gospel.

Does all of your life take a backseat to the Gospel?

Here's the first way to find joy at half-mast, orientate your life around what matters most - that's the Gospel.