

REJOICING IN THE LORD - PART 2

Rejoicing in the midst of adversity

Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Philippians 1:12-21
Subject:	Why Paul rejoices in the midst of his adversity
Complement:	because God is working good for the furtherance of the gospel in his own life and in the lives of others.
Exegetical idea:	Paul rejoices in the midst of adversity because God is working good for the furtherance of the gospel in his own life and in the lives of others.
Homiletical idea:	Rejoice because God can work good even in the midst of a bad situation.
Purpose:	To encourage my hearers to rejoice because God can work good even in the midst of bad situations.

Introduction

It's easy to rejoice in the Lord when things are going well. Isn't it? I was rejoicing two Sabbaths ago when 400 people showed up for the agape communion! And what a sweet time of worship and fellowship we shared together. I'm still rejoicing in the Lord about that! I'm rejoicing in the Lord that more and more of you are coming to the various prayer services of the church, on Wednesday morning and Wednesday evening, and early Sabbath morning. I'm rejoicing in the Lord because a praying church is a church that is experiencing revival and renewal! And I believe that the winds of revival are already blowing! So I'm rejoicing in the Lord!

And it's easy to rejoice in the Lord when things are going well. You're enjoying good health. Your relationships with others are flourishing. You just won a competition or made an A on a test. You got a big promotion at work. When things are going well, it's easy to rejoice. But we're going to discover this morning as we continue our study of Paul's letter to the Philippians, that we can rejoice even in the midst of adversity. We can rejoice even in hard times because we

know that God can work good in the midst of bad situations. Let me say that again. We will discover this morning that we can rejoice even in the midst of adversity because we know that God can work good in the midst of bad situations.

Paul's epistle to the Philippians was written around AD 62. And where was Paul when he wrote the letter? In Rome. And what was he doing in Rome? Was he on vacation? No. He was under house arrest. Dr. Luke records the story at the end of the book of Acts. Acts 28:16 "....." Actually, the Roman soldier, who was part of the Praetorian Guard, did more than just guard Paul. What does Dr. Luke tell us at the end of Acts 28:20? "I am bound with this chain." The Roman soldier and the apostle Paul were actually chained together. And how long did this house arrest last? Look at Acts 28:30-31 "....."

It is during this 2 years of house arrest in Rome, chained to a Roman soldier, that the apostle Paul wrote several letters under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, including the letter to the Philippians. And in this letter, Paul shares with the Philippian believers, and also with us, that he rejoices even in the midst of adversity because God is working good in the midst of a bad situation.

Paul begins, in Phil 1, beginning with verse 12, by sharing that God is working good in the lives of those around him, even in the midst of his adversity. Let's read the text together from our Philippian scrolls. (Line #9 in handout) "Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel." Is that good news? Amen! God is working good even in the midst of adversity. How is good coming out of this bad situation? Let's read on. (Line # 10) Phil 1:13 "As a result, it has become apparent through the whole palace guard, a better translation would be 'the whole Praetorian Guard,' and to everyone else

that I am in chains for Christ.” God is working good in the midst of a bad situation in the lives of those around Paul, including the whole Praetorian Guard.

The Praetorian guard was a regiment of 10,000 elite soldiers organized by Augustus Caesar. Is there any record that the apostle Paul ever spoke to the whole Praetorian Guard at one time? Did the captain call a meeting and give Paul the opportunity to preach to them? No. At least we have no record of such a meeting. How then did Paul speak to them about Christ? One soldier at a time. Remember, he was under house arrest for how long? Two years. And he was constantly chained to.....a Roman soldier. Talk about a captive audience. The Roman soldier thought that Paul was the captive, but God turned that upside down. Now the Roman soldier is the captive audience, and one at a time, those Roman soldiers heard the good news about Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord! Depending on the length of each soldier’s shift, the apostle Paul would have interacted with hundreds, maybe even thousands of soldiers from the Praetorian Guard, one soldier at a time! And if the Roman soldier began to doze off, all Paul had to do was yank on the chain and wake him up! And those Roman soldiers went back to share the good news with their fellow soldiers. Isn’t it amazing how God can work good in the midst of bad situations? No wonder Paul is rejoicing!

Not only did soldiers in the Praetorian Guard hear the good news about Jesus. But they also shared that good news with members of Caesar’s household. You see, this elite group of soldiers was also responsible for protecting the Caesar and his family. That good news about Jesus Christ made a difference in the lives of some of the members of Caesar’s own household. How do we know that? Look with me at Phil 4:22. “.....” Isn’t that a reason to rejoice?! God is working good even in the midst of a bad situation.

But the soldiers in the Praetorian Guard, and the members of Caesar's household are not the only individuals who are blessed as a result of the adversity that the apostle Paul is experiencing. Look with me at Phil 1:14. (End of line # 10) "Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly." Paul says, Because of my imprisonment, because of my adversity, or at least in the midst of it, other believers have found courage to be more bold in sharing the good news about Jesus.

Why do you think that other believers found the courage to testify with greater boldness? After all, look what had happened to the apostle Paul. He was under house arrest. He was chained day and night to a Roman soldier. Why was his imprisonment a motivation for other believers to testify with greater boldness about Jesus Christ? Any ideas?

Sometimes when God calls us to do a work for Him, it's easy to make excuses. A common excuse is this: "But Lord, there's someone else who can do that so much better than I can. Why, look atand you can add a name. She would do a much better job than I could ever do." Have you ever heard that excuse, or perhaps even used it? I'm sure that the apostle Paul heard that excuse all of the time. "Oh, just let the apostle Paul tell them. He could do a much better job than any of us." But now, the apostle Paul is in chains. He can witness to the soldiers, one at a time. He can receive occasional visitors. But he can't speak to large crowds. And there are some people that he will never reach. And God is able to work good for the furtherance of the gospel in the midst of this bad situation. God is able to bring conviction to those other believers who have been sitting in the shadows. And they stand up with a holy boldness and courage and begin to testify about Jesus Christ. Isn't that good news? And when

Paul hears that news, he rejoices. He rejoices in the midst of his adversity because God is working good even in this bad situation.

But God is not only working good in the midst of a bad situation for those individuals who surround Paul. God is also working good in the midst of a bad situation in Paul's own life. Paul has faced hardships before in his life. Some of you may remember his testimony, written 5 or 6 years earlier to the believers in Corinth. We can read his testimony in 2 Cor 11:24-27. "....." Yes, the apostle Paul understood what it meant to suffer. He had also suffered from a physical malady. And three times he had pled with the Lord that it might be removed, taken away. Notice his testimony, in 2 Cor 12:8-10. "....."

And the apostle Paul is learning this lesson again in the midst of his adversity in Rome. God is working good in the midst of a bad situation not only for those individuals around Paul, but also for Paul himself. Paul is learning to trust the Lord completely and absolutely.

That complete and absolute trust is manifested in several ways. Look with me again at Paul's letter to the Philippians, 1, beginning with verse 15. (End of line 11) "It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains." And there would have probably been times in Paul's past when this situation would have made him upset, angry, defensive. But Paul is learning to trust completely and absolutely in the Lord. And so instead of getting upset, angry, defensive, because some are preaching Christ out of envy and rivalry, how does Paul respond? Phil 1:18. (line # 14) Paul says, "But what does it matter" The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached.

And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice.” That, my friends, is amazing! The apostle Paul is at peace, trusting completely and absolutely in the Lord. God is working good even in a bad situation for the apostle Paul himself.

And that complete and absolute trust in the Lord is manifested once again in Paul’s confession, found in Phil 1:19-21. Let’s read it together. (Line #15) “For I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

That, my brothers and sisters, is complete and absolute trust in the Lord! Would you agree? Even though Paul doesn’t enjoy his house arrest, even though he doesn’t look forward to waking up every morning chained to a Roman soldier, Paul rejoices because God is working good in the midst of a bad situation. God is working good in the lives of those around him and God is working good in his own life.

That was a lesson that the apostle Paul learned while under house arrest in Rome. We can rejoice even in adversity because we know that God can work good even in the midst of bad situations. Perhaps Paul was reminded of a time almost 30 years earlier when he stood beside a pile of cloaks outside Jerusalem. A follower of Jesus Christ was being stoned to death. His name was? Stephen. And Paul, then called Saul of Tarsus, was consenting to his death. Saul was an enemy of Christians. He took delight in persecuting them. We can hear his own testimony in Acts 26:10-11. “.....” And yet in this bad situation, as Stephen was being stoned to death, God was able to work good, both for Stephen himself and also for those

who were witnessing his death. What good was God able to work for Stephen in the midst of this bad situation? Luke records in Acts 7:55-56. “.....” God was also able to fill Stephen’s heart with a spirit of forgiveness for his enemies. Listen to his words in Acts 7:60. “.....”

But God was not only able to work good in this bad situation for Stephen. God was also able to work good for at least one of those individuals who witnessed Stephen’s hardship. His name? Saul of Tarsus. Stephen’s conduct during this terrible ordeal, the radiance of his countenance, the peace in his soul, was a compelling witness to Saul of Tarsus. It was a living testimony that he could not forget. Some time later, when Saul was apprehended by the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus, the Lord said to him, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads, against the pricks.” Saul was under conviction. And one testimony that God was using to bring conviction to Saul of Tarsus was the testimony of Stephen the deacon. Saul’s conversion and his subsequent life of missionary service as the apostle Paul was another example of God working good out of a bad situation. On that great resurrection morning, don’t you think that Stephen the deacon will rejoice to learn that one of his persecutors was converted and became of powerful preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Yes, my friends, he will rejoice, along with the apostle Paul, and all of us, that God can work good out of bad situations!

And God can still do the same today. God can still work good in the midst of bad situations. Frank was just a teenager when he saw God work good in the midst of a bad situation. Frank was living in Hong Kong. The year was 1942. Just a few months earlier, in December of 1941, the Japanese had invaded Hong Kong. Times were hard. The Japanese

soldiers were taking Chinese children off the streets and transporting them to Lantau island to “donate” blood for the Japanese casualties in the South Pacific. I asked Frank how much blood the children were expected to “donate.” He told me that the children never came back. These were hard times for a Chinese teenager in Hong Kong.

After several months of living in constant danger, it was decided that Frank should be smuggled out by boat to free China. It was only an overnight trip, but it would be the most dangerous trip of his life. His family paid some Chinese pirates, who were planning to transport about 35-40 individuals in two of their junks. They left early one morning. The boats had to zigzag to catch the breeze, back and forth between the island and the mainland. At one point, they came close to a bay on the mainland, and they saw some other junks, with guns pointed toward them. They were forced to come to shore. When they landed on the beach, Frank and the other passengers were all locked in a small hut. Through the cracks in the walls, some of them could see these other pirates ransacking their luggage, taking all the valuables. About midnight, they heard gunfire outside of the hut. They were in the midst of a battle! Finally all was still, and they found the courage to go outside. Their “friendly pirates” had returned and chased the hostile pirates away! After such a terrifying experience, some of the refugees decided to return to Hong Kong, but Frank and many others decided to continue their flight into mainland China.

I should tell you that Frank had been born in Australia, and had a nominal Christian background. But he had never trusted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and Lord. On his flight into free China, he met a Seventh-day Adventist missionary named Elder Longway. Frank had heard of Seventh-day Adventists from his older sister who had become a Seventh-day Adventist

some years earlier in Australia.. Frank ended up at a Seventh-day Adventist mission school in Chung King. When he was in 11th grade he gave his heart to Jesus Christ and was baptized! After the war, he got on an American transport plane, ended up in San Francisco, with no idea where to go from there. He found his way to PUC, studied there for 2 years, completed his undergraduate studies at Walla Walla College, went to medical school at Loma Linda, did a residency in OB/GYN at Yale, and has served the Lord Jesus Christ his whole life as a Christian physician and lay leader in his church. Was God able to work good out of a bad situation for Frank? Absolutely. And I know that the story is true because Frank is my wife's uncle. He told me the story himself! And Frank is still rejoicing, because he too has learned that God can work even good in bad situations.

Some of you may be in the midst of a bad situation right now. I want to invite you to take hold of this promise this morning. The One who will be faithful to complete the good work that He has started in your life, that same God is able to work good even in the midst of bad situations. God will work good for you and good for those around you who witness the hardship that you are experiencing. Some of you may not feel hardship free right now. But your time of hardship will come. The Word of God tells us, "When you walk through the fire, I will be with you, " not IF you walk through the fire... Your time of hardship will surely come. And when it happens, remember what we've learned this morning from Paul's letter to the Philippians. You can rejoice, even in the time of hardship, because God can work good in the midst of bad situations. So rejoice in the Lord, and again I say, Rejoice!

I want to challenge you to apply the message of this sermon in a very practical way this morning. In the past year, we've faced some major challenges as a church family. There are also individuals who have gone through great hardships. I want to invite you to take one of the yellow cards from the pew rack and write a note to a fellow church member. Some of those

members may not be here this morning. Some may be sitting at the other end of your pew. Some may need a note of encouragement because they are still in the midst of a bad situation. Others may need a note of affirmation, telling them that you have seen God working good through them in the midst of a bad situation. And whether we are in the midst of the adversity, or we're past it, we can all rejoice knowing that God can work good even in the midst of bad situations.