

PHILIPPIANS 1:19-30
JOY IN AFFLICTIONS!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to Philippians chapter 1 as we continue our in-depth study of Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Over the last several months we have dealt with some heavy subjects in our study of Jude and I & II Timothy. In those letters we dealt with the false teachers that crept into the church and how we see that same thing happening today.

Now, in Philippians, the Lord has lead me to focus on – ***JOY!*** In fact, this epistle or letter has been called the – ***EPISTLE OF JOY!***

Please understand when Paul speaks of joy in this letter, he is not saying that there was no trouble, no difficulty that he was facing. Not at all!

Remember, Paul was waiting to stand trial before Caesar to defend himself against the false accusations that were leveled against him by the Jewish leadership in Israel.

And we need to understand that these accusations were extremely serious. They were saying that Paul was an insurrectionist and an inciter of riots around the Roman Empire.

These accusations could have resulted in Paul's execution!

And yet, he writes this letter of joy while awaiting his trial and he may be put to death for these crimes that have been leveled against him.

But again, Paul was filled with joy!

And this joy that Paul is speaking of in this letter is a joy not based upon outward circumstances but a joy that can only be found in the Lord.

Why is that?

Because outward circumstances can change, and they can change very quickly. But the Lord is unchanging and thus, when our joy is found in the Lord it is solid!

In fact, Paul speaks specifically of “**Christ**” or “**Jesus Christ**” 17 times. That means he speaks of Jesus more than once every two verses!

I think I can safely say that Paul’s mind was focused upon Jesus and not the circumstances that he was facing! Keep in mind that Paul is in prison right now and he is not sure what is going to happen to him and yet, here is this epistle of joy!

Think about this for a minute. In this little 4-chapter letter, some 104 verses, Paul uses the word “**joy**” four times, (1:4, 1:25, 2:2, 4:1).

He uses the word “**rejoice**” eight times, (1:8, 2:16, 2:17, 2:18, 2:28, 3:1, 3:3, 4:4).

And he uses the word “**glad**” two times, (2:17, 2:18).

And, like I have said many times and will continue to say, this letter has been called, “***The Epistle of joy!***”

I have called our study this morning – ***JOY IN AFFLICTIONS!***

I know, not something we want to hear or even think about, but this is a reality, and we need to understand that we too can have joy no matter what we are going through!

I have broken down the verses we will be looking at this morning into the following main points. They are,

A LIVING SACRIFICE – PHILIPPIANS 1:19-20

THE DILEMMA – PHILIPPIANS 1:21-26

STAND STRONG – PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30

Now let me remind you what we looked at last time because we will see Paul’s response, how he dealt with these things he faced in our study this morning.

In Philippians 1:12-18 Paul wrote, **“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.”**

The Devil tried to discourage Paul in the circumstances he was facing, being under house arrest in Rome and awaiting his trial.

Not only that, but some of the people, Christians, tried to rob him of his joy.

This is what Paul was facing and how did he deal with it?

Let’s read on and see as we look at – ***JOY IN AFFLICTIONS!***

With that as our introduction, let’s pick up our study in Philippians chapter 1 beginning in verse 19 and see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word!

PHILIPPIANS 1**VERSES 19-20**

Think about all that Paul went through in his life. The imprisonments. The beatings. All the turmoil you can imagine. And yet, Paul understood that the Lord was in control over all that he was going through. It did not matter how dark it was, God was still the one who was with Paul and will see him through.

For many of us, we are really good at quoting Scripture to other people who are going through difficult times, but are we ready to apply those same Scriptures to our own lives?

Paul did!

What do I mean by that?

A few years earlier, Paul wrote to the church in Rome and said in Romans 8:28, **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”**

Paul not only wrote that, but he believed that truth, that no matter what he was going through, God was going to use it for good!

And when Paul says, **“For I know that this will turn out for my salvation . . .”** I believe he is speaking of his deliverance from this imprisonment in Rome.

Some feel that it is speaking of his salvation in Christ. But let’s look at that for a minute.

If Paul was already saved, and he was, then why seek prayers for his salvation?

Is our salvation a process that we gain over time or is it instantaneous the moment we repent of our sins and ask Jesus to be Lord and Savior of our lives!

It is instantaneous! It happens the moment we come to Jesus. This is called –

JUSTIFICATION!

This word speaks of declaring or reckoning one to be righteous.

We are not justified or declared righteous by our good works, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

We see this as a work of God. David said in Psalm 32:1-2, **“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.”**

It is the Lord who does this, and we see that played out for us in the New Testament.

In Galatians 2:16 Paul wrote, **“knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”**

Again, it is not by keeping the Law but by faith in Jesus Christ that we are justified!

Paul also tells us in Galatians 3:24-25, **“Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”**

The Law is good, the Law is perfect, that is not the problem.

The problem is each of us. None of us are good, not even one of us. We all have sinned; we all fall short of the glory of God and there is nothing we can do to fix that.

But God can and that is what Paul tells us in II Corinthians 5:21, **“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”**

Here we are, lost in our sins and God comes along and pays in full the penalty for our sins. He took our sin, and He not only did that, but He then gave to us His righteousness. When God the Father looks at us, in a positional sense, He sees us as white as snow as the blood of Christ has cleansed us from all our sins!

Yes, on a practical, day by day picture, we still sin, but Jesus has paid for all our sins with His shed blood. In other words, we are – ***JUSTIFIED!***

I like the way that John Flavel illustrates justification for us.

He wrote,

My friend Dr. Roy Gustafson has the finest illustration of justification I have ever heard.

It seems that there was a man in England who put his Rolls-Royce on a boat and went across to the continent to go on a holiday. While he was driving around Europe, something happened to the motor of his car. He cabled the Rolls-Royce people back in England and asked, ***“I’m having trouble with my car; what do you suggest I do?”***

Well, the Rolls-Royce people flew a mechanic over!

The mechanic repaired the car and flew back to England and left the man to continue his holiday.

As you can imagine, the fellow was wondering, ***“How much is this going to cost me?”***

So when he got back to England, he wrote the people a letter and asked how much he owed them.

He received a letter from the office that read: ***“Dear Sir: There is no record anywhere in our files that anything ever went wrong with a Rolls-Royce.”***

That is justification.

Did Christ finish the work?

How dangerous it is to join anything of our own to the righteousness of Christ, in pursuit of justification before God!

Jesus Christ will never endure this; it reflects upon His work dishonorably. He will be all, or none, in our justification.

If He has finished the work, what need is there of our additions?

And if not, to what purpose are they?

Can we finish that which Christ Himself could not complete?

Did He finish the work, and will He ever divide the glory and praise of it with us?

No, no; Christ is no half-Savior. It is a hard thing to bring proud hearts to rest upon Christ for righteousness. God humbles the proud by calling sinners wholly from their own righteousness to Christ for the justification.

- John Flavel

Make no mistake about it. If we are justified by the work of Jesus, we can be assured that we are also **“saved from wrath through Him.”** The wrath of God that was revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Romans 1:18) was placed on Jesus as a substitute in the place of the believer.

And it is only by His shed blood that we are justified before God.

I know, that was a lot of time with this one topic, but we need to understand what justification is all about.

You see, Paul can't be speaking of his salvation from sin here in Philippians and thus, it is salvation of deliverance from this imprisonment in Rome!

And he is asking for the Philippians to pray for him in this situation that he is in!

You see, Paul put his faith in the Lord, and he knew he could do all things through Christ who would strengthen him. He sought the empowerment of the Spirit of God to move his life along the way that God wanted it to go!

Then Paul says “**. . . so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.**”

It almost sounds like a fatalistic attitude by Paul.

No, Paul knew God was in control and yes, going before Nero did not look good, but he knew the Philippians were praying for him as I have said.

Paul did not live to promote or preserve himself, but the Lord, Jesus Christ!

So, whatever happened, God was in control and Paul could rest in that.

It is as one writer put it in regard to Paul’s life, “*My body will be the theater in which Christ’s glory is displayed.*”

That means no matter what happens!

In other words, Paul was – *A LIVING SACRIFICE!*

We see Paul speak of that very thing in Romans 12:1, where he wrote, “**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.**”

Paul is speaking of consecration, of placing your entire life on the altar of sacrifice to be consumed by the Lord.

And here’s the thing. I don’t believe you can truly place your entire being on this altar of sacrifice without applying God’s Word to your life!

You see, if you are not willing to apply God's Word to your life then you will not live what God has said because you will be doing those things that *YOU* want to do instead of what He wants you to do.

Thus, there is no real consecration; there is no real surrender to Him and God is not looking for a partial surrender He is looking for a total surrender.

I like the way that J. B. Phillips translates Romans 12:1-2. I think it is a great translation, it really makes the point, he drives it home.

This is what he wrote, *“With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give Him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to Him and acceptable by Him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the Plan of God for you is good, meets all His demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.”*

Paul tells us that we are to be a living sacrifice unto God. That is our lives are to be placed on the altar to be offered up as a burnt offering, totally given to God, and it will be a sweet-smelling sacrifice unto God as we do.

Too often we give God portions of our lives but not our entire being. He wants it all and as we do, He gives it back to us so we may bring Him glory!

That is what Paul is speaking about here as he is a living sacrifice. He puts it like this in Philippians 1:20, that **“... Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.”**

The point of Paul's life, the point of our life is to glorify God and that is done as we surrender to Him as a sacrifice unto Him!

The problem, many times, because we are living sacrifices, we jump off the table and run away!

To be totally consecrated to God means every day we must, in light of all that God has done for us and especially because we now belong to Him, we must first present our bodies to God!

Let me give you a few verses to show you what I mean.

In Romans 6:13 Paul wrote, “**And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.**”

Once again, this tells me we have a choice to make, how we present ourselves.

Also, in I Corinthians 6:20 Paul tells us, “**For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.**”

Almighty God became flesh and dwelt among us, going to the cross of Calvary and dying for our sins, being raised on the third day to make us happy people?

No, He died so that we might be holy people and glorify God in all that we do!

You see, when Paul speaks of our bodies he is not talking about flesh and blood but about all that we are, every part of us being placed on the altar of sacrifice, totally dedicated to the Lord for His use, for His glory!

Because of all He has done for us, we should live for Him and that will only be done when you are willing to give your life totally to Him!

It is easy to get caught up with the things of this world and lose sight of who we belong to!

Again, in Romans 12:1, Paul says that as we place our lives on the altar of sacrifice unto the Lord it is our “**reasonable service**” or really “**spiritual worship**”!

You see, as we give our lives to God for His use it is a form of worship unto Him!

Let me explain this, because I do believe this is important.

First of all, the word “**reasonable**” comes from the Greek word, **LOGIKOS**, (log-ik-os’) and it can also be translated “*of the word*” just as it is used in I Peter 2:2.

Also, the word “**service**” in the Greek is **LATREIA**, (lat-ri’-ah) and it speaks of the worship of God.

Thus, what is our reasonable, our logical service unto God?

Listen carefully; ***it is a life of worship that is according to God’s Word!***

Again, if you don’t have the right doctrine, you are not going to be able to live a life that is pleasing to God, I don’t care what people will tell you today!

I think that Paul makes this point very clear!

Jesus said that we are to worship God in **SPIRIT** and **TRUTH!** (John 4:23)

In other words, we must be saved, and we must worship Him according to His Word!

We tend to make it so complicated when in reality it is just complete surrender!

Yes, the Old Testament priests came with bodies of slain animals to offer up to God, but we, as New Testament priests you might say, bring our own bodies, our own lives to the Lord and place them on the altar of sacrifice as a living sacrifice unto the Lord and that is our logical, our reasonable, our spiritual worship, one that is in accordance with the Word of God!

We belong to the Lord and thus, may we live for Him as – ***A LIVING SACRIFICE!***

As we read on, we are going to see – ***THE DILEMMA!***

VERSES 21-26

Did you hear what Paul said?

“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Philippians 1:21.

In other words, Paul considered death as gain.

Do you know what that means?

It means that there is no *“soul sleep”* or that when you die you are in some kind of suspended animation until the resurrection occurs!

That would not be a gain, not at all!

Not only that, but it also would refute the idea of *“purgatory.”*

Think about that for a minute. If there was purgatory, a place where you would have to go to atone for your sins in this life, that would not be a gain. This place, some believe, is where you would suffer to be purified before we can come into the presence of God! There is no place called purgatory. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord and that is – ***GAIN!***

In fact, Jesus paid in full the penalty for all our sins as we have seen and thus, we are justified in Him!

Make no mistake about it, Paul did not fear death because he rested in the promises of God found in the Word of God.

But for those that don't know the Lord, many fear death because they don't know what lies beyond the grave. They have no assurance and for them, apart from Christ, it is an eternity in Hell! So they should fear death. But for us as Christians, we should not fear death, we may not like the process, but the end result is to be with the Lord!

Spurgeon speaks on the fact that even Christians can fear death, and this is how he sees it. He wrote, *“When men fear death it is not certain that they are wicked, but it is quite certain that if they have faith it is in a very weak and sickly condition.”*

I want to continue to focus on Philippians 1:21 for a minute, it is important for us to see this.

This verse becomes a valuable test of our lives.

Think of it like this and you fill in the blanks.

“For to me to live is _____.

And to die is _____.”

What would you fill that in with?

Maybe, “For to me to live is **MONEY** and to die is to **LEAVE IT ALL BEHIND!**”

Or “For to me to live is **FAME** and to die is to **BE FORGOTTEN!**”

Even, “For to me to live is **POWER** and to die is **TO LOSE IT ALL!**”

And there are many things we can put in there but in the end, you will have nothing if your life is not focused upon Christ with the understanding that in death you lose nothing, but you gain everything!

For Paul, **“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!”** and that is why he was filled with joy in spite of the circumstances that he faced, even this imprisonment!

Not only that, but when people see the joy of the Lord flowing from our lives, it is a witness to them of what God has done, is doing and will do in our lives. It gives us an opportunity to share the Gospel message with them!

Paul understood this and so should we, that **“We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”** II Corinthians 5:8.

Paul knew that to be absent from the body he would be present with the Lord, and we need to understand that as well.

The One he loved, the One he gave his life for he would be with and thus the dilemma. To remain on this earth and minister to the brethren, minister to the lost or be with the Lord.

Paul desired to be with Jesus but also realized the work that was still needed and so while martyrdom is a possibility here, he also tells the Philippians that he expects to be spared and minister to them, which did occur.

Paul was released for a time and then imprisoned again and martyred for his faith by Nero at God's appointed time, not Nero's!

It was time for Paul to go home and he finished the race and was received up into glory in around 66 A. D.

And remember what he wrote to Timothy as he sat in the Mamertine prison there in Rome, waiting to be put to death for his faith. He told Timothy, **“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”** II Timothy 4:6-8.

Paul finished the race strong!

And for us, we need to remember that death for the Christian is really just moving day as our spirit and our soul separate from our body, this temporary dwelling place or tent, and we receive our new body, a mansion made in the heavens, made by the Lord.

It is as Jim Elliot said who was martyred for his faith at a young age. He said, “***He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.***” May we not forget that.

Now I know we don’t like to talk about death, but it is something we all will experience, and I think we need to have a correct perspective of what death is all about.

Let’s compare this life with the life to come and see what we have, and as we do, you are going to wonder why we fight so much to remain, for there is a striking contrast between the two.

REMAINING HERE

A temporary residence, a tent.
Suffering mixed with joy.
Suffering for a little while.
Being absent from the Lord.
The fight.
The realm of sin.

DEPARTING TO BE WITH CHRIST

A permanent abode, a mansion.
Joy unmixed with suffering.
Joy forever.
Being at home with the Lord.
The feast.
The realm of complete deliverance from sin.

Ray Stedman gives us this perspective. He wrote,

I remember when I was in the Philippines a few years ago, speaking at a little pastor’s conference down in the island of Panay, there was a dear Filipino pastor who was asked to speak one afternoon.

He had only one leg, and he hobbled up to the platform and as he began to speak I could see a real sense of the light of the glory of God on his face.

I don’t remember all of his message, but I do remember one illustration he used.

He told about a wealthy American man who had gone abroad and visited all the ancient capitols of Europe and bought all the rich furnishings, tapestries, paintings in the castles and brought them back home. He even bought a whole castle, tore it down and imported it to the States where he erected it stone-by-stone so he could make it his home.

All his wealth, affection and interest he poured into this home, and he loved it. But the day came when he died, and as he lay dying he said to the doctor, ***“Don’t let me die. Don’t make me leave my home.”***

Then this dear Filipino pastor compared that with the death of a Christian who didn’t have a home on earth and lay dying in a little nipa, palm-thatched hut.

As he lay dying he looked at his family gathered around him and he said, ***“Thank God, I’m going home!”***

That is the difference between the Christian and one without the Christian hope.

If you say to me to live is anything else than Christ, then you have to leave it all behind when you go.

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In other words, **“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”** Philippians 1:21.

And here is where Paul struggled. To be with the Lord or to remain in this body of flesh so he can minister to the brethren.

You see, Paul understood that others still needed him; that his work was not yet done at this point.

He was not certain that he would be released this time, but he thought that he might and thus, he told the Philippians that he expects to be spared at this time. We see that in Philippians 1:25 as Paul said to them, **“... I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith.”**

And Paul concludes this section speaking of their rejoicing for Paul and that their rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ when Paul visits them again!

Paul's friendship with the Philippians was so close that he knew that they would be rejoicing to see him again.

So we have seen here – ***THE DILEMMA!***

To go home and be with the Lord or remain and teach these believers as they needed someone to help them grow in the Lord.

As we finish up, we will be looking at this last point which is – ***STAND STRONG!***

VERSES 27-30

As Paul opens up, he speaks of their conduct, how they were to live out their faith. In fact, the Greek word Paul uses for “**conduct**” is ***POLITEUOMAI***, (pol-it-yoo'-om-ah-ee) and the idea is “***to behave as a citizen.***”

Philippi was a Roman colony and thus enjoyed all the benefits of Rome.

Thus, the people were not only proud of this but they also obeyed the rules of Rome so they would not lose their status with Rome.

Paul is calling the Philippian believers to a higher standard for they are citizens of heaven and thus they should walk according to the high calling by which they have been called.

He wants then to live as faithful citizens of heaven according to God's Word.

Think about it, one of the greatest testimonies we have to a lost world is our integrity, that what we believe has impacted our lives in such a way that it is manifested in what we say and what we do!

Remember what Paul said of the Thessalonian believers in I Thessalonians chapter 1, **“For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”** I Thessalonians 1:5-10.

Their lives were a witness of their love for the Lord. They not only encouraged believers, but unbelievers also saw the change in them. May that be seen in our lives as well.

And here in Philippians, Paul also gives them some words of encouragement and accountability. He calls for them to conduct themselves in a godly way whether he is there or not, but he also tells them he is watching them.

Why is that?

Did Paul not trust them?

It is not that Paul did not trust them. It has to do with accountability. We should all be accountable to each other so that if we start going astray, doing something that is not pleasing to God and we don't see it, or don't want to see it, a brother or sister in the Lord will let us know it in love!

In fact, Paul tells us we are one in Spirit, the Spirit of God.

We are one in mind; we have the mind of Christ.

And we are “**striving together**” and the Greek word that Paul uses is a compound Greek word that is composed of a preposition, *SUN*, (with) and the noun *ATHLEO*, that speaks of competing in a contest, such as a sporting event.

It is the term from which we get our English words “*athlete*” and “*athletics*.”

Here’s the thing.

We are a team working together for a common goal, spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, seeing the kingdom of God grow.

We are working together, giving it our all.

Now, for example, and this is from a few years back. But Randy Moss of the Minnesota Vikings. He plays football on a team and yet, at times he doesn’t run the routes all out. He makes a half-hearted effort. Sometimes he walks off the field before the game is over while the rest of the team is still playing. Sometimes he doesn’t even know what play is being run and walks off the field to the sidelines when he is supposed to be the receiver on the play.

The outcome is that it affects the whole team, not just Randy Moss and that is Paul’s point here. We are working together as Christians for the Gospel of Jesus Christ! May we not forget that!

Think about High School football. You will practice week in and week out for a few games that you will be playing. The practices that you are involved in are far more than the games you will be playing!

And these practices, with full gear, heavy equipment are done in the heat of summer. You don’t get paid to have your body beaten up day in and day out!

Then why in the world would you do something like that?

Because when it is game day, when you work together as a team and in the end, you get the win, everyone is joyful, you are hugging each other, giving high fives to each other, shouting for joy.

All those tough practices, in the end, paid off.

Now let's apply this to our own lives.

You come to church week after week after week, sometimes twice a week and sometimes three times a week!

You may be involved in some ministry at church. You labor and you don't get paid and there is little recognition many times.

Many times, there is a lot of conflict, the heat is turned up.

Why do you do it?

Because, when it all clicks God is glorified and there is incredible joy as you see God working! You have become something bigger than yourself; you are part of God's team, you might say.

And there is tremendous joy as you stand fast, you stand together, and you stand up for Jesus!

And, as Paul said, "**And do not [for a moment] be frightened or intimidated in anything by your opponents and adversaries, for such [constancy and fearlessness] will be a clear sign (proof and seal) to them of [their impending] destruction, but [a sure token and evidence] of your deliverance and salvation, and that from God.**" (Philippians 1:28 - The Amplified Bible)

In other words, in spite of what they were going through, all the difficulty, the persecution that they were facing, they were to be full of joy as Paul was in the situations that he was facing!

You see, Paul wants the Philippian believers to remain focused and not be **“terrified”** or startled by the enemy.

Paul uses the Greek word *PTURO*, (ptoo'-ro) and the idea here is of an uncontrollable stampede of startled horses.

Horses can be startled by something as small as a bee and the same is true for us as Christians and Paul wants them to stay focused, not be startled by anything the enemy might throw at them; be it persecution or even imprisonment or death!

Remember what Paul said in Philippians 1:21, **“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”**

I think that is important for us in the days we are living in. Not to be startled by what comes our way, the things that are happening in this nation and in the world.

God has warned us, and we need to walk accordingly, shining the light of Jesus in this dark world!

And here's the thing. As you stand firm against the enemy it shows to them God's judgment upon them, eternal punishment.

It is as Paul said in II Thessalonians 1:4-10, **“so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.”**

Not only does it show their eternal punishment but our salvation because persecution shows we are His.

Persecution should not be discouraging to us, but it should be encouraging.

Paul said in Colossians 1:24, **“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.”**

In Galatians 6:17 Paul tells us, **“From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.”**

Folks, the enemy will be destroyed, and our salvation is secured in Christ because God is the one bringing these outcomes to pass!

Now in Philippians 1:29 Paul says, **“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”**

The Greek word for “**granted**” has as its root the word “*charis*” which means “*a gift of God’s grace.*”

In other words, God has graciously given to us the privilege and blessing to suffer for Jesus!

But why?

Because it allows us to identify with Him and be a witness to the people of this world.

Think about the millions of Christians that were martyred for their faith in Jesus under the Romans and how that caused the Gospel message to spread throughout the Roman Empire!

And like I have said, it guarantees that we belong to Jesus and have an inheritance with Him in heaven.

Now how often do you hear this spoken of, that we are to suffer for His sake?

Not too often! It is not a popular message; it is not a feel-good message. And yet, that is what Paul speaks of here and we see it many times in the New Testament!

But look again at what Paul is saying here. God, in His sovereign grace has given to us the gift to believe but also, He has given to us the *privilege* to suffer for His sake!

Now I believe this gift to believe is given to all, but all don’t accept that gift. I just want to be clear on that or some may think that God has gifted some to be saved and some not to be saved!

Not true, we have a choice, a free will to choose!

But in regard to suffering, Paul tells us in Romans 8:16-17, “**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.**”

Also, Peter tells us in I Peter 4:12-16, **“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.”**

Thus, we should not be surprised when difficult times come as Paul tells us, **“that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.”** I Thessalonians 3:3.

Paul, in a sense, is saying to the Philippian believers, ***“Brothers and sisters in the Lord, for you and for me the battle is on; let us not lose heart but let us do something great for the Lord!”***

Paul is trying to encourage them not because persecution might come but it has come and more is coming so don’t give up, don’t fall back, it is time to stand up and fight for the faith which has been entrusted to us!

And may we not just stand up and fight for the faith but may we do it with joy in our hearts!

I think many Christians just have closed their eyes to what is going on around them, they don’t seem to care, or they are so focused on self that they are missing what is going on around them.

I think our freedom in this country is coming to an end. We see it with the social media, that you can be shut down if you say something that Big Brother, I mean something that they don't agree with. And it will only continue to get worse.

Let me show you what I mean. This is from a few years back, about ten years ago and it is worse today. We are told,

Before I speak about the ominous trends in America to curtail freedom of speech, let me tell you about Dr. Charles H. McVety, president of Canada Christian College in Toronto, whose television program was removed from the air because he had the temerity [gall] to preach against homosexuality.

Later, he was allowed back on television, but now he has to submit his program to the Canadian Broadcast Standard Council every Wednesday for review by the censors on Thursday, and then, if approved, can be broadcast on Sunday. As far as I know this panel does not rule on programs that are immoral or violent, just on those that dare to be politically incorrect, such as a minister who believes the Bible and therefore opposes same-sex marriage.

Closer to home in our great United States, hate speech laws and recent court rulings seek to restrict our right to believe, preach, and practice one's religious convictions (hate speech, someone said, is simply whatever the leftists among us hate to hear!) The supposed line of *“separation between church and state”* means that God must stay on His side of the line in our country's education, politics, law, science, and workplaces. Beware if you live out your religion in the so-called public square, because you just might find yourself slapped with a lawsuit.

Here is the irony: the censors, the radicals who are all too ready to deny freedom to those who disagree with them, are perceived in our culture as *“tolerant,”* and we, who want to express our views, are viewed as *“intolerant.”*

In other words, the philosophy of the left is *preach tolerance, but practice inflexible intolerance to anyone who has the courage to express a different point of view.*

Here is but one example: Angela McCaskill was suspended as an administrator from Gallaudet University for signing a petition to put Maryland's same-sex legislation on a November ballot. In other words, even an innocuous act, such as allowing the electorate to decide the question of same-sex marriage, is enough for one to be suspended. Incredibly, the university justified its decision because of its view of *tolerance!* What they were saying was: *we exercise tolerance by censoring anyone who does not agree with our point of view!*

The loss of our freedoms can take an unusual twist. The lawsuit *Christian Legal Society v. Martinez* arose when Hastings University insisted that The Christian Legal Society could not require its leaders to adhere to a certain set of beliefs and behaviors, but it had to be open to all students, without discrimination.

This means, among other things, that an atheist could become president of The Christian Legal Society on campus. This action on the part of the university is a denial of freedom of association and the free exercise of religion. The notion that student groups at the university can have no religious, political, or moral requirements for leadership defies common sense and defeats the very purpose of such groups.

The list of cases where religious rights are being marginalized is endless. If the present trends continue, we must prepare ourselves for a dark and challenging future. Thankfully, we can face the future with confidence that God is with us. The Church in other eras has been here before. . . .

Returning to the matter of religious freedom. What should we do to prepare for the continuing attacks against Christianity in our culture?

. . . That is both an important and huge question. For every Christian the answer will be different, but minimally what we must do is, first, give thanks to God for the opportunity to live at this hour of history and prove the faithfulness of God to His people.

Secondly, we must courageously and lovingly witness to Christ among our families, neighbors, and friends, and wherever we have influence. We must also support those organizations that are fighting our legal battles, which is really where the conflict comes in our culture.

And finally, let's realize that America has fallen too far for us to ***“turn it around.”***

We have lost the so-called culture war. We must repent of our sins and cry out to God for mercy and for divine intervention. Whether or not God chooses to turn this country around, He will be with us as we live out our faith - even if it means death.

- <http://bit.ly/2ky8bYQ>

How should we respond to all of this?

Paul said, **“Only let your conduct be worthy of the Gospel of Christ . . . and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. . . having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.”** Philippians 1:27, 28, 30.

The Greek word for **“conflict”** is *AGON* and from this word we get our words *agony* and *agonize* from!

That is what Paul was facing, it was what the Philippians were facing, and I believe it is what we are facing in our country today!

And Paul wants these Philippians to know that in spite of the conflict he was facing, in spite of the conflict they were facing and in spite of the conflict that we are facing now, we should have that joy and fruit in the midst of all this!

Our lives need to be - ***A LIVING SACRIFICE!***

In other words, we need to place our lives in the hands of God, giving to Him as a sacrifice to be used as He pleases!

We realize that there is – ***THE DILEMMA!***

And yes, we all want the Rapture to come so we can be removed from this evil world, but there is still work to be done and God will work in us so He can work through us!

And yet, we also know that we need to – ***STAND STRONG!***

It is a battle, but in the midst of all this difficulty we need to stand strong in the Lord and let the joy of the Lord fill our lives!

Let me close this morning with this story to sum it all up for us. We are told,

Principal Rainy, of whom a child once remarked that she believed he went to Heaven every night because he was so happy every day, once used a fine metaphor about a Christian's joy.

“Joy,” he said, “is the flag which is flown from the castle of the heart when the King is in residence there.”

Who is on the throne of your heart?

You can tell by the flag that is being flown over your life!

May it be joy, may you rejoice in the Lord and the work He is doing no matter the situation you find yourself in as Paul did!

In other words – ***JOY IN AFFLICTIONS!***