

REJOICE

IN THE LORD ALWAYS ■

A 6 Week Sermon Series on Philippians

Week Two: For Paul, Everything is About Christ

Philippians 1:15-30

For Paul, Everything is About Christ. That's the sense you get when you read this passage. His work is about Christ. His life and his death are about Christ. Even when he talks about his friends, his main concern is that their lives shine for Christ. After reading this passage, turn to the questions below.

- 1) In v. 15 -18 it seems that with Paul locked up, other Christians see an opportunity to fill the void Paul has left. Since Paul is no longer able to freely go out and proclaim Christ, others have taken up that mantle. Some of them have done so out of pure motives and others seem to be doing it for bragging rights, to one-up Paul, or to increase his suffering.

It reminds me of presidential politics. I get the impression from some candidates that they want to be President to be of service to America. I get the impression from other candidates that they want to be President to be of service to themselves.

But Paul's response to both groups of his peers is the same! He rejoices, because, regardless of the motives, Christ is being proclaimed. The work that Paul occupied his life with is being done - regardless of whether or not he gets the credit.

How do you think Paul is able to deal so gracefully with those who are proclaiming Christ as a means to personally attack him? (There may be a few clues in this passage but you may also have to use your Biblically informed imagination)

2) Paul had two careers. He made tents that he sold (Acts 18:1-3) and he was a preacher. His career as a missionary and preacher was very much all about Christ. That comes across clearly in this passage from Philippians.

It's easy to see how "professional" Christians can make Christ the center of their work. Do you think it's possible for Christians in other fields of work to make their work focused on Christ? Why or why not? And if so, how?

3) V. 18 This is the first time the theme of our series, Rejoice, appears explicitly. How would you paraphrase Paul's reasons for rejoicing? If you're up for a challenge, how would you explain Paul's reasons for rejoicing to someone who has no knowledge of Christianity?

4) v. 20-24, Paul is awaiting trial. For all he knows, he may very well be sitting on death row since he doesn't know how his legal case will turn out. In these verses he is personal and transparent.

It's not often that we reflect on our own mortality. Paul is very aware of what it will mean for the Philippians if he dies. They need his help to progress in their faith.

What would you like your life to be about - to the degree - that if you were to die, there would be a void in someone or some group's life?

(If this question is too personal for you to share, ponder it over on your own this week)

5) V. 29 has a striking phrase, "he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but also of suffering for him as well." The privilege of suffering for Christ.

There are at least three different reasons that we suffer:

- 1) We make stupid choices
- 2) We live in a world where the effects of the fall are still present (disease, racism, selfishness, etc.)
- 3) We suffer because we follow Christ

It's sometimes easy to confuse these and think that we're suffering for Christ when we're actually just suffering the effects of living in a fallen world or suffering the effects of making bad decisions. God still can and wants to redeem all our suffering but it's important that we not confuse why we're suffering.

Do you have any stories about people who have considered it a privilege of suffering for Christ? Have there been any times you have suffered for Christ and it has been a privilege? Why do you think Paul considers it a privilege?

Final Word

The danger in reading a letter like this, with a hero such as Paul, is that we can start to think that his example is only for super-hero Christians. It's for people who are really crazy about their faith but not for you and me. After all, you're probably not a missionary or a preacher. And is God going to seriously have you suffer for Him the way Paul did?

I'd like to leave you with two parting thoughts. First, all of us are preachers. We may not all be getting into pulpits on Sunday mornings. But all of us are constantly preaching with how we live our lives. Paul hints at this in verse 27. And second, God (through Paul) gives a sobering promise to *all* who follow Him in II Timothy 3:12, "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Maybe God has bigger plans in store for you than you think.