

Lesson 5

Blooming Where You're Planted

Philippians 1:12-18a

Most people, when they think of their lifetime goals, envision a future filled with security, ease, longevity, and wealth—the good life. This worldly good life, however, was not the case for God's bond-servant Paul. In Lesson 6 we'll see Paul declare, "For to me, to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). For Paul there was no other option but to spend his life in full-out sacrificial service.

But for now, for today, let's look at one of Paul's secrets to peace. Let's see exactly how he enjoyed an abundance of God's peace, even in the midst of what looked like a tragedy. As you read through this precious passage of Scripture, note the many ways Paul "bloomed where he was planted"—even when he was "planted" in prison!

Philippians 1:12-18a

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,

¹³ so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ;

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.

¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will:

¹⁶ The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; ¹⁷ but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.

¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice....

Out of God's Word...

1. Perhaps imagining that his friends might have heard he was suffering as a prisoner in bonds, Paul turns from

greetings (verses 1-11) to a "mission update." What is the first thing he wants the readers of his "newsletter," the epistle of Philippians, to know about his imprisonment (verse 12)?

What is Paul's personal condition (verse 13)?

Who is his audience (verse 13)?

2. Continuing to let his friends know what is going on in his life, Paul describes the two groups who are preaching the gospel of Christ during Paul's absence due to imprisonment. Scan verses 15-17 again and, in a few words, describe the groups and their differing approaches to sharing the gospel.

Paul's friends:

Paul's enemies:

3. Even though these two groups differed in their motives and means of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, what was the singular outcome (verse 18)?

And what was Paul's attitude about this outcome (verse 18)?

...and into your heart

- Paul's outlook on his situation, despite his bonds and imprisonment and removal from public ministry, was overwhelmingly positive. His final statement about his divinely appointed circumstances and God's use of them was, "In this I rejoice" (verse 18). Here are some of the "good" outcomes from Paul's "bad" situation:

—Paul enjoyed a powerful personal witness to the elite Roman guard (verse 13). He was always chained to a member of the Praetorian Guard, the Imperial Guard of Rome. Every six

hours his guard changed. That's 365 days a year, for two years. At four guards a day, Paul had 2,920 opportunities to share one-on-one about Jesus! Perhaps some of these soldiers who were sent throughout the Roman Empire spread the message of Jesus Christ they had heard from the lips of the prisoner Paul. What a ministry!—one Paul would not have had were he not under their guard.

—Paul the prisoner suddenly found time to write this marvelous and uplifting epistle that blessed the Philippian church and extends the blessing of encouragement to us today. The four sparkling chapters of this little book have brought joy, faith, hope, love, and peace to Christians for almost 2,000 years!

—Because Paul preached the gospel in his bonds (verse 13), others were inspired to join him in proclamation. His bonds also gave him access to the flower of the Roman army, but his absence created a need (and an opportunity!) for others to step in and fill the vacuum.

—Regardless of how or why the gospel was preached or who preached it, in every way, Christ was preached (verse 18).

—Even as a prisoner, Paul experienced God's peace and joy (verse 18).

- And now for you and your life, my friend. To whom or to what are you "chained"? Or, put another way, what are your divinely appointed circumstances? For instance, are you a wife, a mother, a single, a widow, a homemaker, an employee? Jot a quick answer here.

- Paul has often been referred to as "the optimistic prisoner." In his evaluation, the things that happened to him actually turned out for good (verse 12). What lesson about suffering and difficulty can you draw from Paul's attitude?

Also name one constructive or positive thing you can do today in your situation.

Heart Response

Well, dear one, where does today find you? How I would love to know your answers to the questions above!

But I want to leave you with yet a few more words—powerful words—from the pen of Paul. He wrote these uplifting lines in Romans 8:28-29: “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. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son....”

Beloved, our knowing God and trusting in His promise to work all things together for good makes us women of hope. Our God is in control of *all* things—even those things that appear to be negative—and He will work all things for our good and for His purposes. And, as another has noted:

Many a great Christian was molded in character in the crucible of suffering, matured in loneliness, and pre-

pared for greater usefulness in God's hands than if untouched by the storms of life.⁵

—John F. Walvoord

When we choose to bloom where our all-wise God plants us, we, too, will one day be able to declare with Paul, “But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.... I want you to know that God has worked all things together for His good purposes!”

NOTES