

PHILIPPIANS

1:12-30

Introduction

Nothing just *happens* to a child of God who is walking in obedience.

The New King James renders verse twelve,

Philippians 1:12 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel,

Notice that the words which happened are italicized. That means that they were not in the original language, but were added by the translators to give a better reading in English. It is an unfortunate choice of words, though, because nothing just *happens* to you. God is Sovereign and the things which seem to just *happen* to you as you are walking in obedience to Him are really part of His plan in His providence for your life.

The New American Standard translation is more accurate:

Philippians 1:12 Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,

Paul's circumstances actually furthered the work of the gospel. They were a part of God's plan in His providence all along.

And just what were those circumstances? *Paul was a prisoner of Rome, guarded around the clock by Caesar Nero's elite Praetorian guard!* The church back in Philippi saw this as an obstacle to the furthering of the gospel; Paul saw it as it truly was, an opportunity for the furthering of the gospel.

If everything is in God's plan in His providence, then your circumstances can always be an opportunity to further the gospel. Like Paul, you may be in chains; but your chains are challenges that can be met in God's strength and empowering.

Your circumstances are an opportunity, not an obstacle. Your conduct in your circumstances is another matter! Your conduct can be an obstacle to the furthering of the gospel - which is why Paul says, in verse twenty-seven,

Philippians 1:27 Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ...

We want to take a look at your circumstances and your conduct, your opportunities and your obstacles. We'll see two things this morning:

#1 Always Let Your Circumstances Be An
Opportunity For Furthering The Gospel
(v12-26)

#2 Never Let Your Conduct Be An
Obstacle For Furthering The Gospel
(v27-30)

{ { {
#1 Always Let Your Circumstances Be An
Opportunity For Furthering The Gospel
(v12-26)

Author John Phillips describes Paul's plans to visit Rome this way:

"In all the fullness and blessing of Christ, he would go there and lead the church to new and glorious victories. Roman roads would throb to the beat of marching men - armies of young men marching out of Rome to take the gospel to the globe... People from all over the world would flock down those same highways to visit Paul at Rome... Paul would turn the city into such a center of evangelism, missions, and Bible teaching that when people thought of Rome, they would not think of Caesar; they would think of Christ... Paul had planned to go on from Rome to Spain, Gaul, the frontier lands along the Rhine, and the lands where the Huns and Goths and Vandals sat in pagan darkness... His plans for evangelism had been as wide as the world."¹

Paul's visit to Rome was very different than those plans. He wanted to go to Rome as a preacher, but instead he went as a prisoner! He was illegally arrested in the temple at Jerusalem; he remained a prisoner in Caesarea for two years; when he finally appealed for a trial before Caesar Nero, he was sent there - but en route the ship was wrecked; he spent another three months on the Island of Malta before arriving in Rome; in Rome, he was guarded day and night by soldiers.

These were the things that *happened* to Paul. These were his circumstances - the ones he said "actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel."

He's going to tell us how the gospel was being furthered; but, before he does, I want to emphasize again the application for your life. **Your** circumstances actually turn out for the furtherance of the gospel!

¹Phillips, *Exploring Philippians*, p. 48.

Paul's circumstances were these: He was in *chains*; he was being *criticized*; he was facing a *crisis*. In each of them the gospel was being furthered! The word "furthered" means *pioneer advance*. It is a Greek military term referring to the army engineers who go before the troops to open the way into new territory. Instead of complaining about his confinement, Paul discovered that his circumstances opened up new areas of ministry.

=Like Paul, **your** chains further the gospel - opening up new areas of ministry:

Philippians 1:13 so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ;

Philippians 1:14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

The "palace guard" is the Praetorian Guard - the elite military unit that answered directly to Caesar Nero. A different guard would be assigned to Paul every six hours. Chained to him, they would hear his conversations with visitors about Jesus... They would hear his prayers to Jesus... They would hear him dictate letters to the churches about Jesus... And he would speak with them about their own lost souls! The soldiers were getting saved!

The "rest" Paul mentions were others in Nero's palace. Because of his imprisonment, people who probably never would have heard the gospel, in the highest part of the Roman government, were being converted to Jesus, as the soldiers who guarded him went back and shared their new found faith.

In addition, the believers in Rome, seeing Paul's example and recognizing God's providence, were being rekindled to the work of everyday evangelism. They were "much more bold to speak the word without fear" in their everyday conversations with unbelievers.

Your "chains" in life may not be as dramatic or as difficult as Paul's, but there is no reason why God cannot use them for furthering the gospel. You might feel chained to your spouse... to your children... to your extended family... to your desk or job... Those positions and relationships didn't just *happen* to you! You are there to make a pioneer advance with the gospel.

=Like Paul, **your** critics further the gospel - opening up new areas of ministry:

Philippians 1:15 Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will:

Philippians 1:16 The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains;

Philippians 1:17 but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.

The believers in Rome didn't all appreciate Paul. Some envied him and sought to cause "strife" - a word which means *factious rivalries*. They were seeking to divide the believers over issues with which they disagreed with Paul. In doing so they hoped to hurt Paul - "supposing to add affliction to [his] chains." How sad...

Some envied; others were encouraged, and preached the gospel out of love - recognizing God's work in and through Paul.

Paul's statement in verse eighteen is a remarkable window into his heart:

Philippians 1:18 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.

As long as the essential truths about Jesus were being preached, Paul was delighted! Christianity was not, and is not, a competition between churches or ministers. We, too, can rejoice when groups we have disagreements with prosper with converts- so long as the essential truths about Jesus' Person and work are not compromised.

=Like Paul, **your** crisis furthers the gospel - opening up new areas of ministry:

Philippians 1:19 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

Paul was in a crisis: He must defend himself before Nero, and could lose his life to the executioner.

He was confident that he would be released from prison. He was encouraged in his confidence by the prayers of the saints at Philippi, and by the abundant supply of the ministry of the Holy Spirit from heaven to his heart.

Philippians 1:20 according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

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

He was intent on preaching Christ to Nero. Whether he was acquitted or accused made no difference to him! Jesus was everything to him. If he lived, it would be to serve Jesus; if he died, it would be to see Jesus.

Like Paul, your crisis is an opportunity to "magnify" Jesus. How can you, in your measly physical body, magnify the Son of God? The stars are much bigger than the telescope, and yet the telescope magnifies them and brings them closer. The microscope is much bigger than the item on the slide, and yet it magnifies it. To the unbeliever, Jesus is far away; but as they watch you go through your crisis, they see Jesus magnified and He is brought closer to them. To the unbeliever, their problems seem so important; but as they watch you go through your crisis, they see Jesus magnified - they see how big He really is! Your crisis is the lens of opportunity that makes a "little" Jesus look very big, and a "distant" Jesus come very close.

Philippians 1:22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.

Philippians 1:23 For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Philippians 1:24 Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

Philippians 1:25 And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith,

Philippians 1:26 that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

Not that it was his decision to make, but, if it were, Paul was willing to postpone going to heaven in order to help the believers grow in their faith! Your crisis *also* affects believers as they see Jesus magnified by you in it...

+Chains, criticisms, and crises... Never your plan, but often God's in His providence. Each is your opportunity to further the gospel.

Your circumstances are not an obstacle; but your conduct in them can be!

#2 Never Let Your Conduct Be An Obstacle For Furthering The Gospel (v27-30)

These first twenty-six verses are an introduction to the rest of the letter. When Paul says, in verse twenty-seven, "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ...", he begins to address certain spiritual needs they had at Philippi; he identifies what was lacking and what needed correction. He would urge the Philippians - and you - to be *unyielding*, *undivided*, and *unafraid* in conduct.

=Be unyielding in your conduct:

Philippians 1:27 Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ...

The word "conduct" means *citizenship*; or, more properly, your duties and disciplines as a citizen of heaven. Philippi was a Roman colony; its citizens were to behave worthy of Rome, whom they represented. So you are a heavenly colony, and are to behave as worthy representatives of heaven's graces and glories while on earth. Don't yield to the world around! As the poet wrote,

Nay, world, I turn away,
Though thou seem fair and good,
That friendly, outstretched hand of thine,
Is stained with Jesus' blood.²

When you yield to the pressure of your circumstances, your conduct in unbecoming of the gospel.

=Be undivided in your conduct:

Philippians 1:27 ...so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,

There was disunity among the believers in Philippi. Later in this letter, Paul would name two women who were fighting! Here he reminds the believers that they are like an athletic team, for that is what the words "striving together" mean.

When you fail to maintain unity, your conduct is an obstacle to the furthering of the gospel.

=Be unafraid in your conduct:

Philippians 1:28 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.

Philippians 1:29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

Philippians 1:30 having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.

Paul uses a picture of a horse shying away from battle. What he is saying here is, Don't let your circumstances scare you out of furthering the gospel. Your circumstances have been graciously given to you to magnify Jesus. Your circumstances are like the "conflicts," the word for the Olympic athletic contests. They are an opportunity for you and others to see the stuff you're made of as a Christian - so conduct yourself as a disciplined athlete would.

As I said, the rest of the letter is an expansion on their "conduct." The point here is: Don't let your opportunities to further the gospel become obstacles because of conduct that is unworthy.

²*Ibid.*, p. 68.

Conclusion

We close with these lines, written by another anonymous poet:

Not till each loom is silent,
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Shall God reveal the pattern
And explain the reason why

The dark threads were as needful
In the weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
For the pattern which He planned.