

The sermon

Intro

As we celebrate Mother's Day today, we're going to look at the story of a man who treated Christian mothers with horrific cruelty and experienced God's mercy. It's the story of the author of Philippians, the apostle Paul.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

Biblical spirituality 101. How to live the Christian life. Where to find joy. What to avoid. Where to place your confidence. How to know Jesus.

Point 1: Rejoice in the Lord in every circumstance (3:1)

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

This is a command.

Note the man issuing the command is imprisoned, chained to a Roman guard 24/7, and the threat of execution is hanging over his head. Preachers in Rome are envious of Paul, view him as a rival, and preach for selfish gain (1:15, 17). And Paul's worried that the Philippian church. That they'll will give up gospel ground because of opposition. Or they'll implode because of internal division.

Does Paul think a person in his situation can be joyful?

Yes.

Does Paul think Christians in Palermo who have suffering family members, financial constraints, physical struggles, unjust bosses, busy schedules can be joyful people?

Yes.

Where is joy to be found?

In the Lord. We can be joyful, no matter what, because we know what we have in the Lord. Where is your gaze? God? Your circumstances? Seeing God brings joy.

What do we have in the Lord?

- 1) We have empowering grace to sustain us through each and every circumstance in life (1:2).

That's why Paul can say, "*it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*" (2:13).

- 2) We have peace with God (1:2).

No questions about reconciliation with God. No questions about forgiveness of sins. No questions about his verdict on the day of judgment.

- 3) We have fellowship/partnership with one another (1:5).

That's people who encourage and challenge us.

- 4) We have certainty that God will complete the work he began in us (1:6).

Glorification is sure. We'll be given new, physical bodies that can't die, sin, or suffer anymore. The curse will end!

5) We have a benevolent Savior, Jesus, who died in our place to rescue us from our sin (2:8).

I could add God's "mercy [or steadfast love] *follow me all the days of my life*" (Ps 23:6). God acted for us. God is acting for us. God will act for us.

When our gaze is on God, we find joy.

To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

Paul has no problem repeating himself about joy in God. It's beneficial (safe) for us to delight in God.

Point 2: Watch out for false teachers (3:2)

There's true and false. There's real and counterfeit. Real and counterfeit money. Diamonds and cubic zirconias. Air Jordan's and \$10 knock-offs. The dogs preached a distorted gospel.

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

Look out = beware of, watch out for, pay attention so that you're not led astray.

With **three insults**, Paul describes **one category** of false teachers.

Dogs = derogatory. Not cuddly pets. Scavengers who roamed the streets eating trash and road kill. Not something you'd want in your home. Like raccoons with rabies. Dangerous on contact.

Evildoers = morally corrupt. They thought they were faithful when in fact they were law-breakers opposing God by peddling a false gospel.

Those who mutilate the flesh = a reference to a group of false teachers who emphasized circumcision. In Galatians, Paul comments on this problem.

*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. ² Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³ I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. ⁴ You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. ⁷ You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? – **Galatians 5:1-7***

- 1) Paul connects circumcision with slavery.
- 2) Paul pits circumcision against Jesus.

If God's acceptance is merited through law-keeping we're doomed, because no one perfectly obeys God.

- 3) Paul pits circumcision against grace.
- 4) Paul pits circumcision against faith and love.

It's faith that produces love!

- 5) Paul pits circumcision against obedience.

Application

I'm not worried about you falling prey to the circumcision party. I'm not worried about 70 year old men wanting to be circumcised. I have other concerns.

Before I was here, people in this church followed some heretics who said Paul's books were the only ones we should follow.

Today there's self-appointed internet "authorities" who reject the local church and encourage church members to leave their churches. Men never affirmed as elders acting in that capacity.

The cheezy TV preachers who promise health and wealth if you give your money to them.

Those who paint Jesus as a social justice warrior who fought for transgender rights rather than the Savior who humbled himself by dying on the cross as an act of obedience to the Father.

I had a group Zoom this week. One missionary in India lamented the fact that a number of members were leaving the church because they wanted the feel good, positive, inspirational messages they can get on the internet instead of the Bible.

Watch out. Deceivers are everywhere!

Point 3: Don't put your confidence in yourself (3:3-6)

For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh- – 3:3

Believers are the only ones who've been circumcised = born again. Paul's talking about heart circumcision. In **Romans 2:28-29**, Paul says circumcision isn't "*outward and physical.*" Rather, "*circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.*"

Physical circumcision was a picture of heart circumcision accomplished by the Holy Spirit.

What is a Christian?

A person who worships God from "*newness of life*" (in the Spirit's power) and boasts in Jesus rather than their own merits. "*put no confidence in the flesh*" means place your confidence in Jesus' perfect obedience and death on the cross, not yourself.

though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: – 3:4

If there's anyone who should have confidence in his flesh, it's Paul. Paul's achievements dwarf the circumcision party. If Paul can't boast in his merits, neither can they.

circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; – 3:5

This is Paul's pedigree. "*circumcised on the eighth day*" means Paul came from faithful parents who followed the law to the tee. "*of the people of Israel*" means Paul's a purebred. Pure Jewish stock. "*of the tribe of Benjamin*" means Paul has traced his family ancestry. "*a Hebrew of Hebrews*" means his family kept the Jewish religion despite living in Gentile lands. He had a flag on his lawn. He dressed in red, white, and blue and went to the parades on the 4th of July. "*as to the law, a Pharisee*" = he belonged to the purest of all Jewish religious sects.

The Pharisees were the authorized experts and orthodox interpreters of the law who were loved by the common people. They were the most precise in law interpretation and promoted scrupulous application of purity, tithing and Sabbath laws. Paul was educated by the esteemed teacher Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3).

“a persecutor of the church”

Here's my mother's day reference.

I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, – Acts 22:4

Paul was headed to Damascus to capture Christians and return them to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2). To have them executed. That meant Paul's mission was separating mothers from their children.

Imagine the horror of a mother being bound and taken and her children left to fend for themselves. Women have been created and designed by God to nurture. Single women perform this function different than mothers, but they nurture nonetheless. Nurture is a good and glorious gift from God. These mothers were robbed of that gift because of their devotion to Jesus.

Execution could occur through Rome giving Jewish authorities the okay or Rome carrying it out as was the case with Jesus. Women were crucified by the Roman Empire per Jewish historian Josephus (*The Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.3.4).

A word of caution for us. Paul was deceived. Deceived bad. He thought that separating mothers from their children and having them executed was serving God. There's a possibility we too might be serving Satan when we think we're serving God.

“as to righteousness, under the law, blameless” ≠ Paul thought he perfectly kept every commandment without fail. Faithful law-keeping involved making use of sin offerings which involved the admission of sin. Paul's saying, if anyone kept the law well, I did.

Once upon a time Paul was confident in himself.

Point 4: Put your confidence in Jesus (3:7-9)

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. – 3:7

Before conversion, Paul counted these things as gain. After conversion, Paul counted these things as loss. Pride in his law-keeping, separating mothers from their children were things to shed, not celebrate.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

When he believed, everything was loss *“because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”* That's everything that conflicts with knowing Jesus must go.

What does it mean to know Jesus?

The intellect is involved. Knowing facts about Jesus like what he taught about lust and loving our enemies, he died for my sins, he rose from the dead. But that's not all. To know someone is relational language.

Yes, I know more about Kaitlin than I did before we married. At the same time, our relationship has deepened because of what we've gone through together.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish,

Paul's orientation changed from self to Jesus. What he counted as gain (separating mothers from their children) he now counted as garbage to be tossed in the dumpster.

Coming to Jesus is a change in our values. In order to believe, I had to come to the point where I valued God's holiness, wisdom, commands, forgiveness more than I valued the pleasures of fraternity social life like the parties and the bars.

in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-

Paul gave up what held him back, confidence in himself, to "gain Christ and be found in him." Which means Paul had to recognize he could do nothing to merit God's acceptance.

How can a person whose sinful, law-breaking lifestyle merits God's judgment come under God's blessing? Through faith in Jesus the unrighteous are declared righteous in God's sight.

On the cross, Jesus was treated as if he lived our sinful life. If we believe, God treats us as if we lived Jesus' perfect life. Through faith God credits to us the merits of Jesus' sinless life and substitutionary death. Jesus both kept the law and died for our sins.

If we continue to trust in our own merits, we suffer the punishment for our sins.

Non-Christian

God calls us to stop placing our confidence in ourselves and to start placing our confidence in Jesus. Maybe you think you're fine as is. You need to see your sin. Sin isn't just murder and rape and stealing from the elderly. Sin is selfishness, harsh words, hatred, withholding love, deceit, pride in our own pedigree and achievements.

Maybe you lack confidence in yourself. You know you're broken and need outside help. The gospel is for you! You can know Jesus through faith. That's turning from pride to trust in Jesus' death and resurrection. You can know God's acceptance. You can know the life change the Holy Spirit produces.

Point 5: Make progress in your relationship with Jesus through suffering (3:10-11)

that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,
– 3:10

Paul's talking about the **ongoing experiential knowledge** that comes through a life lived by faith.

As we walk with Jesus over time, life happens.

The wait for a spouse while your younger siblings are getting married. The wait for a pastor job while your brother, two brother-in-laws, and your wife's cousin are in full-time ministry. Walking up every morning to a job that doesn't fit your passions and giftings. Difficult people in your life that bring turmoil rather than encouragement. The vehicle you thought was a wise investment that can't be fixed no matter how many thousands you spend.

Hardships are opportunities to experience "the power of his resurrection." As we walk through life with Jesus we experience the power of the Spirit that indwells us, what I call empowering grace. God working his good pleasure in us. We experience relationship with Jesus as he works inside our hearts, guides us with his word, and sends his people to minister to us.

As we go through life we share (**koinwni,a**) in Jesus' sufferings. Things like rejection, opposition, slander, mockery. Our experience mimics what Jesus experienced on the cross.

Why did God save us? To share in Jesus' sufferings and experience God's sustaining power.

that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. – 3:11

What does Paul mean? We know he believes the future resurrection of believers is certain (1:6; 3:20-21). And we know we attain resurrection through faith. So Paul isn't suggesting multiple paths to resurrection or doubting his own resurrection.

The best suggestion is "by any mean possible" means whatever path, whatever suffering God has for me. Maybe I'll be executed soon. Maybe I'll die of old age. Maybe I'll be alive when Jesus returns. Maybe I'll be in the grave.

Non-Christian

The gospel is good news. Good news of forgiveness of sins despite our failure. The guy who separated mothers from their children was forgiven! Good news of God effecting heart circumcision. Good news of resurrection from the dead when Jesus returns.