

JOY AT HALF-MAST

The Brits were angry. Princess Diana was dead, yet the Union Jack wasn't flying half-mast over Buckingham Palace. In fact, the British flag wasn't flying at all. Not even the loss of a princess could change a centuries-old, royal tradition.

The flag never flies over Buckingham Palace unless the Queen is in residence.

It's been said of the Christian life, "Joy is the flag that indicates King Jesus is residing in the palace of our heart." And the book of Philippians is all about joy...

But its message is that the flag does fly at half-mast. The joy of Jesus can be experienced in the midst of death, danger, difficulties, heartbreak, and struggles. A Christian's joy is not dependent on

smooth, pleasant, care-free circumstances...

It's amazing that a letter full of joy begins with a couple of guys in jail... Verse 1, "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ..." It's 62 AD. Paul is on death row in a Roman prison waiting for the wicked emperor, Nero, to hear his appeal. Paul isn't sure if he'll live or die.

It's hard to imagine a gloomier, more depressing situation. But you'd never know of his circumstances by the tone of his letter. Rather than be bummed, Paul is brimming with joy and confidence. This book is full of rejoicing and celebration.

Devotion Box - What If...

What if tomorrow... the doctor reads the result of your test and announces that you have cancer - yet you drive home with a peace in your heart and a newfound appreciation for every day you have left... Or—your boss hands you a pink-slip, but rather than panic, you start to laugh, and get excited about the new door the Lord is about to open. Or, news arrives that a friend has just died in an automobile accident – you're obviously upset, but as tears stream down your cheeks there's rejoicing in your heart that your friend is now in a far better place.

Are those reactions to calamity possible? Paul would say "Yes!" If Jesus lives in you, it's not just possible – it's expected. Joy in tough times, or *joy-at-half-mast*, is Paul's theme!

PAUL'S PRAYER

Paul shows his fondness for the Philippians in 1:7, "I have you in my heart..." Here's a key to experiencing joy-at-half-mast. Paul's priority was people. Joy departs - not necessarily when life gets hard, but when we go it alone. Paul's heart was padded with a friendship that helped him absorb the world's blows.

Paul continues his prayer, 1:9, "that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment..." As your pastor I have the fear that the more you get to know me, the less you'll like me. People hear me teach Bible studies and think, "*Wow, what a cool guy!*" But I wonder what you'll think when you find out that I make mistakes, pick my nose, yell at my kids, and fight with my wife.

Devotion Box - The Great Finisher

Prisoner Paul writes to the church at Philippi and its leaders. He reminds them of his prayers for them. He was thankful for what God *had done* and *would do*.

One of the reasons Paul could rejoice under any condition was his confidence that what God started in his life, He would finish. Paul shows the same assurance toward the Philippians. Verse 6, "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ..."

Go through my garage and I'll show you all my half-completed projects. I'm notorious for starting stuff I never finish. But I'm not the only one.... There's a museum in Florence, Italy dedicated to Michelangelo's *unfinished works*. But Jesus is just the opposite. Whatever Jesus starts, He finishes. You may be tired, and discouraged, and on the verge of defeat - but take heart, Jesus never abandons a work in midstream. He will complete what He's begun in your life!

Getting to know me is pretty risky.

And this is why it's critical you keep your eyes on Jesus, and not on me. For Jesus is the only person of whom it can be said, "The more you get to know Him, the more you're going to love Him." Jesus has no defects. He is thoroughly cool! This is why Paul prays that your love for Him will abound in knowledge.

Paul prays again in 1:10, "that you may approve the things that are excellent..." It's easy to differentiate between the good and the bad - but Paul prays that we learn to discern between the good and the best. All too often, the good becomes the enemy of the best. Pray that you can discern "things that are excellent."

Bible Scan - Philippians 1-4

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Devotion Box - All Your Eggs In One Basket

Understand, Paul is in prison facing possible execution, but his concern is not to live or die. Come what may, Paul's passion is to shine for Jesus Christ. Read verses 20-21, "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. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Paul is a bottom line guy. He puts all his eggs in one basket. Jesus was all that *really* mattered to Paul. If he *lives*, it's with Jesus. If he *dies*, it's Jesus in heaven rather than in prison. Either way, Paul can't lose.

Guys, you're never ready to live until you're first ready to die. Paul's deepest desire was not to *save his skin*, but to *serve His Savior*. Paul was caught up in a cause more important than his own convenience, comfort, or even his life.

No sacrifice was too large. He would go anywhere, do anything for Jesus. And in the end, no one lived a fuller, more satisfying, more joyful life than Paul. What is your earnest expectation? What's your bottom line? What really matters to you?

THE JESUS STYLE

The blessings we've received in Christ should free us to be a blessing. Since Jesus lives in me and meets my needs, I can live to meet the needs of others. Verse 3, "let each esteem others better than himself."

In 2:5 Paul tells us that to live an others-centered life we need to adopt the attitude of Jesus... "Let this mind (*or attitude or mindset*) be in you which was also in Christ Jesus..." Following Jesus begins by adopting His attitude. Live the Jesus style. Jesus was God. He could've thrown His weight around and used intimidation to get His way - but He didn't.

Rather, He laid aside the perks and privileges of deity and became a man. He declined special treatment. Verses 6-7 tell us, "who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation..." The Phillips translation puts it, "who had always been God by nature, did not cling to His privileges as God's equal, but stripped Himself of every advantage."

In verse 7 the word translated "made" means "emptied". When Jesus became a man He didn't stop being God, but He emptied Himself of His divine advantages. While among us, Jesus lived as one of us. The King of the universe became a simple servant. Jesus humbled Himself, and God exalted Him.

Devotion Box - More Opportunity

In 2:23 Paul is torn between wanting to live and wanting to die and go to heaven. If Nero orders a death sentence, he'll send Paul to heaven. Paul will be with Jesus! How can that be bad? If he lets Paul live, then he can continue serving the Church - which would be better for the Philippians. Death would be heavenly. Life is more opportunity.

THE FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL

A joyous Christian looks on the bright side. In 1:12-14 Paul sees his imprisonment as an opportunity, "for the furtherance of the gospel..." While in prison for his faith, rather than throw a pity-party, Paul preached the Gospel.

Roman prisoners were under round-the-clock surveillance - a soldier was always nearby. Over time, Paul witnessed to the whole palace guard. Paul saw circumstances not as *inconveniences*, but as *opportunities*.

Paul's imprisonment also inspired other Christians to boldly share their faith. If Paul could share Christ behind bars, then they could do it in the open air.

In verse 15 Paul says, "Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will..." Paul knew this sudden rash of Christian witness was fueled by mixed motives. Some of the preachers were truly inspired by Paul's example. But others figured that while Paul was in prison - out of commission - they could make a name for themselves and enhance their own popularity.

But look at Paul's conclusion in verse 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." This doesn't mean that motive in ministry is not a concern. A man's motive is vital to God. But it may not be that important to the person who receives the message. The power is in the message, not the mouthpiece.

It reminds me of the mom who walked into her son's room and chided him to get up and go to church. As he pulled the covers over his head, he said, "Mom, I don't want to go church! Why can't I sleep in?" She replied, "There're two reasons: it's Sunday... *and you're the pastor.*" Not every pastor has the best intention.

In Isaiah 55:11 God says, "My word... shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please..." God will honor His Word even when preached from a dishonorable motive. It's been said, "One of the greatest proofs of the power of the Gospel is its ability to *shine* despite some of the *shady* people who've preached it."

Devotion Box - Our Part, God's Part

In Philippians 2:12-13 Paul tells the Philippians to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

We're never required to work *for* our salvation. God works for us and in us. He plants in us both the desire and the dexterity to do His will. But what God works in - we must work out. We are not the catalyst, but we are the channel.

In other words, God has a part and we have a part. It's said, "Man *can* do nothing without God, and God *will* do nothing without man." God works a miracle in us and revs up our engine - but we have to drop it in gear and get rolling. God puts *the life of Christ* in us. It's up to us to adopt *the mind of Christ*..

Devotion Box - Fighting Firefighters

Paul says in verse 14, "Do all things without complaining and disputing..."

Once, two battalions of Maryland firefighters answered the same call. The firefighters got into a fight over which group was responsible for extinguishing the fire. As the house burned, the county police were busy separating the firefighters. This describes what happens in a lot of churches. We're murmuring and disputing with each other while countless souls burn in the flames of hell.

ALL THAT I COUNTED LOSS FOR CHRIST

Philippians 3 begins with a warning for Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets, and Tennessee Volunteers, and Florida Gator football fans... "Beware of dogs". In fact, the Greek word is spelled *d-a-w-g*. Actually, rather than *Bulldogs* Paul is thinking of *bad dogs*. Theological pit bulls. He's talking about false teachers who take a bite out of the truth. They mesh faith and flesh. They take pride in their pedigree, and procedures, and performance.

The Judiazers were at it in Philippi, spreading their false doctrine of faith plus works. If you wanted to be a Christian you first had to act like a Jew. In 3:2, Paul calls them "the mutilation" – making fun of their insistence on circumcision. What makes a person right with God is not a physical operation, but a spiritual transformation. Not a work of human effort - the flesh - but a gift of God's grace.

It reminds me of the legalist who said, "I believe the Christian life is like rowing a boat. One oar is the Law, and the other is faith in Christ. If you drop either oar you simply row in circles. You need both oars." The pastor replied, "That's a fine illustration. There's only one problem... you don't get to heaven in a rowboat!"

Paul says in verse 3, "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh..." If ever a man could've had confidence in the flesh, and proved good enough for God through his own efforts, it would've been Paul.

He takes us on a tour of his trophy case... Verse 5,

"circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." That's quite a religious resume. If that won't gain God's favor, and get you to heaven nothing will...

But Paul adds in verse 7, "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ." Paul gave it all up, to be found in Christ.

The former rabbi realized that a right standing with God is never obtained or maintained by *what we do*, but by what *Christ has done*. And you've got to choose how you'll approach God... what you want to trust in... It's either flesh or faith.

Paul's testimony reminds me of Zack and Natalie. When they were tots we would doll them up in little sailor suits. They looked so adorable, but then you'd pick them up, and realize they'd soiled their diapers. I'd think, "Man, how could something so cute smell so rotten." This was how Paul felt about himself... Outwardly, he looked so righteous, but inwardly he was so rotten.

Paul says that all the trophies of religion he had accumulated he considered to be "rubbish" compared to the merits of Christ. The Greek word translated "rubbish" means "*dung or manure*". Paul worked hard, day and night, being good. It was *do-do-do-do*, but compared to the righteousness in Jesus it all proved to be *do-do*.

Devotion Box - Paul's Goal

Guys, everybody needs a goal in life – a master passion.

I once saw a poster of a High School soccer player. He's on the ground – dirty and exhausted. He's wearing a painful expression. The caption reads, "No pain, no gain – no gain, no goals – no goals, no scouts – no scouts, no scholarship – no scholarship, no college – no college, no girls – no girls? Get up man, get up!" We all need a goal – and Paul states his goal in verse 10, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection..."

But that's where a lot of us stop. Sure, it's cool to know God – and the power of His resurrection... to plunge the depths of His wisdom - to feel the surge of His power – to bath in the healing virtues of His love. What a goal! But Paul doesn't stop there– he wants to know "the fel-

lowship of His sufferings."

When my kids were young they told me everything- but as they've grown older that's not always the case. At times I see they're bothered or hurting inside, and I ask them what's wrong - and they'll shrug me off, "Aw, dad, nothing's wrong. Everything's cool"... when I know it's really not. I love my kids more than life itself - and if you love someone you'll want to share their concerns. You'll want to share all that's in their heart – not only their joys, but their hurts – perhaps even more so their hurts and their sufferings.

This is how Paul felt about Jesus. He loved the Lord, and wanted to know His heart. He wanted to share all with Jesus - His presence, power, and His sufferings.

Devotion Box - Pressing To Know Jesus

Philippians 3:12, reminds us that none of us have arrived spiritually - nor will we in this lifetime - but Paul presses toward the mark. His goal is to know Jesus. His prize is to be like Him. And Paul is determined to let nothing get in His way.

When a basketball team puts on a full court press the coach expects his players to intensify their efforts. Likewise, we need to show some intensity in our pursuit of God. Yes, we apprehend God by faith,

but faith is not passive. Real faith is aggressive. Paul applies every ounce of his attention toward achieving his goal.

Notice his comment in verse 13, "but one thing I do..." It's not, "these 50 things I dabble in." Paul's one propelling pursuit, his master desire, is to know Jesus - His presence, His power, even His pain. Are we preoccupied with knowing Jesus?

Bible Scan - Philippians 1-4

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements - Tuesday, August 27th @ 6:30 PM—*Ladies Italian Potluck and Bible Study*...Tuesday, September 10th 9:45 AM & 7:00 PM *Ladies Bible Study*, "Face to Face with Women of the Bible" begins...Friday, September 13th @ 12:00 PM—"Buy Your Score" *Men's Golf Tournament for Missions*.... Next Bible Scan - September 1, 2002 - Colossians 1-4

"According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." - Philippians 1:20-21

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Devotion Box - A Piece Of God's Peace

Philippians 4:4-7, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

We experience peace with God when we receive the Lord's acceptance and forgiveness, but peace with God is not the same as the peace of God. The peace of God is a piece of God's peace – a chip off the old block – a slice of His composure, the sense of his invincibility, the surge of His unstopable love.

Here we have one of the few, true Scriptural formulas. You can't manufacture God's peace – it's a supernatural work. But there are steps you can follow to put yourself in a position to experience His peace. Here Paul gives us 5 steps to follow – 5 steps to experiencing the peace of God...

Verse 4 tells us **to rejoice in one thing**. I can't always rejoice in certain circumstances, but I can always rejoice in the goodness and grace of God.

Verse 5, **be satisfied with few things**. The word "gentleness" means "moderation" - or "to live without, to travel light". Become enamored with possessions and earthly ambition - and you set yourself up for major disappointment. It's said, "Contentment in this life comes not from getting more, but from expecting less."

Verse 6 provides us three more steps... **Worry about nothing. Pray about everything**. "Turn your cares into prayers." And 5th, **be thankful for anything**.

There you have it, 5 steps for knowing the peace of God: *rejoice in one thing, be satisfied with few things, worry about nothing, pray about everything, and be thankful for anything* – AND... verse 7, "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ."

Devotion Box - The Key To Contentment

Paul appreciates the Philippians' offering, but he wants them to know he doesn't need their money. Paul says in verses 12-13 that he's learned the key to contentment.

His disposition is no longer influenced by his *lot in life*, but by the *Lord of life*. Hey, *lifted up or laid off - bulging pockets or a barren pantry - more than enough or less than what it seems he needs* - Paul can thrive in any situation because Christ has become my strength!

Ella Wilcox writes these words, "One ship drives east and another drives west with the selfsame winds that blow. It's the set of the sails - and not the gales - which tell us the way to go. Like the winds of the sea are the ways of fate, as we voyage along through life. It's the set of the soul that decides the goal, and not the calm or the strife." The Christian has joy even at half-mast because we've learned to base our joy on our relationship with Jesus, not the circumstances of our life. Paul sums it up in verse 13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Devotion Box - Spiritual Investments

What excited Paul was not his receiving, but the Philippians giving. He tells them in 4:17, "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account." Paul is teaching the Philippians – and us - that an offering – a gift to the church or donation to a missionary – is actually an investment in that particular ministry. That's why it's important to make good investments. Treat your charitable giving just as you do your financial investments. Always put your money where you believe it'll accomplish the most good. Give to get the best return.

Paul's words encourage us to give - and remind us we can never out-give God. Verse 19, "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." What a promise! Give to God's work, and God in turn will see to it that all your needs are supplied... and abundantly so, "according to His riches!"

Devotion Box - The Saints In Caesar's Palace

Paul closes in verse 22, "All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household..." Remember 1:13, Paul said he'd been locked up for the furtherance of the Gospel. God had him in prison to share his faith. And guess what? During his prison term he witnessed to members of Nero's court - and some became believers. Now they're sending their greetings to the Philippians.

Paul could've gotten down about his circumstances, but instead he experienced joy-at-half-mast – and God used a tough situation to yield tremendous results.