

"Rejoice with Me"
(Philippians 2:17-18)

Introduction: What would you think if you had to face the execution of one of your closest Christian brethren? Would the possibility of his death cause you grief? Could it in any sense cause you joy? What if you had to face suffering, persecution, and eventual death for the Gospel? Would you be able to accept it joyfully, or would you shrink from it in fear, would you fear it so much that you would do anything you could to avoid it? The text this morning tells us what is a proper attitude to have toward persecution for the Gospel.

This morning, we have displayed for us in the pages of Scripture something more of the heart and mind of the apostle Paul in his ministry and love for the Lord Jesus. You will recall that last week we saw Paul encouraging the saints in Philippi to hold fast the faithful Word so that in the last day, the day of Christ's coming in judgment, he might have the privilege of seeing his spiritual children standing complete in Christ. Paul's life was completely taken up into Christ, and he lived for His glory alone. His whole focus was to run the course which his Lord had set before him, and to run it with all of his might. Jesus had specifically called Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and to see the Gentiles embrace the Gospel and enter the kingdom was that for which he lived. And so, having labored for many years, and having established many churches in the Roman empire, he was finally arrested for his incessant preaching of His Lord, and was awaiting possible execution. But far from being despondent about his situation, Paul rejoiced. He rejoiced because he knew that he was where he needed to be, and if it was God's plan that he died in that Roman jail, he was well content with that. But not only this, he wanted the Philippians to rejoice with him, for this was an acceptable end to the apostle, who was ready to give his life for Christ, as Christ had given His life for him. And I believe what this text is showing us this morning is,

Christians can and ought to rejoice when they are counted worthy to suffer for the cause of Christ.

I. First, I Want You to See How Paul Viewed His Imprisonment and Possible Execution, and How He Ties This Together with the Fruit of the Philippian Church.

A. Paul Saw the Fruit of Obedience which the Philippians Bore as an Acceptable Sacrificial Service of Faith.

- 1. Paul here likens their labors to the O.T. sacrifices.***
 - a. Under the Mosaic system, when one desired to draw near to God, he had to come by way of sacrifice.***
 - (i) The Israelites could not approach God except by way of an appropriate sacrifice.***
 - (ii) It normally required the pouring out of the blood of an animal to atone for their sins.***
 - b. But even then, the sacrifices in themselves were not acceptable to God, unless the state of their***

hearts was right.

- (i) To offer a sacrifice without their hearts engaged was not acceptable to God.
- (ii) As He says in Micah 6:6-8, "WITH WHAT SHALL I COME TO THE LORD AND BOW MYSELF BEFORE THE GOD ON HIGH? SHALL I COME TO HIM WITH BURNT OFFERINGS, WITH YEARLING CALVES? DOES THE LORD TAKE DELIGHT IN THOUSANDS OF RAMS, IN TEN THOUSAND RIVERS OF OIL? SHALL I PRESENT MY FIRST-BORN FOR MY REBELLIOUS ACTS, THE FRUIT OF MY BODY FOR THE SIN OF MY SOUL? HE HAS TOLD YOU, O MAN, WHAT IS GOOD; AND WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU BUT TO DO JUSTICE, TO LOVE KINDNESS, AND TO WALK HUMBLLY WITH YOUR GOD?"
- (iii) Even the greatest sacrifices, without obedience, and without love are not acceptable to Him. Remember what Paul told us in 1 Corinthians 13:3? "AND IF I GIVE ALL MY POSSESSIONS TO FEED THE POOR, AND IF I DELIVER MY BODY TO BE BURNED, BUT DO NOT HAVE LOVE, IT PROFITS ME NOTHING."
- (iv) He wanted not the form of a ceremony, but the truth of a righteous life.

2. The Philippians, in the estimation of Paul, rendered an acceptable sacrifice of obedient service to God.

a. The two words "sacrifice" and "service" may be understood here to refer to the same thing, and so it may be translated a sacrificial service.

- (i) They offered up to God the sacrifice which He required, that in which He delighted.
- (ii) Paul tells us in Romans 12:1 what this sacrifice is, "I URGE YOU THEREFORE, BRETHREN, BY THE MERCIES OF GOD, TO PRESENT YOUR BODIES A LIVING AND HOLY SACRIFICE, ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, WHICH IS YOUR SPIRITUAL SERVICE OF WORSHIP."
- (iii) It is not the half-hearted obedience of an ungrateful servant, but the whole-hearted and whole-souled obedience of a life given entirely to God, laid upon His altar for His service alone, for the mercies which they have received in Christ.

b. One of the marks of a genuine faith is that it gives the appropriate response to the Word of God.

- (i) It renders fear toward the threatenings, hope in the promises, ascent towards the truth, and obedience to the commands.
- (ii) The Philippians were giving the appropriate responses to the Word, and it showed in their lives.
- (iii) To Paul it was clear that they had drawn near to God with their hearts.
- (iv) They had demonstrated this by their

participation in the gospel from the very first day it came to them; by their suffering for the sake of the gospel; by their sending one of their own members to minister to Paul in his imprisonment, and in contributing more than once to meet the material needs of Paul.

- (v) Paul called their labor a sacrificial service of faith, and so it was.

B. *And Now With Paul Facing Execution for the Gospel of Christ, How Did He Describe His Own Impending Death? He Calls It a Drink Offering Placed Upon Their Acceptable Sacrifice.*

1. *The word which is used here refers to the wine which would be poured out beside the altar as the final and crowning act of the sacrifice.*
2. *Paul uses the same image in 2 Timothy 4:6 to refer to his impending death. "FOR I AM ALREADY BEING POURED OUT AS A DRINK OFFERING, AND THE TIME OF MY DEPARTURE HAS COME."*
3. *Paul here suspects that his life is about to be poured out, as that cup of offering is emptied of its contents.*
 - a. *But this does not matter to him as long as he knows that it is but the crowning of the sacrifice which the Philippians are bringing of a true and lively faith.*
 - b. *They were his "joy and crown" in the Lord (41), and so he did not mind crowning their sacrifice with his life.*

II. *And this Bring Us to the Second Point I Want You to See, Namely, the Attitude of the Apostle in the Face of the Very Real Possibility of Dying for the Gospel.*

A. *Though Paul Was Facing Death, Far From Fearing for His Life, He Was Actually Rejoicing.*

1. *He was not rejoicing in the fact of death itself.*
 - a. *Death is the result of the Fall.*
 - (i) *God did not make man to die, but to live.*
 - (ii) *But with the Fall came sin, and the consequences of sin, which is death.*
 - b. *Therefore, death is an unnatural thing.*
 - (i) *It may seem natural to us because we were born into a world of sin and death, and have known of nothing else.*
 - (ii) *But death is the tearing asunder of soul and body, that which God originally made to remain in intimate union.*
 - (iii) *In death, the body goes into the grave, and the soul returns to God who made it.*
 - (iv) *And it is not until the resurrection that they are reunited.*
2. *Paul was not rejoicing over the prospect of death in itself, but because of what his death meant.*
 - a. *He rejoiced because his death was for the cause of*

Christ.

- (i) There is no greater end than that of the giving up of your life for the Savior.
- (ii) Jesus said, "GREATER LOVE HAS NO MAN THAN THIS, THAT ONE LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS" (John 15:13).
- (iii) Our Lord laid down His life for His sheep; the greatest expression of our love to Him is to do likewise.
- (iv) Paul, when he was begged by his brethren not to go to Jerusalem where he was sure to die, replied, "WHAT ARE YOU DOING, WEEPING AND BREAKING MY HEART? FOR I AM READY NOT ONLY TO BE BOUND, BUT EVEN TO DIE AT JERUSALEM FOR THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS" (Acts 21:13).
- (v) Paul was joyful if his life was to be laid down for his Lord.

b. He rejoiced because his departure meant that he would be with Christ.

- (i) If given a choice, Paul would much rather be with his Savior.
- (ii) "FOR TO ME, TO LIVE IS CHRIST, AND TO DIE IS GAIN. BUT IF I AM TO LIVE ON IN THE FLESH, THIS WILL MEAN FRUITFUL LABOR FOR ME; AND I DO NOT KNOW WHICH TO CHOOSE. BUT I AM HARD-PRESSED FROM BOTH DIRECTIONS, HAVING THE DESIRE TO DEPART AND BE WITH CHRIST, FOR THAT IS VERY MUCH BETTER" (1:21-23).

c. And lastly he rejoiced because he was to depart with the stamp of God's approval upon his ministry through his spiritual children.

- (i) To the Corinthians, he said, "IF TO OTHERS I AM NOT AN APOSTLE, AT LEAST I AM TO YOU; FOR YOU ARE THE SEAL OF MY APOSTLESHIP IN THE LORD" (1 Cor. 9:2).
- (ii) He rejoiced because the Philippians as well were the seal of his apostleship.
- (iii) He had not run in vain, nor toiled in vain. The saints at Philippi through their sacrifice of obedience had demonstrated that.

3. And he rejoiced together with the Philippians because they too shared in the glorious fruit of the gospel through his ministry.

B. Not Only Was Paul Rejoicing, but He Called Upon the Philippians to Rejoice With Him.

1. He did not want the Philippians to lament his circumstances.

- a. We usually think of death as tragic, and useless.*
- b. But Paul was here sealing the truth of the Gospel by his own blood.*
- c. He did not fear death, but counted it a privilege to die for Christ.*

2. He did not want them to grieve for him, but to rejoice with him.
 - a. He wanted them to rejoice among themselves because of the fruit which God was bearing in them.
 - b. And he wanted them to rejoice together with him, because he was about to obtain the martyr's crown.

III. By Way of Application this Morning, I Want for Us to See this as an Example of What We Ought to Look for in Our Lives as the Proper Ground of Our Rejoicing.

- A. All of Us Are Seeking for Joy in Life to One Extent or Another.
 1. We are not merely looking for happiness, for happiness is tied to our circumstances.
 - a. We are only happy when things are going our way.
 - b. And when things do not go the way that we want them to, happiness vanishes like steam into the air.
 - c. Someone might be happy when they get that new car that they've always wanted, only to lose that happiness when it gets into a wreck, or is stolen.
 - d. A child might be happy when he gets that toy, or piece of athletic equipment he always wanted, only to be disheartened when the newer and better version is released.
 - e. Happiness is temporary at best; it is something which soon flies out of our grasp.
 2. But we are looking for lasting joy in our lives, something which transcends our circumstances, something which cannot be affected by them.
- B. The Only True and Lasting Joy in this World Comes from Knowing that You Are the Lord's.
 1. The world's goods can bring temporary happiness; even the pleasures of sin are fun for a season, but in the end they do not give lasting joy or profit.
 2. Rather, only those things in our lives which show that we have a true interest in Christ, and therefore an everlasting inheritance in the heavens, filled with love and joy, which will not pass away, are the things which will bring the ultimate joy.
 3. Our text this morning tells us that one of these marks of grace is the fruit of an obedient life.
 - a. Paul rejoiced to see the sacrificial obedience of the Philippians, because it was an indicator to him that they had received the mercy of God.
 - b. And when we find in our hearts the desire to serve the Lord with wholeness of heart, we ought to rejoice as well, for it is a strong evidence of God's working in us.
 - c. Remember that salvation is by grace through faith, apart from works. It comes through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His work alone to save you, apart from any works of yours.
 - d. But if you are truly saved, there will be the fruit of thankfulness, the labor of love. The Bible tells us that this is the reason for God's renewing us. "FOR WE

ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS FOR GOOD WORKS, WHICH GOD PREPARED BEFOREHAND, THAT WE SHOULD WALK IN THEM" (Eph. 2:10).

- e. And so do you want joy in your Christian experience? Is there the fruit of an obedient walk in your life? If there is no obedience, then how can you possibly have any assurance that you are His? And if you don't have any assurance, how can you have any joy?
 - f. And so you must give yourself to the business of bearing fruit for the Lord's glory. If you can do so with a joyful heart that is ever being enlarged with love for the Savior, this is a strong assurance of faith, and it will multiply your joy. It will multiply your joy in knowing that you are redeemed from everlasting destruction, and can look forward to everlasting bliss.
 - g. But if your heart is stubborn, and refuses to obey the Lord, and has no love for Him, then you must turn to Christ if you are to find that joy. It only comes from knowing Him in a relationship of love and obedience.
- C. And Lastly, If this Joy Is Yours, then even the Worst of Circumstances Can Never Remove It from You.
1. If you have a sound assurance of faith, then it becomes a mighty bulwark against the whiles and schemes of the devil.
 - a. When temptation comes your way from the enemy, you know that you have a heavenly protector to defend you.
 - b. When you are buffeted by your own flesh, you know that there are means available to strengthen you in the spirit.
 2. Even persecution, a persecution unto death, can not take this joy away from you.
 - a. It can't take it away because you have the assurance that God has brought the affliction, and He has done so for your ultimate good.
 - b. He is refining you, and testing you, and showing you where you need to grow in sanctification.
 - c. He is granting you the privilege of suffering in the place of Christ, a privilege we should all cherish if the Lord should call us to it.
 - d. And even if we should be required to give up our lives for it, we know that Christ has removed its sting.
 - (i) **What is it that really makes persecution a fearful thing? Is it not the eventuality of death?**
 - (ii) **But in Christ, the sting of death has been removed, death has been overcome.**
 - (iii) **And so if the evidence of a true and lively faith is in your life through an obedient sacrificial service, remember these four things when you are facing persecution to maintain your joy:**

- (a) It only comes in God's gracious providence, and God means well by it.
- (b) It will purify from your life the things that God hates, and make you more like Him.
- (c) It is a great honor when you can suffer for Christ, to endure the persecution meant for Him, since He took God's wrath for you.
- (d) And even if you should be called to give up your life unto death, even if you should be poured out as a drink offering as the apostle Paul, you can yet rejoice, because for the Christian, to depart and to be with Christ is very much better.
Amen.