

## Whatever Comes

New Year, new series. I'm guessing you don't get as excited as I do when a new series comes around, but this is always really fun for me. Sometimes we do topical series, but this one is what we call an expository series. That simply means the instead of taking a topic and exploring what the Bible has to say about it, we allow Scripture itself to set the agenda for what we talk about.

The reason we do this is because one of the primary characteristics of Christians is that we are called to be shaped by Scripture. This is important because we live in a society that constantly tells us that we find our purpose and identity by looking inside. So, the worst thing you can do is to tell someone they're not perfect the way they are. It's a tragedy to try to conform to anything other than your passions, desires and dreams.

The problem is that it's impossible not to be shaped by something. We're all shaped by our family, friends, what we read and what we watch on TV. It's so subtle, we don't even realize it's happening. And not everything that shapes us is good.

That's why it's critical for Christians to go to Scripture and hold ourselves—our thoughts, desires, actions, and way of life—up to it and ask ourselves what we need to change to conform our lives to Scripture. This is exactly the point the Apostle Paul is making when he writes in Romans 12:2, **“Stop conforming to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”** That's what this whole thing is

about—taking a portion of Scripture, seeing what it tells us about the way of Jesus and then holding ourselves up to that standard.

We'll be studying the New Testament book of Philippians, which is known as the "joy" book because of the tone of the book. But what's most remarkable is that Paul writes with so much joy while he's going through probably the most intense trial he would ever face—his imprisonment he knew could lead to his execution.

So, one of the things you'll find about the book of Philippians is that it's not only is it good theology, but Paul exhibits incredible spiritual and emotional health. And he's able to do that because of the depth of his faith in Jesus. And you'll see this right away today as we look specifically at Philippians 1:12-30. //

As you're turning there with me, let me give you a little background. The Apostle Paul was Christianity's most prolific missionary. It's hard to overstate the impact Paul had for Jesus. When Paul was radically converted to Jesus, he made it the mission of his life to spread the message of Jesus as far as he possibly could for as long as he possibly could. That mission led him to start churches all around the Roman Empire.

One of the churches he started was in the city of Philippi, which is located on the coast in modern-day Greece. Philippi was named after the Greek King Phillip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. When the Roman Empire defeated the Greeks, Philippi was made a Roman outpost where many Roman soldiers were discharged. Everyone who lived in Philippi were Roman citizens so it was patriotic a city as you could find.

Acts, chapter 16 records the founding of the Philippian church. Paul and his companion, Silas found a group of women that Acts says “worshipped God.” This means the women were probably Greek, but had come into contact with Judaism and liked what they heard. Without going all the way and converting, they would read the Scriptures and take on many Jewish practices. When Paul and Silas told them about Jesus, they believed, and the group started meeting in the house a wealthy woman, named Lydia.

Once a church was established, Paul moved on, but he never forgot about the churches he started. He made it a point to regularly visit those churches to see how they were doing and to answer any questions about the faith or practice. When he couldn’t get there in person, he would send someone with a letter.

Paul seemed to have a special place in his heart for the Philippian church and the feeling was mutual. This is clear because Philippians is more personal and intimate than his other letters. He’s not writing this letter as Paul the Apostle, but as their friend, Paul.

Now, Paul was a prisoner in Rome when he wrote Philippians. The story of how he got there is found in Acts, chapters 21-25, but I’ll give you a short summary; Paul’s third and final missionary journey was a fund-raising trip. The church in Jerusalem was experiencing of persecution and poverty, so as he visited the other churches around the Empire, he collected money from them to take back to the church in Jerusalem.

When he arrived back in Jerusalem, some Jews stirred up trouble for him and had him arrested. The Roman Governor in charge of Paul’s case knew that Paul had just

collected a large amount of money, so he kept him in jail for two years, hoping for a bribe. Eventually, a new governor was appointed and this new governor was going to send him back to Jerusalem to face charges in the Jewish court, but Paul knew there was a group of Jews who were waiting to ambush him and kill him on the way—so as a Roman Citizen, he appealed to stand before Caesar, who at the time was a guy named Nero.

This was the right of a Roman Citizen, so Paul was sent to Rome to face trial. Paul spent another two years in Rome. Acts says that “he lived in Rome at his own expense,” which means Paul wasn’t *in* prison, he was under house arrest. Which means he would have had to rent a house and have a guard chained to him 24/7.

Now, put yourself in Paul’s shoes. Imagine that you were falsely accused, and you were in custody for no reason other than some people accused you of causing trouble. How would you feel? How would you pray? How would you feel about your accusers? I suspect most of us would be bitter about the injustice of our situation. We would think about the all plans we had that we might never accomplish. That was Paul’s situation when he wrote the book of Philippians. So, keep that in mind as we dig in.

Like most ancient letters, Paul begins with a traditional greeting, a note of thanksgiving for the believers, and then a prayer for their continued spiritual growth. Then we get to verse 12 and that’s where I’d like to start to focus today.

**<sup>12</sup>Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.”** What stands out here is the incredibly

healthy attitude Paul has in his situation. People who are a little more cynical might say Paul was in denial, but looking deeper, I don't think that's the case at all. It had everything to do with his perspective, which we see in the first line of his letter. Vs 1, **"This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus."** If you don't like the word "slave," think of the word "servant." Whichever word you want to use, the basic meaning is someone who submits his own plans to someone else's plans.

You see, Paul saw himself above all else as a servant of Jesus. In our world today, we talk a lot about our identity. Well, if you were to ask Paul how he identified, he would say, *"I'm a servant of Jesus Christ,"* and everything else was filtered through that identity. He viewed life through Jesus-colored glasses.

His life's mission was to share the message of Jesus with as many people as possible. Now, of course, he had plans for how he wanted to do that. For instance, in Acts, chapter 16 he wanted to go up to some cities in the province of Asia, but God prevented him from doing that and he ended up in Philippi. He also mentions that he wanted to share the Gospel in Spain, but he never got to do that.

I don't think Paul wanted to spend the last four years of his life in Roman custody, but instead of being discouraged because his plans were thwarted, he just shared the gospel with whoever happened to be there at the time. He has such a one-track mind that in Acts 26, when he's brought before King Agrippa to defend himself, he finds a not-

so-subtle way to share the gospel. King Agrippa says, **“Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to become a Christian?”** (Acts 26:28)

Paul’s attitude was, *“I don’t care where they take me, they can’t stop me from sharing the gospel.”* So, he wrote to the church and said, “Actually, guys, don’t feel bad for me. This is great! I always wanted to go Rome to share the gospel. Now, I’m here and the Empire paid for my trip. All kinds of people are hearing about Jesus. Even some people you wouldn’t think I would have access to.

Verse 13, **“<sup>13</sup>As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. <sup>14</sup>And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.”**

*“Think about it...they think I’m the prisoner, but I have a guard chained to me 24/7—he’s a captive audience. Then, when I’m done with him, his shift is over and I get another one! Isn’t this great? I get to share the gospel and the Christians who are already here in Rome are encouraged because the church is growing!”* Everybody wins!

Now, I how this causes all of us to reflect. What are you living for? Is it something that difficult circumstances or opposition can thwart or are you living for something that can’t be derailed by bad luck or someone else’s poor choices? When your mission in life is to serve Jesus then anything that happens to you, whether its good or bad can serve the cause of Jesus.

In fact, when we get to chapter 3, we'll talk about Paul's remarkable comment in 3:10, **"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death..."** But this exactly illustrates Paul's attitude. In order for Jesus to accomplish his mission he had to suffer, so why should it be any different for Paul? Are you suffering for the gospel? Congratulations, you're like Jesus! We'll see this more a little later. For now, let's go to verse 15.

**"<sup>15</sup>It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. <sup>16</sup>The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. <sup>17</sup>The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. <sup>18</sup>But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."**

I won't spend a lot of time here because there's a lot of speculation about what this might be referring to, but just know that Paul was a polarizing figure, even in the church. First, he was very successful, and success always breeds jealousy. But *second*, his calling was to spread the gospel to Gentiles and that was controversial among Jewish Christians. Some believed salvation was only for the Jews. Others believed that when Gentiles converted to Christianity, they also had to start following the Jewish Laws. But Paul didn't preach that.

But while other people saw themselves as rivals, but Paul wasn't in competition. He just knew the Gospel had to get out there and whatever motive people had...praise God.

Then the next section is the most incredible...Now, Paul clearly believes he will be released. The Bible itself doesn't tell us this, but the church fathers tell us Paul never made it out of Rome because he was beheaded by Nero. But Paul's attitude didn't depend on whether he was right.

Verse 19, **"I will continue to rejoice, <sup>19</sup>for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. <sup>20</sup>I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup>For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup>If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! <sup>23</sup>I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup>but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body."**

These are the words of someone who has submitted his will completely to Jesus. And I don't know about you, but these words are convicting for me. Would it be a real dilemma to choose between dying and being with Jesus or living and serving Jesus here? I suspect most of us still have things we'd like to accomplish in this life.

I remember thinking this way as I was growing up in the 70's and early 80's when there was a lot of focus on the end times. I heard a lot of sermons about it and they even

made rapture movies to scare people into following Jesus. Well, I knew I was *supposed* to be excited about Jesus coming back in my lifetime, but to be honest, I wasn't because there were a few things I wanted to do first.

I wanted to get married. Then I wanted to have kids. Then I wanted to have a good job and make decent money. What I didn't realize was that every step of the way, something new would be added to my list. In fact, I've been a pastor for 21 years and even though I'm OK with dying, I still don't think I'm at the point where I can say serving Jesus is absolutely everything to me! I want to say that, but I don't think it's the reality right now. I would guess that I'm speaking for most of us in this room.

And I'm sure there are plenty of people who think that it sounds stressful or not much fun to have Jesus be your greatest and only pursuit. You don't want to be one of those "religious people." But look at Paul's lightness of spirit even in the face of the incredible trials. He had a peace that makes no sense to most people.

Now, you might say, *"Well, that kind of life is for Paul, but not for most people. After all, he was a special case. He was an Apostle called by Jesus himself."* And it is true that Paul was a special case to some degree. But as he continues in verse 27, he tells the believers in Philippi to have that same attitude.

Verse 27, **"<sup>27</sup>Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for**

the faith of the gospel <sup>28</sup>without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. <sup>29</sup>For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, <sup>30</sup>since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.”

Verse 27 is the payoff—it’s what Paul wants them to take away from his whole situation. **“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”** Now, Paul does something interesting here. He uses a word we wouldn’t expect. In fact, it’s not really reflected in English translation. The English translates it as “conduct yourselves.” It’s the Greek word *politeuomai*. Can you hear what English word it might be related to? Politics. It’s the word for *citizen*.

This is a rare case where the NLT is more literal than the NIV. Here’s what it says, **“<sup>27</sup>Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ.”** This is a great image for the Philippian church because they were a city of Roman soldiers and Roman citizens who were fiercely loyal to the Empire. And yet, that identity must take a back seat to their identity as a citizen of the Kingdom of God, where Christ is the King and law is the Gospel.

*Whatever happens, whatever your situation in life, whatever your earthly citizenship, whatever your identity, whether successful or a great failure, conduct*

*yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.* He doesn't say their job is to fight for the Kingdom, but just to live consistently with its way of life.

This is the same battle as everyone who wants to follow Jesus today. The world wants to shape us into its mold, while God wants to shape us into citizens of *His* Kingdom. And that war plays out in our mind, emotions, and desires. For many, circumstances determine how the battle is going, but Paul says our circumstances should never determine whether we live consistently with the way of Jesus.

The question is, how do you do that? How do you continue to follow Jesus consistently no matter what's happening in your life? Well, there are two things here in the passage. The first we've already mentioned...*Remember that your primary identity is citizen of the Kingdom of God*, because your primary identity—how you view yourself, will determine how you live.

You see, people today think about faith upside-down. Most of us, as we get older, have a picture in their mind of our ideal life. We want to build a career. We want to build a family. We want a nice house, car, or want to travel. We want to prove we're worth the space we're taking up, so we pursue those things and build our identity around them. Most don't *forget* about faith. In fact, we value "faith" as a way to get God to bless our plans and help us achieve what we set out to achieve. That's how most people view faith.

But making your purpose in life anything other than Christ, you will be at the mercy of your circumstances. For instance, if your purpose in life is to get married someday—if

you say, “Then I’ll be happy,” then as long as you’re single, you won’t be living your best life. If your purpose in life is your kids, you’ll be happy as long as they turn out the way you want, but if they don’t live up to the dreams you have for them, you’ll be devastated—you’ll feel like a failure. If your purpose in life is to be successful in business or make a lot of money or whatever area—none of these things is totally in your control.

If this is how you view faith, then if you don’t accomplish what you want in life, not only will you feel like a failure, it’s worse than that. That kind of faith won’t help you cope, but you’re likely to become disillusioned with God because you were living under the assumption that God would help you get what you want and he didn’t come through.

But faith if we learn anything from Paul here, *it’s that faith isn’t a great good luck charm, but it’s a great foundation*. It’s the only foundation you can build that nothing in this world can take it away from you. Which should I choose? If I die, I get to be with Jesus, if I live, I get to be with my friends and do ministry and live a life of love. Your happiness isn’t determined by whether life goes the way you want. So, continually remind yourself that you are first a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven.

But there’s another way to live as a citizen of the Kingdom of heaven is to *remember that you’re not alone*. One thing you have to realize about this letter is that it’s not written to an individual. In fact, in Paul’s mind, “solitary Christian” is an oxymoron. To be a follower of Jesus is to be a part of the Church. Look at what he says immediately after his command.

**“<sup>27</sup>Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then...*I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel...*”** Think about it for a minute. If all of us are primarily pursuing our own interests, it will be impossible for us to all pull in the same direction. In fact, if that’s everyone’s attitude, then we’ll all be pulled in different directions because we’ll all have our own agenda.

Of course, laboring together as a church for the gospel makes us more effective, but it also carries us through the ups and downs of life because when one of us is having a hard time, someone else is bound be doing OK and can step in and help. When my faith isn’t strong, I can borrow yours! That’s the value of the church. The church has to be something more than just a service we all happen to attend regularly. We must “stand firm in one spirit and strive together for the faith of the Gospel.”

Do you view Church as a way for you to be spiritually fulfilled or do you view it as the way for us to strive together for the sake of the gospel?