

## JOY WAY

An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul

TO THE PHILIPPIANS

by

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### CHAPTER FOUR

#### THE HAPPINESS OF A HUMBLE SPIRIT - *Philippians 1:12-26*

THE apostle's name, Paul, *Paulos*, means "*little*"; and it seems, according to the first or second century book, *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, which has a description of him, that his name is physically apt.

Small in bodily frame yet he was intellectually a giant - yet he was the most humble-minded of men. "The highest degree of the hardest grace", as Coventry Patmore calls humility.

When he speaks of his life so dramatically changed, he takes no credit to himself - "**By the grace of God I am what I am**"; when he speaks of his life so dynamically charged, he accounts for it as - "**not I, but the grace of GOD which was with me**", I Corinthians 15:10. He sums it all up as "**not I, but Christ . . . in me**", Galatians 2:20.

Indeed, he even goes so far as to describe himself as "**chief**" in sinnership, I Timothy 1:15. Of course, anybody could say all this in false humility: it is in unconscious ways, in undesigned coincidence, that the reality of it all becomes apparent. This is what is beautifully disclosed in the passage that we are now to consider. Here is a man of such obvious importance, and seemingly indispensable - yet he appears to regard himself as one who didn't matter -

#### SO LONG AS THE GOSPEL WAS FURTHERED

One of this man's passions was "**the gospel**" (12). In ringing tones he declares, "**I am not ashamed of the gospel of CHRIST**", Romans 1:16; and he unfolds the reasons why he was not ashamed, in the use of those four "**for's**" in verses 16-18:

- (1) "**For**" *the People it serves*: Roman, Jew, Greek, so universal in its range.
- (2) "**For**" *the Power it shows*: the dynamite (Gk.) of GOD: not to destruction, but to salvation, "turning right side up", not as Acts 17:6.
- (3) "**For**" *the Problem it solves*: the way in which GOD can righteously exercise His love in saving us.

(4) "**For**" *the Pardon it secures*: instead of "**the wrath of God**" for all who turn and trust Him. All which the gospel does for believers; and such glorious effects endow Paul's message with a quality for which he can never be ashamed.

No wonder that, in I Corinthians 9:16, he says, "**Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel**". He is a glad man to have such a message to carry: if he were to fail to do that he would be not merely a sad man, but a bad man. He would be guilty of such an iniquity as nearly attached to those four lepers in II Kings 7:9, "**We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings** [a gospel day], **and we hold our peace**". But enough of this pessimistic side of the matter. Paul did proclaim that gospel; he rejoiced in it, gloried in it - whatever happened to him.

This inveterate and intrepid missionary roamed hither and thither on his gospel crusade, and, Christian strategist that he was, he ever tried to get an entrance for the Saving Word in the populous, and significantly important, cities of his world - to adopt the late Harrington Lees' nomenclature:

- Corinth, the gospel in a heathen port;
- Galatia, the gospel in the country districts;
- Ephesus, the gospel in a heathen cathedral city;
- Philippi, the gospel in a Roman colony;
- Colossae, the gospel in an out-station;
- Thessalonica, the gospel in an independent state.

Ah, but Rome - if only he could take that gospel to Rome, the Imperial City, the then hub of the universe! So, in Acts 19:21 he says, "**After I have been there** [Jerusalem], **I must also see Rome**"; and in Acts 23:11, the Lord assures him, "**Be of good cheer, Paul, for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome**".

Now he is actually there; but how differently from what he had supposed - he is a prisoner: "**my bonds**" (13): yet, as ever, he is a preacher. Nothing will stop him telling out the good news.

To a man of Paul's restless, roving disposition, this incarceration, however mild, must have been an irksome trial. His circumstances were all against him; but he had long formed the habit of turning opposition into opportunity - and now he is at it again. The indignity, the suffering, the restriction, and the rest: of what consequence were they, if only they could be overruled, and made the occasion of furthering the gospel - that, and not he, was what mattered (12).

How fared the situation, then, in that Roman house of detention?

(i) "**The palace**" - the word will include the whole soldiery of Caesar forming the praetorian guard. Paul would all the time be chained at the wrist to one of these military men, who would be relieved in constant succession, and who would go out on the conclusion of their term of guard

duty to tell the tale of this remarkable prisoner who, rather than succumbing to his misfortunes, was happily spending his time preaching, and praying, and penning a deal of correspondence.

Something of the picture is in Acts 28:30-31.

Thus it happened that, as he says, "**My bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace**" (13), that is, as Lightfoot paraphrases, "have been seen in their relation to CHRIST, have borne testimony to the gospel". The spread of this influence would be rapid and wide and effective. so that at the end of this very Epistle (4:22) Paul is able to speak of "**the saints... that are of Caesar's household**" - an expression that might include the highest functionaries and the lowest menials.

Truly, "**the things which happened unto [him] have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel**" (12) - he would never have got into this close circle with his message, if he had not been a prisoner!

As the late T. W. Drury said, "The very chain which Roman discipline riveted on the prisoner's arm secured to his side a hearer who would tell the story of patient suffering for CHRIST among those who, the next day, might be in attendance on Nero himself."

A further blessing, as it seemed to Paul, accrued to his imprisonment.

(ii) "**The brethren**" - his fellow-Christians in the city caught the infection of his courage. At least "**many**" of them did (14).

Some, as is always the case in any company of Christians, were too fearful to come right out for GOD; but many here were so deeply stirred by the example and exhortation of this great soul that they waxed confident in spirit and bold in speech. If courage breeds cowardice in some, be assured that it begets confidence in many.

Here, too, then, was another influence for GOD directly attributable to "**my bonds**". But Paul was suffering from all the inhibitions of his confined condition. Well, what of it? In modern jargon he "couldn't care less". What did he matter, so long as the gospel had "**free course**"? II Thessalonians 3:1.

Let us, at least, take this lesson to heart, ere we pass on: **that wherever we find ourselves, and whatever our circumstances, there is opportunity for service; that however we may be hindered and hampered by our conditions, there is some opening for testimony - and that all the more effectual as it is to be seen that we refuse to undergo our trials, but resolve to overcome them.**

How Paul would have hated our all-too-frequent use of the phrase, "under the circumstances"! He never allowed them to get on top of him - in the circumstances, of course; but not "under" them.

Let us now proceed further, and note his readiness to subdue and subjugate self.

## SO LONG AS THE SAVIOUR WAS GLORIFIED

"**Christ is preached**" (18) - that is the main thing. If it was not always just as Paul liked, if sometimes the phraseology, or even the doctrine, was a bit unorthodox, if, with some, the motive was not pure, still he rejoiced that anyhow the Name was proclaimed. The Judaisers, who were always trying to hamper Paul's ministry, were, alas, moved by feelings of "**envy and strife . . . not sincerely**" (15-16).

In Galatians (1:6-9) the alternative is the liberty of the gospel, or the bondage of ritualism (Lightfoot's word) - and Paul comes down with all his weight against the latter. In Philippians, here, the choice is an imperfect Christianity, and an unconverted state - and Paul "**will rejoice**" in the former, in spite of what it lacks of the full Christian truth and the true Christian spirit.

On the other hand, there are those who would show their goodwill to the captive preacher (15) who, while the others would add gall to his bonds, would bring gladness to his heart. These latter recognise that he is "**set for the defence of the gospel**" (17) - posted as a sentry, is the Moffatt Commentary's interpretation of "**set**". He is not caring over much for his own defence; but he does care intensely that the gospel shall suffer no inroads of false interpretation.

If he had not stood for the proclamation of the pure gospel, he would never have been in bonds: seeing he is thus, he will not relax his watchfulness. He is glad that CHRIST is preached any way; but his great concern is that He shall be preached in all His sole and unique grandeur. What a faithful sentry this "**good soldier of Jesus Christ**", II Timothy 2:3, had always been, challenging every movement, and every man, "Who goes there - friend or foe?"

"**Christ shall be magnified**" (20) - is Paul's ambition: not himself, but his Saviour. How his heart would glow if he heard John the Baptist's declaration, "**He must increase, but I must decrease**", John 3:30.

Says R. C. Joynt, "Mary's magnificat was "**My soul doth magnify the Lord**"; Paul's, "**Christ shall be magnified in my body**" - even as he exhorts those very believers in Rome, from where he writes, "**I beseech you, therefore, brethren . . . that ye present your bodies . . .**", Romans 12:1: CHRIST:

- magnified in the body
- magnified by lips that bear happy testimony to Him;
- magnified by hands employed in His happy service;
- magnified by feet only too happy to go on His errands;
- magnified by knees happily bent in prayer for His Kingdom;
- magnified by shoulders happy to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of CHRIST.

So, whether in life, or in death, this body is to be so employed in His service, whether bound or free, that we shall not be ashamed to meet His gaze, nor afraid to be bold in His cause (20).

There are two kinds of magnification:

(i) *That of the Microscope* - that makes the little seem big. With this the Christian has nothing to

do, for, there is nothing little about his Lord - though, alas, He may have but little place in a Christian's life; and "**no room**" at all with the worldling.

(ii) *That of the Telescope* - that makes the really big loom big. The vessel may appear as a dot on the horizon; but this instrument brings it out in its true proportions. Or, if you like, it brings the distant near.

That is the Christian's joy: his body and being becoming a telescope, showing to others His true greatness, and bringing to those who see Him but far off the sense of His real nearness. When the Psalmist moves the proposition, "**O magnify the Lord with me**", Psalm 34:3, and when Paul seconds the resolution, "**Christ shall be magnified**" - it is this latter ministry that is in mind.

Shall we carry it out unanimously? Thus, once again, we observe that Paul is thinking, wishing, nothing for himself.

### **SO LONG AS THE OTHERS ARE HELPED**

There is a choice before his mind - "**to live . . . to die**" (21). If he is to consult his own interest - he has no hesitation in coming to a decision: "**to die is gain**". What is it to die? Paul tells us it is

(a) "**to depart**" - a metaphorical word, suggestive of a nautical figure, a loosing of moorings preparatory to setting sail; or of a military figure, a striking of camp ready to start on the march. He would for himself so gladly do that straightaway.

In II Timothy 4:6, when his earthly end really had come, he says, using the same word and metaphor, "**the time of my departure is at hand**". The storm-tossed mariner sailing away on the last ocean voyage, to the haven where he would be; the battle-scarred warrior marching away off the field of war, for his Sovereign's Review - that is the apostle's idea of death, on the one side of it, the negative side.

(b) "**to be with Christ**" - that is the positive side: and, by the very words employed, how filled with blest anticipation. Of course, there is a certain, and real sense in which believers are "**with Christ**" now; indeed, "**He that is not with Me is against Me**", Matthew 12:30.

Yet there is a relationship to Him somehow more intimate awaiting us yonder.

I wonder if an illustration might successfully convey the difference? You get to know a certain person, and become friendly. After a bit he invites you to go and stay with him. You greatly enjoy your visit; but, of course, you return to your own house. However, the ties of friendship are fostered and strengthened, and you become very close to each other, so that one day your friend invites you to go and live with him. Right gladly you leave your own house, so much poorer than his, and on the appointed day you move into his, to share with him the richness, the beauty, the joy of that new lovely home. Does that properly illustrate the difference between the two aspects of this "**with Christ**"?

Our earthly experience a *Staying with Him*, our heavenly experience a *Living with Him*. You will naturally recall His own allusion in John 14:2, "**In My Father's house are many mansions . . .**

**I go to prepare a place for you."**

How immeasurably **"far better"** the apostle knows that to be (23).

O think to step on shore,  
And that shore Heaven;  
To take hold of a hand,  
And that GOD'S hand!  
To breathe a new air!  
And find it celestial air!  
To feel invigorated,  
And to know it Immortality!

O think! to pass from the storm and the tempest,  
To one unbroken calm;  
To wake up,  
And find it glory!"

Yet there is another side. If he is to consult his converts' interest - he doubtless must abide awhile with them - **"to abide in the flesh is more needful for you"** (24).

To continue in life would add still more fruit for his labour (22) - yes, but that is not what will decide this matter for him: which is the more profitable for them? That is the point with this wholly selfless man. If he stay, he would hope to help with the enlargement ("**furtherance**") of their faith - he is no believer in a merely static religion, he would have them to be always growing in grace and knowledge, II Peter 3:18.

His staying would also contribute to the enjoyment ("**joy**") of their faith - he is so constantly dwelling upon the joy of religion, and especially is he stressing that in this particular Epistle which, written in captivity, might have been supposed to be always striking a note of gloom. He trusts that his visiting them again, as he hopes to do, will cause their "**rejoicing**" to become "**more abundant**" (26).

So his mind is made up: he will gladly sink his own personal preference, and, for their sakes, he will be content to "**continue**" with, and for, them.

The true humility of this man, so unmindful of self-advantage, makes him a man of rich happiness - which the self-centred, self-seeking man can never be.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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