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Sermon Notes

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Exalting Christ by Suffering Joyfully

Philippians 1:12-26

Introduction: Attitude is Everything

I. Paul's Central Desire: That Christ Be Exalted

1:20 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.

A. The Exaltation and Magnification of Christ

1. The Greek Word: μεγαλυνω

Literally means: "to make great, enlarge, make bigger"... used of a child growing up, used of a King enlarging his territory through conquest, used of a man's fame and reputation spreading far and wide, used of the size of one's opportunities getting larger

Paul's deepest desire is that CHRIST would be enlarged, be greater, be EXALTED and grow immense

2. Old Testament: "Magnify the Lord"

NASB Psalm 34:3 O magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together.

Literally, let's get together and make God BIGGER, make His name GREATER

Question: How can you make an infinite God BIGGER? Solomon's prayer of dedication:

1 Kings 8:27 "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!

Solomon's word "contain" means to hold in, like a vessel which contains oil or wine; it was spoken of the bronze sea made for the altar, that it could contain 3000 baths... 17,500 gallons! The universe is immeasurably immense, but it cannot contain God!!

Jeremiah 23:24 Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the LORD. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the LORD.

Universe is immeasurably vast, able to hold trillions and trillions of immense stars... and yet God “fills” the entire universe

How can sinful human beings like us MAKE GOD BIGGER???

Illus. “Magnify” the Lord = make Him bigger in our own estimation... not in reality!! He is already immense and the angels know it

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty... the whole earth is FULL of His glory!!!”

The issue is... He is too small to us, because we are too far from Him!

Illus. Jupiter is approximately eleven times larger than the earth... an immense planet, a huge ball of gas 143,000 km. in diameter, big enough to hold all the other planets in the Solar System ... yet from the earth it appears as tiny as a small dot of light. Why? Simply because we stand about 314 million kms. away from it!

However, in January of 1610, when Galileo Galilei pointed his newly-invented telescope at Jupiter, he could see four moons orbiting the massive planet! Quite possibly he also saw the Great Red Spot on Jupiter’s surface, which is twice as large as the earth, but completely invisible to the naked eye. The telescope magnified Jupiter... yet massive Jupiter was just as big as it ever had been... the telescope made Jupiter APPEAR bigger to his eye

2. Christ Is Too Small... NOT in Reality, But in Our Estimation

So it is with the Apostle Paul’s life... sin makes God stand relationally distant from us... far away; but through the preaching of the gospel and the way Paul lived his life, Paul was like a telescope, bringing God near to people... magnifying Christ, making Him greater

3. Christ’s Kingdom is Too Small... not merely Jews, but also Gentiles must enter the Kingdom

Revelation 7:9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

Also the constant goal of Paul’s life was to MAGNIFY Christ’s kingdom... to make it larger and larger, the place where Christ is worshiped by people who love and trust Him

B. Through Paul’s Body

1. Paul wanted to use his body to magnify Christ
2. His body was a temple of service to Christ
3. Every day he presented his body as a holy vessel of service to Christ
4. Even if Christ wanted to use his body up to the point of death, Paul just wanted one thing: for Christ to be exalted in his body

C. The Need for Courage and Boldness... and JOY

1. Paul's desire in this verse is BOLDNESS AND COURAGE
2. Paul's overall focus in the whole letter is JOY
3. In order for Christ to be exalted in his body, whether by life or by death, Paul needed COURAGE, BOLDNESS, and JOY
4. Courage to keep preaching the gospel even though it might mean death

BIG danger is that he might be ashamed of Christ... ashamed to preach a gospel of a bloody, dead, Jewish carpenter who was God in the flesh

5. Boldness = plainness of speech, telling the WHOLE TRUTH, not shrinking back from the unpopular parts
6. Joy = delight, rich emotional pleasure in the working out of God's eternal plan

D. Paul's Confidence

1. Paul says he is confident... eagerly expectant and filled with hope
2. He's not consumed with fear that he will fail and be ashamed of the gospel
3. Instead, he is confident that God will support him right to the end

Summary: the one central desire of Paul's entire life was: that Christ be exalted—magnified, made greater... His name would be held in esteem, His Kingdom would grow and grow, ever larger and ever more glorious

NOTHING ELSE MATTERED TO PAUL... including his own life

II. Paul's Two Subordinate Means: The Gospel Advance Globally and Individually

A. For Christ to be Magnified = Constant Growth on Earth

B. Two Subordinate Means to Overall Goal: Growth Globally and Individually

1. Growth globally... worldwide advance of the gospel

1:12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

2. Growth individually... personal growth in Christ for each Christian... for the Philippians and for others

1:25 I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith

Note: Both verses use the same Greek word: προκοπή “progress, advancement”... advancement of the Gospel around the world, and advancement of the Philippian Christians and others in their personal walks with Christ

C. Paul Cares NOTHING for His Life... Except for these things!!

1. Paul discusses his own suffering a great deal in Philippians 1
2. However, the whole focus is on how he thinks about it for the glory of Christ
3. There’s not a hint of pity or selfishness here... just a desire to advance the gospel around the world, and to advance the Philippian Christians in their faith
4. PROGRESS... that’s what Paul wants... and so he’s going to present the Christian life as a journey, an unfinished work

1:6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

2:12-13 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed-- not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence-- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

3:12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

3:14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Paul presents the Christian life to them as a great journey, a hard race to be won through great exertion and effort... but most of all through the power of the Spirit working in us

So, here in Philippians 1, he wants to help them grow personally in joy and in the faith:

1:25 I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith

This is his entire reason for living on earth... the glory of Christ in the advance of His gospel, both worldwide and individually

5. This is his whole philosophy of his suffering in Philippians 1: it has one purpose: the advance of the gospel

1:12-13 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole Praetorium that I am in chains for Christ.

III. God's Chosen Strategy: Pouring Paul Out Like a Drink Offering

A. God's Strategy for Worldwide Kingdom Advance: Suffering

1. Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles
2. There stands the whole Gentile world, with the mighty Roman empire
3. Paul could have prayed: "God, what is your strategy for reaching all these people... for reaching this vast empire?"
4. God's answer: "Paul, I'm going to put you in jail! I'm going to put your joyful, bold, Christian faith on display"

B. First Century Prisons: Immense Suffering

1. Paul's imprisonment could have been "house arrest"... living in a home with a Praetorian guard
2. Or it may have been like the Philippian jail... dark and torturous
3. Food would come only if the prisoner had external friends to bring it to him
4. Larger picture: Paul's general life of suffering for the gospel

Acts 9:15-16 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

Acts 20:23-24 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

2 Corinthians 11:23-28 I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

C. Poured Out Like a Drink Offering

2:17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.

Summary: God's strategy for the advance of the gospel among the Gentiles was that Paul should preach Christ crucified, simply and clearly, then stand firm, boldly and joyfully, while enraged crowds rioted, beat him, and threw him in prison

It was the exact same strategy Christ described concerning His own life... a life of personal sacrifice even to death for the blessing of others:

John 12:24 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

IV. Paul's Daily Example: Joy and Boldness in Suffering

A. Not Just a Theory: It Was Really Happening!

1. It's one thing for us to discuss suffering for Christ in abstraction, while we are comfortable
2. Paul spoke of rejoicing in Christ even while he was going through the trial!
3. Immense power of example!!

B. Paul's Daily Example: Joyful, Bold Proclamation, Even in Prison

1. The very thing that had gotten him arrested to begin with

Illus. Just like William Tyndale... arrested and sent to prison for translating the Bible into English—a crime punishable by death; while in a freezing prison cell in Vilvoorde in the Netherlands, wrote to the officials for a warmer blanket, a coat, and a hat... but above all (if you send nothing else) “please send me my Hebrew Bible, Hebrews grammar, and Hebrew dictionary so I may spend my time in that study”

2. Even then he would continue in prison, boldly suffering and proclaiming Christ with joy
3. His example was giving many other Christians great courage
4. His story was being spread around the whole of Caesar's household
5. Fear of further sufferings and even death could not stop Paul's preaching of the Gospel

Illus. John Bunyan, Baptist preacher imprisoned for preaching the Gospel in England without a license... was offered his freedom again and again on the condition that he never preach the gospel again

Though he suffered greatly in the prison cell of Bedford, and said

“The parting with my wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place as the pulling of my flesh from my bones.”

Yet he refused to give up preaching the gospel: he said to his jailer **"If I am freed today I will preach tomorrow."**

Refusing to give in to self-pity and depression, Bunyan used the time to write his classic Pilgrim's Progress.

So it was with Paul... imprisonment and suffering were not just theoretical, but real in his life

C. Paul's Attitude on Display: Joy in Suffering

1. I AM in Chains
2. I am in Chains FOR CHRIST
3. I AM GLAD and I REJOICE!!!

V. The Fruit Already Seen

- A. Greater Freedom and Boldness for Other Believers
- B. Increased Preaching of the True Gospel by Enemies
- C. Fruit for the Kingdom: Actual People Brought to Christ

VI. Paul's Greatest Pressing Need: Protection of His Joy and Boldness

- A. Rejected by Paul: Pressing Need for Relief from Suffering
 1. Epaphroditus had brought their gift... it meant physical food and strength for him
 2. Paul is not some robot, free from concern about his body

2 Timothy 4:13 When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.

3. But his real concern is Christ and His Kingdom
4. Escaping suffering is not his concern

1:21-26 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 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! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

5. "To live is Christ" = to live is living for Christ's glory, by Christ's power, for the sake of Christ's Kingdom and the blessing of Christ's people

vs. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me.

6. “To live is Christ” means learning how to suffer and die for others like Christ did for us

3:10 “I want to know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings...”

For Paul, daily life is a daily growth in fellowship with Christ... walking with Him through great suffering in ever sweeter relationship

Here, Paul is very much like Christ; Christ left heaven and came to earth in the body for the benefit of His people

Paul chooses to stay on earth in the body, if he could, refusing to go to heaven so he can serve Christ’s people more on earth... self-sacrifice for the sake of Christ’s people—just like Jesus Himself

So, Paul rejects any easy way out of his suffering... thank you for the money, thank you for your material support, but I have greater needs than food!!

B. Attractive to Paul... but Still Rejected: Escape to Heaven

1. Paul would LOVE to die and be with Christ
2. No fear of death whatsoever

vs. 21 “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”

So many Christians are little different from non-Christians in their fear of death... this should not be!!

For Paul, it was a deeply desired reward...

What he says would be blasphemous if it didn’t mean: **For me, to live is Christ and to die is MORE CHRIST!!**

Now, in the Spirit, we have just a downpayment of our future reward... then we get the full amount

Illus. Imagine a billionaire leaving all his worldly possessions to his thirteen year-old son; in America, the boy could not gain his inheritance legally until he was twenty-one years old. In the meantime, he would receive a stipend out of his full future inheritance

Ephesians 1:13-14 Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance

Some people think of heaven as a place with streets of gold, with eternal pleasures of the sensual kind... of feasting and ease and celebration

Christians think of heaven as CHRIST!!! Seeing Him perfectly, being with Him forever

3. Heaven: face to face with Christ is immensely appealing to Paul... but even that can wait until Paul's time of fruitful labor is over

Paul loves the Philippians so much, and loves serving Christ so much, he'd rather stay on earth, suffering in prison, than go to heaven! AMAZING!!!

"I am torn between the two... I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body"

AMAZING! Torn between suffering more for Christ and dying to be with Christ! Only a Christian could understand the depths of that struggle!!!

Illus. Adoniram Judson, missionary to Burma: originally sailed with his wife to India, but was rejected by the government there; suffered greatly from the deaths of his first two wives, a son and a daughter; waited six years for his first convert, saw years of labor go up in smoke when his translation of the Bible into Burmese was destroyed in a fire before it was finished; arrested as a British spy, was in prison for twenty-one months and sentenced to be executed, but his life was spared. When he arrived in Burma in 1813, there was not a single Christian in the whole land; when he died 38 years later, the government listed over 210,000 Christians!!

Dying words from a man who suffered so much:

"I am not tired of my work, neither am I tired of the world; yet when Christ calls me home, I shall go with the gladness of a boy bounding away from school."

So it was also with Paul... his pressing need was not to die and escape his hard life...

C. True Pressing Need: Fresh Supply of Prayer and Support by the Spirit

1:18-20 Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20 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.

1. Paul's "Deliverance"... not from prison and suffering
 - a. Paul is clearly not afraid to die... that is not the deliverance or "salvation" he has in mind
 - b. nor is Paul afraid of losing his own salvation if they don't pray for him
 - c. Paul's concern is that he would not be ashamed of Christ and of his gospel
2. Deliverance from Cowardice, Fear, Complaining, and Discouragement
 - a. flesh is strong

- b. temptations to cowardice worked hard on Paul
- c. Paul was afraid of his own sin and of the devil's temptations
- d. trials go on and on... one can be in a very good frame of mind one day, then start to get discouraged the next
- e. Paul NEVER wanted to deny his savior, Jesus Christ... he did not want to be ashamed of Christ, or ashamed before Christ on judgment day

Mark 8:38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

So, Paul's concern was deliverance from his own weak sinful nature... which was apt to become ashamed of Christ and to give up suffering for Christ

Paul was also concerned that he continue to be JOYFUL in Christ... something clearly beyond anyone's natural ability

3. How? Philippians Prayers

"through your prayers..."

- a. by their faithful praying for him, Paul would receive ongoing spiritual strength for his ministry
- b. their best support of him would be faithful prayer for his joy and courage in preaching the gospel
- c. PRAYER is POWERFUL... God uses it to support His people
- d. suffering Christians in prison NEED YOUR PRAYERS

Illus. "Voice of the Martyrs"

Hebrews 13:3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

"Remember" means keep praying for them... the devil wants them to be depressed, fearful, joyless, and fruitless... he wants them to give up in despair

Prayer is Paul's greatest need... and through the prayer comes the true spiritual assistance

4. How? Assistance by the Spirit

vs. 19-20 I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20 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.

Christ gives a special assistance to suffering Christians... something only they know fully

1 Peter 4:14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

This happened three times at least to Paul:

[in Corinth] ***Acts 18:9-10 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. 10 For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."***

[during the shipwreck near Malta] ***Acts 27:23-24 Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me 24 and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.'***

[on trial for his life in Rome] ***2 Timothy 4:16-18 At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. 17 But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.***

Paul is asking the Philippians to pray for him, for his courage and boldness, for his joy in suffering, so that he will be delivered from his own sinful weakness and from the devil's attacks

5. Result: ongoing joyful boldness, courage and... fruitful labor for Christ... Progress of the Gospel!!!

VII. Application to the Philippians and to Us: Live Worthy of the Gospel

1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

A. Fix Your Hearts on the Glory of Christ Above All Else

B. Live for the Magnification of Christ

Advance of the gospel worldwide

Advance of the gospel in your own heart... more and more like Christ

C. Understand the Role of Suffering

D. Know the Certainty of Success

Paul's tone is so triumphant here... suffering, yes, but joy

He who began a good work in you WILL carry it out to completion

He who began a good work in the WORLD will carry it out to completion as well

Paul already sees great fruit from the seeds he's planted

LIVE FOR THAT

E. Therefore, REJOICE in Christ Always

Joy in the struggle is essential to final success

Walk in a manner worthy of the gospel

Carry yourself like a son or daughter of the King

F. Pray for suffering Christians around the world

G. Walk in a manner worthy of the gospel

1. Holy living

free from wickedness and from sin, which makes suffering for Christ impossible

2. United living (more later)

free from divisions and prideful arguments

3. Contented living

free from complaining about their trials, from murmuring against God

4. Courageous living

free from all fear of their enemies, free from shame of Christ

“This will be a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved-- and that by God.”

5. Clear proclamation