

September 8, 2024

Phil 1:3-18
A Choice to Make

I recognize that many disciples have had some horrible things done to them. I also recognize that many disciples have been the perpetrator of some horrible things. Mental abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, adultery, lies, oppression, bigotry, racism, murder, etc. You name it and there is possibly someone under the sound of my voice who has experienced it and/or perpetrated it against another. And though that period of our lives may be well behind us or not many are haunted and/or burdened by those things. As disciples of Jesus the Christ we have a choice to make. Either we will choose to be prisoners of the hurts, failures, etc., or we will choose to use those things as catalysts for gospel ministry. And if you, at this very moment, are asking and saying to yourself, "Pastor Small, how can I do such a thing? You have no idea what has been done to me or what I have done." I say to you this morning that Paul shows us how. Paul is no stranger to having perpetrated horrible things and having horrible things done to him. In fact, Paul writes this letter from a Roman cell where he was facing the possibility of death because of his faith, unjustly. In reading these verses I finally learned how Paul was able to persevere in the face of great failure and hardship and I want to share with you this morning what I have learned. Three choices I see Paul consistently make in his walk with Christ that made all the difference in the world for him and I believe it can do the same for us.

First, Paul had a grace attitude about all things. V3-8 ³Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. ⁴Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, ⁵for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard

it until now. ⁶ And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. ⁷ So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. ⁸ God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.”

Paul could have had a bad attitude, even a nasty attitude and no one would have given him a hard time about it considering his circumstances. Instead, Paul chooses to reflect on the goodness of God throughout his life and especially in his partnership with the Philippians. In the middle of his ordeal Paul encourages the Philippians assuring them that God will finish what he has started. How could Paul encourage anyone given his circumstance, given what was being done to him, unjustly? A grace attitude. Paul refused to forget how the favor of God had sustained him throughout his life, throughout his ministry. And in looking back he is able to encourage the Philippians to trust God/Christ just as he was in that very moment. Attitude indeed determines altitude. A grace attitude and we will rise above whatever life may bring our way. We have a choice to make.

1 Tim 1:13-15 NIV “¹³ Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.”

Acts 14:19-22 “¹⁹ Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. ²⁰ But after the disciples had

gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. ²¹They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch,²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.

2 Cor 12:7-10 ⁷“So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Second, Paul focused on what mattered most V9-11 ⁹“I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. ¹⁰For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ’s return. ¹¹May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.” Once Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, he was relentless in his pursuit to spread the gospel of Jesus for he knew this brought glory and praise to God. This was what mattered most. Too often we see it the other way around, believing we are the one’s to be glorified and praised. Prosperity gospel, I might add. Where it is about our comfort, our accomplishments, and our

security. What really mattered for Paul was the Philippians faithfulness in Christ and to Christ. That is, what they believed and how they lived. For faithfulness in what one believed about Christ and how one lived as a disciple of Christ brought glory and praise to God. Are we overtly focused on God getting the glory and the praise in whatever state we find ourselves or are we overtly focused on our comfort, our accomplishments, and our security? Paul knew what matter most and he was unrelenting in his commitment to that. Where is our focus and have we figured out what matters most? We have a choice to make.

Phil 3:3-14 ³For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his

own.¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Third and final, Paul saw every situation as an opportunity to spread the gospel. V12-18 “³ ¹² And I want you to know, my dear brothers and

sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. ¹³ For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. ¹⁴ And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God’s message without fear. ¹⁵ It’s true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. ¹⁶ They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News. ¹⁷ Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. ¹⁸ But that doesn’t matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice.” For Paul it did not matter the circumstance, whether in the

valley low or on the mountain top, the gospel was to be shared. It was the priority.

If you are like me all three of these truths regarding Paul’s faithfulness to Jesus challenges you. Makes you uncomfortable, even embarrassed. Why? At least for me I see in Paul how weak I am in my faith. How easily offended and distracted I am. I see how unwilling I am to be uncomfortable for Christ and how I fight to maintain control of the trajectory of my life, my family’s life. I see all of the opportunities I have missed to spread the gospel. I see my fight with fear and how often I loose. So, what am I to do? Make the choice to

trust God, trust Christ. Choose to believe that scripture is true and what God promises the Philippians through the words of Paul, God promises us to. **V6** “⁶ And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.”

Brothers and sisters, we have a choice to make. In the name of the Father, Son and holy Spirit.