

Intro: Leo Tolstoy, the great author of *War and Peace*, complained of those in his day who lamented the losing of the “good old days.” Though he was a humanist, he recognized that the good old days were no different than our own. This is true in the church as well. Every so often we hear of returning to the “good old days” of church life, when all Christians were perfect, passionate, and poignant for their culture; when they all treated each other with honor and magnanimous deference. You know, those days? Well, what we’ll see in our passage today is that those good old days looked a lot like our day today, and Christians behaved then a lot like we do now, for Paul is assaulted by rivals and self-seekers who want to tarnish his joy and cause him distress in his chains. But he rejoices that even his self-motivated rivals are preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ accurately! His joy is that Christ is known for who He truly is!

And here is a point: in our day and age there is a deluge of anti-doctrine, of semi-certainty, and of an emptying of Christ and His person into an unknowable guide on an trail-less pilgrimage to nowhere. Our culture demands that truth not be exclusive, but rather inclusive, where journey is more important than destination, where the motivations and “heart” of the messenger are more important than the content and the objectivity of the message. It’s no wonder the gospel doesn’t offend anyone, when it has nothing in it that is different than the culture around it. But Paul says we’ve got it backwards, for he rejoices when men with sinful motives preach the objective truth of Christ. While not condoning their sinful hearts, he exults that Christ is proclaimed in truth! The destination of our faith is heralded because he suffers in prison and he is pumped about it. Some things should never change.

Let’s look at Philippians 1:15-18 and see how the apostle rejoices that Christ is proclaimed, whether from pure motives of brotherly love or from selfish motives of impure rivalry.

1. Christ Proclaimed is My Joy!

- a. The suffering and faith-filled gospel-overflowing imprisonment of Paul actually encouraged other believers to preach the gospel
 - i. They were “persuaded” by Paul’s chains to preach boldly
 - ii. They gained courage through hearing of Paul’s joy in the advancement of the gospel
 - iii. The Church has grown largely through suffering, not in spite of it, for “the seed of the Church is the blood of the martyrs”
- b. They “spoke the Word of God”
 - i. The Word of God is not merely living the life of Christ in deeds and action
 1. We have been convinced by our society that it is better to be seen than heard
 2. While there is some truth in this (preaching hypocritically is condemned in Scripture), there is also a great deal of error
 - a. Living without proclaiming the historical event of the gospel and its biblical interpretation saves nobody

- b. Apart from this, the gospel is the point! The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is the shining forth of the knowledge of God (2 Cor 4:6)
 - 3. It is Good NEWS, the message of hope that must be heard:
 - a. Romans 10:13-15
 - b. Colossians 1:5
 - ii. What was it in these brothers that made them lack courage to speak the word of God?
 - 1. Shame of Christ's sufferings?
 - 2. The offense of the Cross?
 - 3. The high cost of discipleship?
 - 4. The unbelief that people are actually lost?
 - a. Gospel a lifeline to the dying or a vitamin to be healthier?
 - iii. Romans 1:6 – "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to all who believe..."
 - 1. Being ashamed of the gospel comes from not believing that it is the gospel that is the power of God for salvation
 - 2. When we believe the gospel is the power of God to save those around, then we proclaim the gospel with boldness

2. This Proclaiming Comes Through Two Types of Messengers

- a. Out of love toward Paul
 - i. *Good-will*
 - 1. Motive in relation to Paul: Knowing that Paul is put there (in Rome) for the defense of the gospel
 - ii. *Truth*
 - 1. Genuine and sincere
- b. Out of rivalry with Paul
 - i. *Envy/jealousy*
 - 1. Roman believers who most likely started churches in Rome after Pentecost
 - 2. Jealous of Paul's reputation and honor?
 - 3. Clement of Rome, in AD90, seemed to implicate rival factions that had Paul put to death
 - a. It may have been self-seeking rival Christians that schemed to have Paul executed
 - b. We also must take Clement's words as man's words, and not holy writ
 - ii. *Self-seeking*
 - 1. Used in Rom 2:8; 2 Cor 12:20; Gal 5:20 (deed of the flesh)
 - 2. Paul preaches against this in Phil 2:3 (do nothing out of "rivalry")
 - iii. *Impurely*
 - 1. Motive in relation to Paul: supposing to raise distress in his chains
 - iv. *Pretense*
 - 1. Insincere and disingenuous

3. We Rejoice in the Content of the Gospel Proclaimed

- a. To Paul, the motivation of those preaching the gospel (while sinful) was secondary to the truth of which they spoke
 - i. They were accurately proclaiming Christ, and that caused Him great joy!
 - ii. Though they were selfishly motivated out of rivalry against him, his concern lied with the glory of Jesus, not his own glory and defense
- b. We rejoice when the One whom we love is honored accurately and without error
 - i. My wife:
 1. when others speak of her inaccurately there is not joy in me, but disturbed anger or sorrow because it is untrue and therefore dishonoring
 2. when others speak of her accurately, even when their motives are jealousy, I rejoice
 - ii. "Christ is proclaimed!"
 1. When Christ is proclaimed accurately, then Paul rejoices, even when the motivation for the preaching may be to "one-up" him
 - iii. If I'm not too concerned with the accuracy of the gospel, then, am I loving Jesus at this moment?
- c. There are many who have fallen prey to our culture's definition of saving faith, believing that sincerity or good and kind deeds are the gospel
 - i. Humble and sincere intentions for good, without the truth of the gospel, are powerless to save or transform, even well-intended ones
 1. Intentions and motivations do not the gospel make, but accuracy and truth of Jesus (historical event and biblical interpretations of events)
 - ii. People can be sincere, but be sincerely wrong, and Paul saves his greatest condemnation for the proclamation of "different gospels" (Gal 1:6) and "distorted gospels (Gal 1:7) which are distorted in their content, not merely in the motivation of the preachers (*though he does not condone poor sinful motives*)
 - iii. Rom 1:16 – "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."
- d. Our post-modern culture believes that it is *sincerity* that dictates goodness or godliness, not the *accuracy* of Truth, nor the actual capacity of the object trusted in to save
 - i. Example: many evangelicals Christians today are convinced that people who are sincere in their beliefs, nice, and not hypocritical or judgmental towards others, are really *saved* people
 1. Because they're "good" and "sincere", then God will save them
 2. A sincere Buddhist adherent or New Age follower is really a "child of God" because they sincerely believe what they believe and do not attack others
 - a. This is really works righteousness: God accepts us based upon the level of our heart's humility (not Christ's sacrifice of His Spirit's work in us to renew us) or the goodness of our actions (simply legalism of a different sort)

- b. It avoids the necessity of Jesus' atoning death for our sins and makes the Cross of Christ ultimately worthless
 - c. "If righteousness comes from law, then Christ died for no purpose" (Gal 2:21b)
 - 3. It is "Christ proclaimed" that causes Paul to rejoice: the content of gospel truth
- ii. This is why the gospel has been watered down and the offense of the Cross removed: as long as people are sincere in their humility and whatever faith that they might have, that is good enough, so why offend them with blood, wrath, repentance, holiness, etc.?
- iii. We have become functional universalists, where believing the Truth of the gospel (content) is unimportant as long as people *intend* to do right, and the impetus for proclamation of the gospel is removed because our view of God and the necessity of Christ-dependant faith is distorted by the Enemy (Satan).
- iv. There is a difference between *accuracy* here and *precision*:
 - 1. Accuracy is to be on point in the object of our faith: the true Jesus as revealed and interpreted in Scripture
 - 2. Precision is to understand deeply and in detail every point of Christ
 - 3. Example from mathematics:
 - a. Accurate: $\pi = 3.1415$
 - b. Precise: $\pi =$ irrational number that cannot be expressed as a fraction and therefore whose digits in its decimal form would never repeat or end
 - c. In the same way, we can know Christ accurately (and this is, indeed necessary for salvation), but not precisely (for no man can know Him fully)
 - 4. But the reality that we cannot know everything *fully*, does not imply that we cannot know anything *truly*
 - a. **Luke 1:4** that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.
 - b. **John 8:32** and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.
 - c. **1 John 2:21** I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.

4. What Do We Need to Know?

- a. The content of the gospel is beautiful to the broken sinner's heart!!
 - i. It doesn't need to be watered down or changed or altered so as not to offend, because it is the power of God for salvation, the salve for the guilty conscience, the joy for the broken-hearted, the lightening of the load for the weary and burdened soul, it is life to the dead.
 - ii. The first deception we fall for when we are tempted to accept intentions and "heart-motives" as more important than gospel truth proclaimed is the deception that it is better if people didn't hear the bad news
 - iii. What sweeter truth is there to a broken heart than that Jesus has cancelled our debt which was hostile against us and secured us a place at the Father's dining room table; that our guilt has been dealt with by His blood so that "He died for me" has power and

not merely inspiration? That injustice is wrong, both against me, and done by me, but that Jesus will deal with it all?

- b. Let us rejoice in the truth of the gospel proclaimed, even when the motives of its preachers are questionable or outright sinful
 - i. This does not excuse the sin, nor lead us to remain silent on it (Paul was calling it what it was, sinful rivalry and selfish ambition).
 - ii. But let not the sinner stand in the way of rejoicing over the great glory of Christ being made known
 - 1. **God can write straight with crooked pencils.**
- c. REMEMBER the beauty of the good news that Jesus Christ reconciles man to God and proclaim it because it is sweet to our soul:

“You have offended the infinite God with your sins, but an infinite price has been paid. You ought to be judged for your sins, but the Son of God has already been judged for the sins of the whole world, which He received in Himself. Your sins ought to be punished, but God already punished them in His Son. The wounds from your sins are great, but more precious is the balm of the blood of Christ.

Moses pronounces a curse against you ([Deu 27:26](#)), because you have not kept everything that has been written in the book of the law, but Christ has been made a curse for you ([Gal 3:13](#)). The handwriting has been written against you in the court of heaven, but Christ’s blood has deleted that ([Col 2:14](#)).

Therefore, your passion, O loving Christ, is my ultimate refuge.”

—Johann Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations*

Conclusion:

Let us imbibe and drink deeply of the good news of Jesus Christ in all its splendor, with all joy and gratitude, with all joyful repentance and grateful faith in and praise of the One who redeemed us by His blood, has given us His eternal Spirit within us for our good, lives today to rule over all of Creation, and is coming back again to gather His elect to join in glorifying God forever and ever. Amen