

The Alchemy of Life Outline

Philippians 1:12-21

- I. What is the passion for which you live?
 - A. What it is that if it was taken from you would devastate you?

- II. The determining factor(s) of joy in your life:
 - A. How you define your life.
 - B. *“The measure of one’s spiritual character, the measure of one’s spiritual strength and the measure of one’s spiritual maturity is what it takes to steal one’s joy”.*
 1. Whatever point your joy is diminished reveals the level of spiritual maturity you have.
 - a. Spiritual maturity is the measuring factor of how much of your is centered upon Jesus Christ.
 2. The apostle Paul allowed nothing to deplete his joy in life (spiritually mature).

- III. Life is hard—the hardness of life.
 - A. John 16:33 **“in the world you WILL have trouble”**....expect it!
 - B. Paul wants his church (and us) to know that despite his circumstances he is where God wants him to be (1:12).

- IV. God achieves His purposes outside of and inside of our circumstances.
 - A. God’s purposes ARE GOING TO HAPPEN, our circumstances don’t thwart what God wants done.
 - B. His purposes get done using our circumstances.
 1. Elizabeth Elliot
 2. It is through Paul’s prison terms that Paul wrote his prison epistles, influencing the world for 2000 years.
 - a. God’s plans yielding a “greater progress” for the gospel than Paul’s plans.

3. Mathew Henry—*Paul is claiming that God is the only ALCHEMIST*: an alchemist sought to change lead into gold.
 - a. God changes our circumstances (lead) into His greater purposes.
 - b. John Bunyan of *Pilgrim's Progress* and Joseph of the Old Testament.

V. The progress of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A. Outside the church (1:12-13)

1. Paul bound in chains to praetorian guards 24/7.
 - a. Which one was the prisoner?

HUMAN CIRCUMSTANCES LAY IN THE HANDS OF GOD AND HE USES THEM TO ADVANCE HIS AGENDA

- b. The house of Caesar heard the gospel through Paul's imprisonment.

B. Inside the church (1:14).

1. Paul's example gave encouragement and courage for others to share the gospel.
2. The gospel progresses even through insincere, flawed preachers (1:15-17).

C. The passion of Paul.

1. The proclamation of the gospel (1:18).

WHETHER THE HARD THINGS THAT YOU GO THROUGH IN LIFE REFINES YOU FROM LEAD TO GOLD DEPENDS ON YOUR DEFINITION OF LIFE.

2. The definition of Paul's life (1:21).
 - a. To live in and for Jesus Christ.
 - b. Jesus Christ is the one thing that cannot be taken away from you.

The Alchemy of Life

Sermon Notes

Philippians 1:12-21

The below is the actual “working manuscript” of the sermon that was presented. It was written and designed for the spoken word rather than a polished written manuscript.

What is the passion for which you live?...what drives you?... what is it that makes you get out of bed each day and strive on... that’s assuming you are getting out of bed each day!... what is it that dominates your thinking?... what dominates your reading.... That’s assuming you read!

*What makes your life tick?...where is it that you want to spend your money?... what passion do you carry in your heart?...What is the most important thing in your life?...can you answer the question... **WHAT AM I LIVING FOR?...***

If you’re having difficulty identifying that...think of it in the negative... what is it... that if you lost it... it was taken from you... would devastate you... would make living not worth it any longer?...What is it that would steel your joy?...

This morning...Our passage in Philippians presses us to think about all that...

Last week we began looking at this wonderful short book of Philippians... simply a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to the church that he founded in Philippi... and I said that Philippians is the most joyful book in the Bible...

*We began differentiating between happiness and joy... **Happiness is an attitude of satisfaction or delight based upon some present circumstance...** and when your circumstances change... so does your level of happiness.... Joy on the other hand is something that is not fleeting... is not dependent upon circumstances.... The things that go on in your life...*

*In the most general terms.... **Joy is a deep down confidence that all is well...** no matter what is going on in your life... no matter the tragedy... no matter the difficulties... no matter the problem... if you are filled with joy... true joy... it is immovable.*

Joy is intrinsically related to and dependent upon God...Joy is a gift from Him... it is as Galatians 5 tells us a fruit of the Holy Spirit... it is the result of being IN CHRIST... and Jesus Christ is immovable!... this morning we are going to continue on in discovering what true joy is all about...

The deeper we travel into the pages of Philippians... the greater our understanding of joy should be.... For the apostle Paul demonstrates...illustrates... and embodies the greatest example of a life of joy found anywhere else in the pages of scripture...

In this passage this morning... Paul emphasizes to us that Joy has nothing to do with the circumstances in your life... it is NOT whether things are going well or going very bad for you... **IT IS THE WAY IN WHICH YOU DEFINE YOUR LIFE THAT WILL DETERMINE WHETHER YOU WILL STAND OR FALL IN THIS WORLD...** And **WHETHER OR NOT YOU WILL REALIZE AND LIVE WITH THE DIVINE JOY THAT IS WITHIN YOU....**

That is why I began this morning questioning your definition of life...

What is your definition of life?... what is it that you are living for?... I'm afraid that most people don't stop to really ask themselves these questions... I think most wake up in the morning and get through the day... but how you answer that will reveal the level of true joy you have...

Listen to this carefully... it's a quote from one of my commentaries that has had me thinking all week... ***"The measure of one's spiritual character... the measure of one's spiritual strength... and the measure of one's spiritual maturity... is what it takes to steal one's joy"***.

In other words... whatever point your joy is diminished to bitterness.... Negativity... a critical spirit... whatever that point is... when a sullenness begins to creep into your life and joy gets pushed out... *that* reveals the level of spiritual maturity you have... or don't have...

[spiritual maturity is the measuring factor of how much of your life have you centered upon Jesus Christ]

When one first becomes a Christian... it isn't unusual for them to get a bit side railed in their faith when tough things start to happen in their life... a little discouraged... a lack of joy... because they have just begin to center their lives on Christ....

But someone who has been a Christian for years... it should not be so

It is amazing to look at the life of Paul and NEVER see anywhere in scripture... that what happens in his life.... As we will see.... (Much more has happened to the apostle Paul that most of us in this room combined)... **nothing that happens in his life depletes his joy...** nothing!

so let's learn from the apostle shall we?... let's begin with this:

1. Life is hard

Or perhaps a better way to say it is.... *There is a hardness to life*... we all can relate to life being hard... but what I mean by a hardness in life is.... underneath all of life is a harshness...

I know that each one of you knows someone that just seems to glide through life without incident.... Everything just clicks for them... and we start to think that life really can be like that... *my life is not like that... I'm sad.*

It's like a Facebook page... the family picture where everyone looks perfect... all in their coordinated matching clothes with huge smiles on their faces posing for the family picture on a beach with the blue sparkling ocean in the background...

What the picture says is "*Life for us is perfect*"... and what we say is "*How come our family doesn't look like that?*"... for most of us life is *difficult*...we don't have matching clothes!.. I don't even have matching socks!

Bad things happen to us.... Some of it...most of it... we caused... but much of it simply comes at us!...even good things are difficult...

Jesus Himself told us in John 16:33... **in the world...you WILL have trouble....expect it!..** What does Job say?... **but man is born to trouble... as sparks fly upward...**

Verse 12 of Philippians 1.. says **Now I want you to know** brethren, that my circumstances ... don't go any further!...*I want you to know*... do you see the concern?... Paul is writing this letter to his friends who have become very...very concerned about what?... his *circumstances*...

Paul knows this... He knows that they are starting to get discouraged.... They are starting to worry...it's because they've heard of Paul's circumstances....so Paul writes this letter to tell them... ***You don't have to get discouraged.... You don't have to worry...***

What is it in Paul's circumstances that is causing this concern...this discouragement?...

Philippians doesn't tell us much about Paul's situation... we have to go to Luke's book of Acts to find out what's going on...

Paul always wanted to go to Rome...he wanted to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the center of Europe...center of the empire... That was his great desire... At the end of the Book of Romans Paul writes... **I want to come to Rome and set up a base so that I can go from you to Spain...** These were his plans!... I'm sure he spent many nights with his notebook charting out... writing his plans... getting more and more excited....

To go to the very center of paganism... the very center of the worldly empire.... *To share the gospel*... earlier in Romans... Paul wrote to the Romans...(1:10) **I hope to have a *prosperous* journey to come to you...**

The journey happens... less the prosperity... you can read all about it in Acts chapters 21-28... it starts out in the temple in Jerusalem...immediately Paul and another is attacked by a mob accusing him of breaking the Jewish laws... and teaching about this man Jesus...

They would have lynched him on the spot... but some soldiers and their commander saved him... and to protect him... they throw him into prison.... Not because of anything he did wrong... but to save him from the mob.

Chapter 22... Paul is in prison in Caesarea where the Roman garrison was stationed..... nobody knew what to do with him... he ends up staying in that prison for two years!... **have your plans ever been put on hold?**...

While he was in prison there was a plot by some to take his life... he was daily insulted and shamed... the government wanted to get rid of him finally... so they put him on a ship...where do they send him?... Rome!

Eventually.... He boards a boat... a ship... and what happens... he gets shipwrecked.. he had to swim for his life... he gets to Rome... but he gets thrown into prison... FOR ANOTHER TWO YEARS!

That's a total of four years in prison...back to back!... this was NOT the plan!... I think I would be saying something like... *hey God!... I'm trying to do YOUR work!... help me out a little will you?...*He's at the height of his career!... think of all the good things he could have been doing!

I think... in many ways it's harder for Christians to struggle with the hardness of life than for the non-Christian... if you don't believe in God... especially a loving caring God... you can just say... *well... that's life... that's just the way it is...that's how the molecules tumble...* But if you believe in an all-powerful all loving God as we do...

And you go through the stuff Paul is going through...wouldn't you be wondering... *why does God allow all this stuff to happen?... especially when what happens seems to derail His work!...*

Like Paul... you give up your career... you give up money... family... normal comforts of life to follow Jesus....plant churches... and then get thrown in prison for four years.... "God! What are you doing!" that's the hardness of life..... BUT...

2. God achieves His purposes outside of and inside of our circumstances.

Circumstances are important... **Just not for our joy...** they are important because it is through our circumstances that God achieves His purposes....

In other words... God's purposes... ARE GOING TO HAPPEN... our circumstances don't thwart what God wants done... in fact... He often gets it done using our circumstances...

Many of you know the story of Jim and Elizabeth Elliot...back in 1956... Jim and four other missionaries were killed by the very tribe they were sharing the gospel with... the Auca Indians in Ecuador...

What were you thinking God?... if you know the story.... years later...Jim's wife... Elizabeth Eliot goes back to the very tribe that killed her husband and the others... and worked with the Aucas and eventually shared the gospel to them.... But this is what Elizabeth wrote in one of her books:

Christians will very often find...just what the Philippians found... Not only does God allow evil in general, but sometimes it seems like God allows evil and injustice to happen to the most strategic thing that God, you'd think...wouldn't possibly want to happen....

When you realize your circumstances are God ordained and He uses them to further His purposes... it helps you to accept and even embrace what's happening to you.....

Well... It was during these two years in prison that Paul wrote what we call the Prison Epistles... the letter to the Philippians is one of these... Now.... Would you say that these writings may have influenced the entire world for the last two thousand years?

It had been at least four years since the church at Philippi had heard from Paul... can you see why they might be getting a little discouraged?... Paul loved that church immensely and they loved him... they wondered what's going on.... *Is Paul ok?... is the gospel ok?...are we on a sinking ship?*

To find out... The church sends a man by the name of Epaphroditus... a member of their congregation... to Rome to find Paul and learn two things..... 1. *What is your condition...* and 2. *what is the condition of the gospel?*

They sent with Epaphroditus some money to help support Paul... and just plain encouragement... but they wanted...needed a report on things... they wanted word back from Paul himself.....

So Philippians is a response to that... Paul writes Philippians to answer those two main concerns the church had...the letter *Philippians* is carried back to the church at Philippi.

So Paul writes:

Now I want you to know brethren, that my circumstances (all these terrible things that you've probably heard about happening to me).... **Have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel[!]**

In other words.... In what appears to be a horrible reality... all the stuff that has happened to me... and my imprisonment... *I want you to see all of it has turned out to be very...very...very... good!... Why is it good?... because God knows what He's doing... and through my imprisonment... I have been able to advance the gospel in ways I never could have if my plans had trumped His plans!*

In other words... *God had a better plan than my plan!... and His plan yielded a greater progress of the gospel.*

That word *progress* is a stronger word in the Greek... it means more than just to *move along*...it's the idea of *moving along in spite of obstacles*, danger or distractions... it is.... Moving despite resistance.. progress against opposition... progress against anything that would hinder the advance... So Paul is saying.... *The gospel is advancing against all obstacles..... my circumstances!*

My oldest set of commentaries... written back in the late 1600's... Matthew Henry's commentary on Philippians... on verse 12...

When Paul says **my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel...** Henry says: **Paul is claiming that God is the only ALCHEMIST**... Back in the Middle Ages an Alchemists believed that lead could be “perfected” into gold, *they attempted to change of some essential element into a superior form.*]

So the alchemist set out to find a process of turning lead into gold.... And never found one!.... but Henry is saying that Paul is saying here... that God does that ALL THE TIME!... with the circumstances of your life!....

He takes the lead in your life and turns it to gold.....

A great example of this is the story of John Bunyan... the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*... written the same time as Matthew Henry wrote his commentaries... late 1600's... Before he wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*... John Bunyan was a great... well known preacher...

His preaching was so powerful that it landed him in the Bedford jail to shut him up...but he preached sermons at the top of his voice which carried over the walls.... Crowds of people would gather outside the jail to hear him preach... they finally silenced him....

They put him deep down inside the jail... in a basement cell where NOBODY would hear him preach...HIS LIFE OVER?... HIS MINISTRY SHOT?... you know what that did?... it gave him the opportunity to write *Pilgrim's Progress*... they thought they silenced a preacher....

Instead... they gave him the time and opportunity to write that which has been preached to millions and millions of people... generation after generation!... still being read today!

That's how it is!....God turns lead into gold

kind of reminds you of the story of Joseph doesn't it?

The brothers sell Joseph into slavery to get rid of him... they say something like ***finally, that's the last we'll ever see of him!***...Of course... Joseph prayed to God ***why are you letting this happen?***... what God did was He turned lead into gold... Joseph eventually becomes the Prime Minister and ends up saving his brothers!.... a tense family reunion many years later and Joseph says to his brothers.....

Genesis 50:20

²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people^[a] should be kept alive, as they are today.

That's exactly what happened here with Paul...Paul could look at his captors and say... *You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good... the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ....*

So what specifically happened that was so good?... what was the *progress* of the gospel?... two things: 1. *The advance of the gospel OUTSIDE of the church.....* and 2. *the advance of the gospel INSIDE of the church...*

1. Outside of the church

Read verses 12-13

Now stay with me here... this is amazing!... **everyone knows Paul is a prisoner... not because he committed a crime... but because he preached Christ!**... in Acts 28 we find out some details about Paul's imprisonment... it really is amazing... Paul was not in a normal prison setting... he actually was in a private residence... he actually paid for it.. paid rent... and people were allowed to come and go... and they did!

He could have visitors... but don't think this was some cushy situation!

Acts 28:20 says Paul was **bound in chains**... specifically... the chain was called a *halusis* which was a short chain... probably about 18 inches long... it would be placed over the wrist of the prisoner... and over the wrist of a soldier...

So that's pretty tight!... just about face to face... Paul was bound to a soldier... 24 hours a day!...there would be four soldiers... they would do six hour shifts... so Paul would have four different soldiers throughout that 24 hour period... Escape was impossible... not to mention privacy!... night and day... attached to a soldier... for two years!

[*Praetorian guard*—these were elite guards... their main job was to guard the governors residence in Jerusalem... they were used to guard the highest ranking military officers tent during military endeavors...]

What was the result of all this?... get this....(13) **The cause of Christ has become well known throughout the entire praetorian guard!**... in other words.... **WHO WAS THE PRISONER?**... Paul? Or the soldiers!... we think how tough it was for poor Paul to be chained to a soldier... but think about this.... **HOW TOUGH IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FOR A SOLDIER TO BE CHAINED TO PAUL!!!!**

Have you ever tried to share the gospel with someone who wanted to get away?... Imagine being chained to Paul for six hours!!!... **WHAT AN INCREDIBLE MISSIONARY OPPORTUNITY!**...think about a captive audience!....

Paul didn't plan that... **GOD DID!**

Can you imagine... probably some people... Christians in the infant Roman church praying "*O God... help us SOMEHOW to reach Caesar's household!*"... *Help us reach the elite Praetorian guard... Help us reach these people... there is NO WAY IN!*

*Oh yes there is... **God!**... in His wonderful wisdom made the whole Praetorian guard captive to Paul at six hour intervals!.... while he evangelized them all!!!!... what do you suppose Paul talked about day and night?... an earful to be sure...probably singing like he did with Silas in prison in Acts 16.. and they would see his character... his temperament... the peace that was inside of him...his passion for the gospel... **AND HIS JOY!***

HUMAN CIRCUMSTANCES LAY IN THE HANDS OF GOD AND HE USES THEM TO ADVANCE HIS AGENDA....Paul's difficult circumstances advanced the gospel.... And the praetorian guard was being converted!.... *how do I know that?*.... later in chapter 4:22...

Paul closes his letter...it's worth the look.... Back of Philippians... 4:22...I think a little tongue in cheek... **All the saints greet you, especially those in Caesar's household!**... and not just the praetorian guard... Caesar's household!

Don't miss the **everyone else** in chapter 1:13!... what does that mean?... it means **everyone else!**... certainly **everybody else** in the palace... but I think it means **everybody else** in Rome!... his house was open to visitors... and they were coming to him in crowds!...

And what did he do?... he preached.... He taught... the gospel of Jesus Christ!...and that is how God used Paul to evangelize Rome!... **the gospel was spreading outside of the church**.... And....

2. Inside of the church

Read verse 14

Apparently many had come to Christ because of Paul's imprisonment... and I would imagine that they were a bit reluctant to go around spreading the gospel themselves in fear of being thrown into prison as well...

But seeing the fruit of Paul's imprisonment!... Seeing some of Caesar's household coming to Christ...Seeing how God protected Paul even though he was chained... seeing how respected Paul was by the soldiers... and the effect he had on them... **has given them courage to share**... to speak the word....

If God could minister through Paul in his condition... his circumstances... God could minister through them as well... and so... Paul's strength became their strength.... What an incredible truth!....

Through one man... seemingly sidelined from ministry... removed of the mission field as far as everyone else is concerned... a plethora of misfortunate experiences saturated his life from the moment he planned his ministry... **and even now**.... There are people trying to derail his ministry even there in prison...

Read verses 15-17...

Notice they are all proclaiming Christ.... Preaching the gospel.... The gospel is being spread... even through flawed preachers!.... wrong motives....

It never lets up... **there is a hardness to life**...even in the church!...

Read verse 18

Paul's Passion

This is the secret!!!...mark that verse...verse 18 underline it... highlight it.... Circle it... **What then?...** what does he mean WHAT THEN?... **in light of all my circumstances**...the troubles I've had... the circumstances I'm in... and even the people trying to distress me... *in light of everything that is coming at me*...(18) **Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth...CHRIST IS PROCLAIMED... AND IN THIS...I REJOICE!... YES!!!! AND I WILL REJOICE!**

Paul is telling us... **whether the hard things that you go through in life refines you and turns you into gold... depends on your definition of life!**... that's alchemy... if lead... you in your circumstances... is going to be turned into gold... **depends on what is most important to you in life**.... The secret is in the first word of verse 19..... **for**...

Read verses 19-20

What gives Paul his joy?...it is what Paul has placed his heart on...his life on..... what is it that gets him up in the morning?... what is the passion for which he lives?... it isn't his work... it isn't his family or friends.. it isn't making money... **IT IS JESUS CHRIST!**...

Read verse 21

That's it!.... **that is Paul's definition of life**... if you have the proper definition of life... you can go through ANYTHING... you can face EVERYTHING.... Paul says... **For me to live**... in other words... *"this is the thing that makes life for me"*...

"This is my bottom line" ...this is the most important thing to me... this is the passion for which I live... If I have this... I am living...REGARDLESS OF WHAT IS TAKEN AWAY FROM ME... DONE TO ME... OR INFLICTED ON ME...[nobody can take Christ away]

what is the passion for which you live?...

1. Some will say... **for me to live is to have fun... have pleasure**... they might work hard...but only for the purpose of making a lot of money so that they can play... They may work hard because it makes enough money so they can do the things that really give life meaning... recreation... experiences...

A new boat to play on the river... airplane tickets to experience the world ... every toy in the world to experience every thrill in the world... the hedonist approach to meaning in life...

2. Some live **for power and control**... the meaning of life for them would be to be strong... self-sufficient... to be in power over others...

3. For some it is **to be a "good person"...** **morality** is the reason for living... to know *I'm a good person*...

[If you've ever read *Les Misérables*...great classic by Victor Hugo... you have Valjean... who was a condemned criminal for stealing for his family...his family was starving... Valjean steals a loaf of bread...goes to prison....

Then you have the... relentless police inspector Javert who is after Valjean...a true letter of the law legalist...after chasing Valjean for years... Javert eventually takes his own life... commits suicide... why?...

Javert couldn't stand the idea that Valjean in actuality was a better man than he was... He couldn't stand the idea that HE NEEDED FORGIVENESS himself... that he needs grace... to be seen as a good person...a right person...and to see himself as a good person was everything to him.]

4. Most have chosen **other things** to give life definition... **family... children... friends... career... spouse**.... FOR ME... TO LIVE IS TO HAVE THAT....to me... it is my children... I pour my life completely out for them... *my grandchildren*....

For me it is my spouse... I've given my entire adult life to my spouse... we do everything together...

The problem with all those?.... ALL OF THEM CAN BE STRIPPED AWAY FROM YOU!... **the bottom line of your life can be taken from you!...**IF YOUR JOY IS LINKED TO SOMETHING YOU COULD LOSE... YOU MAY LOSE IT ALL...

What is your bottom line?... is it something you can lose?...if you lose it...And don't jump on to another bottom line... you're done!... you utterly collapse!...Paul says **there is only one definition in life that stand up to anything and everything**... There is NOTHING in the world that can come at this and remove it from you.... It is the ONLY things that if you build your life on can withstand ANYTHING and EVERYTHING that is thrown at you....

Jesus Christ...

It is so very sad to see lives completely fall apart at the death of their children... or when their spouse leaves them... IF YOUR LIFE COLLAPSES WHEN YOUR LOVES COLLAPSE... IT MEANS YOUR LOVES WERE YOUR LIFE!.... and the problem with your life IS NOT your circumstances... it is your definition of life!

Read verse 21

what does Paul say:

Live... die... since my life is defined being in Jesus Christ.... Nothing matters in the long run!...*I live... great... I die... great.... Either way I spend eternity with the basis for my life!... Jesus Christ...*

Have you ever thought about all this?...Do you ever sit down and really think about your life?...do you wonder why your joy ebbs and flows... rises and falls depending on what is coming at you?....Have you ever stopped to evaluate what it is you are defining your life with?

I mean... most of us here would say... *Of course Jesus is the most important thing in life...* we were taught to say that in Sunday School... and we know that is the right answer...and we're afraid NOT to say that... but is He really?

You look at Paul's life... his amazing life and you think... *well... that's Paul... God told him to go on the mission field... share the gospel and write most of the New Testament... we would expect Paul to live like that!... but I can't share the gospel like he did... I can't teach the word like he did....*

I'm stuck in this job... Hmm.. really?.... that's interesting!... are you chained to your desk?... are you chained to the sales counter that you are responsible for?... Are you chained to tools you have to use every day to build those houses?... are you chained to that computer you work on every day?

Are you chained to that car you have to drive in all over the place meeting clients?... Are you chained to a classroom?... what are you chained to?.... Paul was literally chained to Roman soldiers... and as a result... Rome received the gospel! What are you chained to?

Paul's joy was tied to Jesus Christ... is your joy tied to Him?...