

Study 5

REJOICE WITH ME



The ruins of the ancient Philippian amphitheatre

Background

In remainder of Philippians 2 we get a glimpse of Paul's *temporal* emotional condition and despite this, his eternal perspective. In the opening chapter we read that Paul was chains and under guard by the elite Praetorium (Caesar's personal protectors). Yet Paul's outlook remained positive that even in this situation he had been able to share the gospel with these battle-hardened men (Phil. 1:12-13). Paul's fondness for the Philippians is obvious in the way he gently corrects them over a potential dispute among two trusted leaders within the church (which he does not even identify) and his appeal to them was based on a reminder of Christ's humility and sufferings (Phil. 2:5-8). Now we are going to see that Paul's ability to *rejoice* was due to his overlooking his temporal situation and focusing instead on the eternal results of what Christ was doing through him. While he could rejoice, he could experience the emotions of his life about to end, and certain sorrows that he doesn't reveal.

Work Out The Implications of Your Salvation

Paul has so far described his bleak situation, then referred to Christ's mistreatment leading to His death, and then ultimately to Christ's exaltation by God. What now awaits Paul, and every believer who remains faithful to Christ, despite persecutions, is eternal glory! Yet, there was a certain apprehension that came from following a Saviour at a time when to do could mean death.

1. What two emotive words does Paul use in Philippians 2:12 to describe how the Philippians might have felt in following Christ at the time they were living?

2. Even in the midst of this, what assurance did Paul provide these believers in Philippians 2:13?

Paul has modelled to the Philippians how a believer faces up to persecution and looming martyrdom. So, he tells them, once they have "worked out" the possible implications of following Christ, don't grumble or complain when cost of following Christ becomes high (Phil. 2:14).

3. In considering the context of what Paul told the Philippians in chapter 2 verse 14, how does it reflect on the things that *we* grumble and complain about today? Discuss.

4. Read Philippians 2:15. What did Paul say the effect on outsiders would be if the believers genuinely lived like this?

The key, Paul seems to have said, for any believer about to suffer for their faith in Christ was to hold fast to the Scriptures - *the Word of Christ* (Phil. 2:16). We may not be facing the threat of martyrdom that believers in the first century did, but we too ensure that we are also holding fast to God's Word by reading it everyday and allowing it to speak to our souls.

Paul's Realistic Emotions

5. What was Paul's attitude about the possibility of being martyred? (Phil 2:17)

Paul faced the threat of being martyred with a resignation that it was probable. Even with his confidence that Christ would be honoured by his death, I suspect that Paul would have also been subject to some of the normal emotions of any person facing such a prospect. But in the opening chapter he said that he was *torn* about whether should live so that he could be of further service to the Philippians or to submit to death so that he could be with the Lord (Phil. 1:23-24).

6. How did Paul want the Philippians view his impending martyrdom? (Phil. 2:18)? (What does this tell us about how the early Christians viewed the threat from their persecutors of being put to death?)

During the Roman persecution that was to break out in AD 64 across the empire, it also certain that many of those that Paul wrote to did indeed die as martyrs.

Fatherly Provision For His Children

Paul was different from many of the so-called apostles of his day. Rather than viewing churches as the means by which the "apostle" could be financially supported, Paul had a different attitude.

7. How does Second Corinthians 12:14 reveal this attitude, and how does this compare to Paul's words in Philippians 2:19-25?

In referring to Epaphroditus's recent poor health (Phil. 2:27) we get another glimpse of the *sadness* (not fear) that Paul was experiencing in the face of his looming departure from this life. If his young lieutenant, Epaphroditus, had died, it would have added *another* sorrow to what he was already experiencing. This should tell us that it is not necessarily 'fear' or 'a lack of faith' that a believer experiences when they are navigating a terminal illness or their end of life expiry.

8. What was Paul confident of about how the Philippians would receive his young lieutenants? (Phil. 2:28-30)

Application Discussion

- Why do you think some believers find it difficult to be emotionally honest with their brothers and sisters in Christ?
- Are there any persecution costs for believers today because they follow Christ?
- How can a church congregation be apostolically fathering of the younger members of their congregation (or other congregations) which would leave a legacy for the next generation beyond their own lifetime?