

What really matters.

Philippians 1:15-18.

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice...

Introduction

What matters really? Each person comes to a conclusion according to his or her values. It is a question of priorities that will determine how happy you live your life! It is our priorities that direct our lives. If those priorities are good and worthy, our lives will have purpose. If those priorities are less than worthy, our lives will lack the meaning and fulfilment God intended for us to have.

This is so very important, because if we do not keep focused on the top priority for our lives, we will not be able to enjoy our lives. Lesser things will distract us. We will find ourselves spending an excessive amount of time, and emotional energy, on things that really do not matter. The end result of this is that insignificant things become our focus, make us unhappy and all of this as a result of the things that are not really important. It is hard to enjoy life like that.

The challenge is always to keep our main focus the highest priority in our lives. If we can do that we will not be made miserable by all kinds of miniscule things that we cannot do anything about.

In today's text we see Paul discussing a situation in his life that could have been a major source of distress for him. Paul could have become so preoccupied by the situation that he could have failed to do what God intended him to do. But he resisted the temptation and he was able to focus on what really mattered and even to rejoice in what God was doing in the situation. We will find four steps we can take that will enable us to enjoy life in spite of many otherwise worrying distractions and remain in God's joy.

Recognize that people may disappoint you.

It is true that we all know that people will disappoint us. But we still allow it to happen. Look at the situation Paul describes. He is in prison in Rome, because of his faithfulness to preach the gospel of Christ. Paul was a powerful and successful apostle. He was very intelligent and completely dedicated to his calling. This resulted in other preachers, also in Philippi, being jealous of him and being in rivalry with him. They therefore preached the gospel with the wrong intentions - to stir up problems for Paul, even though he was in chains.

This could have been emotionally distressing for Paul. He could even have felt anger over this. The behaviour of people, especially Christians in the church, too often causes a lot of hurt. We must therefore recognize that people may, and will, disappoint us. Never put your faith in people. Even the best people are far less than perfect. The sooner we admit this fact, the better.

It has always been this way. There are some who talk about life in the early, New Testament church as if it was perfect, but it certainly was not. (*See 1 Cor. 3:3 You are still not spiritual, because there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, and this shows that you are not spiritual. You are acting like people of the world.*) In every church you will find Christians who may hurt you. Their intentions are far from being Christ like. They lack love. **If we think that their views and intentions are the most important thing in the church, we will not be able to rejoice in the Lord.** We will become too occupied with their shortcomings. We have to learn to say with Paul: Does it really matter? We must learn to get over it and focus on the main thing: Christ being preached in the world!

Secondly: Refuse to be petty.

Not only must we refuse to be disturbed by other people's pettiness, we also have to learn not to be petty ourselves! Our own pettiness sometimes causes us even more distress than the silliness of other people's envy. You cannot allow yourself to be pulled down into the same worldly way of thinking and acting, just because others choose to be there. This is one of the strategies of Satan to distract us. He wants us to focus, not on what really matters, but on the multitude of small annoyances that the inconsistencies of people produce. He also tempts us to become one of those who goes on and on about things that will not make a difference to the effectual preaching of Christ. The challenge is to love one another and thereby cover a multitude of sins.

This is what we see Paul doing here. He could have condemned these preachers of Christ for preaching out of impure motives, but he did not. We must remember that these were not heretics like those he instructed to be thrown out of the Galatians' church. There they were perverting the gospel of Christ, making it into what Paul called "another gospel." These jealous preachers in Philippi were genuine Christians who were falling short. Yet, they preached the truth!

Why do you suppose that it is so difficult to say about Christians such as these: Does it really matter to me that they do not act in good faith towards me? Why is it so difficult to carry on with our calling without being hurt and upset by what others do wrong? Why is it so easy to be judgmental? This is one of the biggest problems Christians have. This is also what discourages me easily. I have met so many judgmental Christians in my life and I have seen this attitude destroy so many relationships, also amongst church members. It is really sad. I suppose some think they are upholding some sort of standard. Or maintain some sort of tradition of custom. For some or other reason there always are Christians in the church that just cannot handle the giftedness of others and then act in truly silly ways!! But we need to learn how to maintain standards without being judgmental.

Our goal is to pull people up and not put them down. We as Christians should really be able to see this. We have been forgiven a multitude of sins, ourselves! Jesus could have said, "You don't meet my standard, so you are not worth my work." But he did not. He showed us that things could be different. He gave us hope and faith. He forgave us and he changed us. And now we should be in the business of pulling people out of the mess that sin causes, because we care about them. And rejoice when others efficiently minister to the helpless and the hopeless. We will not condone sin, but we will point people to Jesus. And when people are saved, we will rejoice with the angels in heaven.

If we allow ourselves to be petty, we will be miserable Christians! Always going on about what others do wrong, and how unfair they are and how we are not recognised for our contributions. We will even allow others and their ways to keep us from God's work and God's church - allow us to be hurt, when it really is not about us at all. It is all about the gospel being preached. This is why, in the third place, we always need to remember what really matters. It will save us a lot of distress and help us not to be petty. It will keep us rejoicing. It will help us remain in the joy of the Lord.

Thirdly: Remember what really matters.

"Keep your eye on the ball." Remember when you first learned to play rugby, soccer, netball, tennis - whatever! Was this not what the coach used to say ALL the time - "Keep your eye on the ball". When you do not keep your eye on the ball, you drop the ball, you fail your team and you cannot score!

The same is true in life. Remember what really matters. Keep the main thing the main thing. Keep your eye on the ball!! If you don't, you will be very unhappy. And you will not score any goals for the kingdom of God.

Paul understood this. Look at how he managed the situation where people preached Christ in a spirit of unholy competition. What Paul did not do, is lose his focus. He did not allow himself to become

anxious or angry about these people trying to stir up trouble for him. He could have easily done this. He could have allowed them to become his priority. He could have allowed a desire for revenge to consume him. But he kept his eye on the ball. He kept his main focus, his highest priority. Paul had a lot of preparation for this. When he was visiting the Corinthian church he also had to keep his focus. He wrote to them about that visit and said, "**For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified**" (1 Corinthians 2:2)

Paul had a mission to accomplish and he was not about to let petty distractions sidetrack him. And neither should we. Jesus himself told us what really matters. He told us what should be our top priority. In Matthew 6:33 we read: **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness....** The Kingdom is what really matters. The Kingdom of God should be our top priority in life. Christ, the King, should be the focus of every Christian. We should give testimony by our behaviour that we are followers of Christ. He should be our focus. Our love for Jesus should under all circumstances motivate what we do - even when other people do hurtful things right here in the church!

We just have to keep our eyes on the ball - to live as people who love Jesus and preach his gospel. Only then can we score goals for Jesus! He is also is the only power by which we play his game. That is why he is called the author and perfecter of our faith. Jesus Christ is central to all that we do as Christians.

You do not want to be caught up in the petty frustrations of life. You have to keep your focus on what really matters. You cannot let what other people do and their intentions and motives side track you. Yes, Satan wants you to become preoccupied with everything besides your walk with Christ. Refuse to let him do that. Remember what really matters.

Fourthly: Rejoice in what God is doing.

Remember the perspective that Paul had. It was that God is in control. God is at work. God is doing something even when we do not understand what he is doing. Try to see Gods plan and purpose. Be motivated by your love for the Lord. And rejoice in what he is doing in you and in your church!

One of the great themes of Philippians is about rejoicing. It must happen again and again. We read in Philippians 4:4: **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!** But we forget this too easily, so Paul has to remind us over and over again. There is always something about which we can rejoice.

What is God doing in your life? Do you believe that he is working in those frustrating situations to mould your personality? Do you believe that through it all he is making you more like Jesus is? If you believe those things, then you should rejoice. God is at work in your life. God is changing you for the purpose of the coming of his Kingdom in your life and in the world at large!

Conclusion:

Christianity is not a matter of intellectual understanding. Christianity is about living your faith. The call of Christ is always a call to follow. It is a call to surrender everything in your life to Christ. If that is your commitment, then you will see his hand in your life. You will be able to rejoice, because your faith is not in other people, who may disappoint you, nor is it in being upset about petty things that could disturb you, but it is in the One who is forever faithful, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember that people will disappoint you. Get over it! Refuse to be petty and discover what really matters! Discover the joy of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Discover the love of Christ! Always remember what really matters: your relationship with Jesus Christ and that his gospel must be preached in and out of season. Then, when lives are changed and we see how good the Lord is, we will rejoice in what God is doing. You will begin to relax in your relationship with Christ and

experience the security of knowing you are safe in his hand. You will rejoice because of what really matters.

This is the Word of God!

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.