Anonymous

# (Philippians 1:12-26)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. Today we’re going to look at the mind of the apostle Paul, because if there’s anyone who won the battle of the mind it was Paul. But the good news for you and I is that he wasn’t always there, in fact, sometimes as you read the stuff he wrote it was like he was really struggling. In Romans chapter 7 he said,

“I don’t understand what I do, because what I want to do I don’t do, but what I hate I do…for what I do is not the good I want to do. No, the evil I don’t want to do, this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I don’t want to do, it is no longer I who do it…” (Romans 7:15,19-20).

And so, it’s like he’s going crazy, he’s battling this in his mind, but the good news is that he gained ground, he won the fight, and over time he began to master his thoughts.

This morning, we’re going to consider Paul’s perspective as the odds were against him and it seemed as if all of life was stacked against him. In fact, the apostle Paul was in a prison, not in his mind, but he was actually under house arrest in Rome, chained to a Roman guard 24 hours a day. And so, we’re going to look deeper into the mind of Paul, recognizing that there’s often a war raging in our minds.

This is important because those thoughts, either positive or negative, often determine the direction of our lives. Therefore, what we want to discover is how to change the way we think, because if we don’t change the way we think, we will never change the way we live. And so, Paul tells us it’s all in our minds, and in Romans chapter 12 he says,

“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind…” (Romans 12:2).

And we can renew our minds, because the more we think in a particular direction the easier it becomes to think that way. In fact, we’ve come to understand that the brain continues to evolve as we mature, and the more we think a thought it actually creates a pathway in the brain kind of like a superhighway making it easier to think a certain way. That’s exactly why the apostle would tell us,

“Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things” (Philippians 4:8).

Because it really is about perspective and learning to see things with the mind of Christ.

The problem is that many of us have been conditioned by this sinful world to think more negatively, which in turn affects our reasoning, our beliefs, and our personal preferences. And so, if we allow our minds to continue along this track unhindered, we’re allowing our minds to be conditioned by the world, filtering our thoughts in a way that’s unhelpful, not necessarily accurate, and leads us to make grave mistakes in judgment.

You know, it’s kind of like when I first got bifocals. The doctor had warned me about the line, the different ways of seeing things, and I quickly discovered that as I found myself on several occasions stumbling and almost falling down the stairs. And so, there were many occasions when my glasses actually caused a moment of panic when a step wasn’t where I thought it was. And I’m telling you this because I think it’s really important that we consider our perspective, you know how we see things, because we can’t always control what happens to us, but we can control our perspective. And so, we want to learn to see things differently.

Today, if you have your Bible with you, would you turn to the book of Philippians, and let’s look at chapter 1 at verse 12. If you know Paul’s story, you know that he was very strategic in sharing the gospel and his greatest desire was to go to Rome. But he didn’t get to go there as a missionary preaching the gospel, instead he was taken to Rome in chains as a prisoner. He was actually chained to a Roman guard 24 hours a day, locked up under house arrest for two years as he’s awaiting trial.

As we look at the life of the apostle Paul, he illustrates that even though you can’t control what happens to you, you can control how you see it. You can control your perspective and God can give you joy no matter what challenges or difficulties you may be facing. And so, this message is for you if you feel stuck in a situation that you didn’t choose or if they are things in your life that are outside of your control. And so, as we go to Philippians chapter 1, the apostle Paul writing from prison in verse 12 says,

“Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. 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 defense 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” (Philippians 1:12-17).

Let’s just stop there, because I want you to consider, not necessarily what you did, but what has happened to you? For some of you, it was a bad report from the doctor, maybe you lost your job, or you’re in a bad place financially. For others of you, maybe you’ve got a relationship that’s at a dead end, but something has happened to you that you didn’t plan. And so, number one, what has happened?

## 1. What Has Happened?

I wonder how many of you have found yourselves in a bad place, wondering what happened, because you just can’t see God redeeming your situation? You don’t feel his presence and you don’t know how anything good could ever come out of it. Well, that’s the kind of place where Paul was, but he said, I want you to know that what has happened to me looks bad but it really has served to advance the gospel.

Today, you may be in a place where you feel like you’re in prison, you’re chained up to something you don’t like, but you need to know that thing can become a pulpit, a platform, a tool in the hands of God. In fact, you may not see it now, but God has a purpose for your prison, and what the enemy meant for evil, God can actually use for your good and his glory. And so, I want to encourage you to change your perspective, to see things differently, realizing that God specializes in turning what we would call obstacles into divine opportunities for his glory. He can take what you might call a setback and turn it into a set up for you to make a difference in this world.

In other words, there is a purpose in everything, and even though you may not see it, understand it, or like it, God is there. He’s not surprised by what has happened, in fact, he’s already in your tomorrow. And so, if you’ll begin thinking with the mind of Christ, looking with spiritual eyes at this thing, this situation that you never would’ve chosen and just trust him, he will give you eyes to see.

Some of you are so busy praying for God to get you out of the situation that you’re in today that you’re missing out on what God is trying to do in you and through you. You’re so busy asking for a new job, a new house, or maybe a new relationship that you miss the fact that God is trying to do something greater in your need, your pain, or your singleness. Sometimes we just need to pause and ask, “God, what am I not seeing, what do I need to understand, what is it that you are trying to do in me or through me?”

This is where the apostle Paul was in verse 16, he’d reached that point where he had the right perspective, and he said he knew that he was “put there” for the defense of the gospel. He recognized that he wasn’t a prisoner, the Romans may have put him in chains, but what had happened to him God was using for good. And since he was able to see things differently, he didn’t lose any sleep, he didn’t have to worry about stuff that God had already worked out. And so, in verse 18, he shrugs it off and says, “What does it matter.” That’s our second point.

## 2. What Does It Matter

You know, this is really amazing, because if we believed this like the apostle Paul did, we wouldn’t let people steal our joy, and we certainly wouldn’t waste our time trying to impress people that didn’t die for us. Paul recognized that he wasn’t put there by the Jewish leaders or even by the Roman officials, but that he had been put there for the defense of the gospel. And so, he could say, “What does it matter?” because he knew that he belonged to God and he wasn’t a prisoner to his chains

If we could grab hold of this perspective and say with the apostle Paul, “What does it matter?” we’d know true freedom like never before. You see, Paul knew that with God all things were possible and therefore he knew he wasn’t a prisoner to his chains, he wasn’t even a prisoner to his feelings or what he expected, because he simply committed himself to God’s purpose.

Some of us can’t receive what God is doing in our lives because we are too caught up with our own expectations of what we thought God was going to do, or how he was going to answer our prayer, but Paul emptied himself, pouring himself out becoming as nothing. He recognized that in and of himself he was a nobody, he was anonymous, but he knew that in Christ he was a weapon formed in the hands of God, aimed at the darkness, and created to do good works.

That’s how Paul interprets his situation and that’s why he can say in verse 18,

“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, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance” (Philippians 1:18-19).

This is the perspective that I’ve always tried to have in life whenever something irritates me, bothers me, or worries me. I don’t always do it, but I try to filter it, file it, and categorize it, asking myself, “what does it matter?” And so, if it’s not going to be a big deal a month from now, a year from now, or in eternity it frees me to focus on what’s important.

You see, here’s what we need to understand, whatever you put after that phrase in verse 18, “The important thing is”, that’s what your joy, your purpose, and your fulfillment is connected to. Paul said, “The important thing is that… Christ is preached.” And yet, I wonder how many of us have even figured out what that might look like in our lives? Because whatever comes next, if it’s anything other than Christ, whatever you put in that blank can make life really inconsistent, unfulfilling, and ungratifying. Whatever you put next, if you put the wrong thing in that blank, it makes it extremely difficult to have any joy.

But the apostle Paul got it, he understood, and that’s why he said, “What does it matter?” And then in verse 20 he continued saying,

“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me. (And so, he says) Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:20-27).

Whatever happens, the important thing is that Christ is preached. Whatever happens I rejoice and I will continue to rejoice! You see, even though Paul was imprisoned, he knew that God was using that too, and he didn’t feel sorry for himself, but he said number three, “Whatever happens!”

## 3. Whatever Happens

So many times, in our own lives, we pray that the pain would go away. The character defects, the dysfunctions, the things that we don't like, we pray that they would go away because we think that we could be more effective. You know, “God, if you would just change this.” But what Paul demonstrates is that what’s most important is that the gospel of Christ is preached, and so whatever happens he says, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

The apostle Paul found himself in that place where he was praying over and over to be healed of what he calls a thorn when Jesus reminded him,

"My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

And so, he changed his perspective, he recognized that even if the situation doesn’t change, he would conduct himself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Paul said, “Whatever happens, use me even while I'm in these chains. “God, if you don't remove the chains, just use them, use this season of my life because what matters most is that Christ is preached.” And I’ll tell you, I'm not there yet, but I want to get here. I want to be able to interpret my situation and my circumstances always through the lens of God's love and his purpose. I want to be able to conduct myself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

You see, once you recognize that whatever happens isn’t that big of a deal, it changes your perspective. Suddenly you’re able to focus on what really does matter instead of being caught up in things that really don’t. And so, maybe you might be asking “Well what does matter?” Well, the apostle Paul said one of the most stunning statements in Galatians chapter 2, he said,

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

You might say, “Paul, what matters, what really matters?” And he would probably say, “Jesus Christ matters a lot, eternity matters, serving people matters, using your gifts to make a difference in this world matters.” You see, Paul recognized that he was nothing, that he was dead, that his life was not his own. That’s why he told the Philippians,

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

And so, he’s waiting for a trial to determine whether or not he would be executed, he’s basically locked up on death row, and he says what’s happened is all good. I’m anonymous, I’m nothing, and so what does it even matter, the important thing is that Christ is preached. He says, for me to live is Christ and to die means to be in his presence. That’s the kind of perspective that makes a difference in the world, because all the things that tend to hold us back don’t really matter that much.

Paul said, “Even if I’m being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you” (Philippians 2:17).

It’s a change of perspective that changes everything and so many people all they can see is negativity because they’re looking for the negative things, the bad things, but if we’ll look for God we’ll find him. As we close, I want to encourage you to interpret your circumstances, to see your situation through the goodness of God. Then you can recognize, even in your chains, in your hardship, that our God is still good. He’s still involved, he still cares, and he’ll never leave you nor forsake you. Even when you’re waiting, you can still praise him, because no matter what our circumstances are like our God is always good. And so, Paul says, “I am glad and rejoice with all of you” (Philippians 2:17).

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