

RELATED SCRIPTURES

1 Peter 4:12–19 | Psalm 138:7–8 | Romans 5:3–5

STUDY FOR SERMON FROM 9.15.24

SUMMARY

It is difficult to imagine circumstances that are more discouraging than Paul's. His objective was to preach the gospel and see it spread the world over. With this intent, we would think God's blessing would accompany him at every turn—and to be sure, it did. However, this blessing might not be what we would expect. First, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and sent to Rome to stand trial; he is living under the threat of the death penalty. Instead of having the freedom to preach the gospel as he saw fit, he was shackled and confined to a small house as he awaited trial. Despite its appearance, this is no setback; for Paul, it is opportunity. Paul tells the church at Philippi that the gospel has spread throughout the whole imperial guard (v. 13). This most likely means that his imprisonment included a Roman soldier chaining himself to Paul. But for Paul, this was, quite literally, a "captive audience" of one. With each soldier that cycled through this duty, it was yet *another* person hearing the gospel that would take it back to, of all places, the household of Caesar, where they were stationed. Moreover, the other prisoners imprisoned with him for preaching the gospel became all the more empowered to continue to preach, fearing nothing (v. 14). If imprisonment weren't a big enough "obstacle," Paul also tells the church that it seems there are other preachers out there who are indeed preaching the gospel yet doing so out of envy and rivalry (v. 15). These evangelists sought to lift up the name of Christ to lift *themselves* up, perhaps even insinuating that Paul's imprisonment was God's chastisement upon him. Given his circumstances, it's easy to see why Paul would be discouraged, yet he isn't—far from it; Paul rejoices (v. 18). Paul's focus remains on Christ's name going forward, and despite the peril he faces, if Christ's name advances because of his suffering, he does so joyfully; to him, it's worth it. May it be so for all Christ-followers!

GROUP QUESTIONS

Share something that surprises, encourages, or troubles you from the sermon or your direct reading of Philippians 1:12–18.

Detail the positive outcomes of Paul's negative circumstances. Make a comparison in your life; what negative circumstances might God be using for a Kingdom-positive outcome?

Why isn't Paul adversely affected by the circulating words of envy and rivalry? What can we learn about Paul's response to those who speak negatively of him?

If there's one thing Jesus would want you to walk away believing and receiving as a result of this portion of Scripture, what is that thing?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

As you pray, be sure to include today's themes in what you bring before God.