

Joining Jesus' Story Week 2: I want you to know

Last week we began a series on the book of Philippians. **This is a letter** that the apostle Paul wrote to a group of Christ followers in the town of Philippi.

Matt kicked off this series and, as a part of that, he told us about the **Joining Jesus' Story Challenge**. This is the way to **position yourself for the most powerful life transforming season**. The more of these aspects you join, the more you will position yourself in Jesus' presence.

- **Join each Sunday**, either in person or online (Pick up a **journal**, it's our gift).
- Read through the book of Philippians in **one sitting**.
- Read through it **slowly, section by section**, as we cover it on Sundays.
- **Memorize and feed on Philippians 2:6-11**.
- **Join a Bridge Group**.

We have these journals for you as a gift to help you better dive into these series and hear God's voice more clearly.

Last week Matt read what is the heart of this letter. It is the **hub** around which the rest of the letter rotates. This is the story of Jesus, in **poem form**. This is what we are being invited to join. It's also a part of our **Joining Jesus' Story challenge** as we are memorizing these verses.

Let's read it before we get into the verses for today.

⁶ Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. ⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.⁹ Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:6-11 (NLT)

This is the story we are invited to join. We can be actors in this story. We just have to follow the storyline. There's a different attitude we need to take on, like the one Jesus had. Look at the verse immediately before the section we just read about Jesus' story. ⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Philippians 2:5

That is our invitation to join. You must have the same attitude, or mind, as Jesus had and here's Jesus' attitude.

That includes stuff like...

- **Giving up our own rights and position** for the gospel and for others.
- **Humbling** ourselves.
- **Obedience** to what Jesus taught.
- **Entering into people's lives** like Jesus did.
- **A willingness to sacrifice** like he did.

Then, as we join his story and he transforms our lives, we have the promise of being elevated by him; not because of our own goodness, but his. This is eternal life in His Kingdom.

It is only through joining this story that will give us the real, full life that Jesus promised.

We look to **Paul as our example** in this section. We see how he has joined Jesus' story. **See if you can find aspects of Jesus' story in what is happening in Paul's life.** Mark them in your journal as I read with an "A".

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. ¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the

defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Philippians 1:12-18

"I want you to know"...is a standard for letters of this time, when the writer informs the reader of his/her situation. This is where it would be expected for Paul to list his conditions in prison. He is to tell them how bad it is, if he's worried about the trial, are there others coming to his defense, when does he think he will get out.

And yet, what does he talk about? None of that. He talks about the gospel spreading.

He says...**my imprisonment is for Christ.**

This could be translated **"for" or "in Christ."** This is probably intended to be a double meaning. It is because of Christ and the gospel, but it is also joining Jesus' suffering or joining Jesus' story.

"Thus his imprisonment is not simply a result of his Christian commitment, but is the necessary means through which Paul fulfills his calling." 59

I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should. Ephesians 6:20

It is clear that Paul has an attitude that is similar to what the story of Jesus tells.

Suffering does the opposite of what we expect. He believes that his situation is allowing him to join into the story of Jesus.

"I seem to remember a story where one person's suffering helped many. It's on the tip of my tongue. Yes, that would be Jesus!"

So what can we learn from Paul's example...**Suffering and hardship are our opportunity to join Jesus' story.**

Paul's attitude toward his circumstance, being falsely imprisoned, facing trial, is not normal; it's like Jesus.

He's not waiting for it to be resolved so that he can live out his calling as an ambassador. He is not stumping for people to help get him out so that he can be the apostle and plant more churches. No, the suffering and hardship are his opportunity to join Jesus' story, the story where God can use suffering. It not only doesn't slow God's plans down, it actually accelerates it.

Here's how suffering and hardship allow us to join Jesus' story. It's fertile soil for the Gospel.

Paul makes the most startling statement in verse 12. He says his situation has..."served to advance the gospel."

Even more so than today, having been in prison carried a powerful stigma. It's not like a writer or artist of some kind might get some sort of street cred by being locked up. There weren't people making "Free Paul" t-shirts and sitting outside where he was imprisoned and chanting. No, it did not help you to win friends and influence people.

The expectation would have been that his imprisonment and impending trial would have slowed the preaching of the gospel to the gentiles, but the opposite is true. This should be a surprise.

In a similar way, you would think crucifying the leader of a new religious movement would be the end of that movement.

You wouldn't think that as this new movement is first growing in Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection, that persecution scattering the followers would lead to the gospel spreading in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then Europe, but it did.

"Lord, don't make me read 2 Corinthians 12:9 again. Don't make me do it. You know we struggle with this one. Ok I will." Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast

about my **weaknesses**, so that the power of Christ can work through me. 2 Corinthians 12:9

Paul knows that this is his opportunity to align his life with the story of Jesus. No, he didn't try to get himself arrested, nor did he get himself beat up and left for dead, shipwrecked, or flogged. **These things aren't good, but in Jesus' story, he uses them for his good purposes. Why, because this suffering and hardship drains him of any of the power our world tells us we need to do something or be something. It's actually the perfect environment for God's power to be, well, powerful. It's to the point that he boasts in his suffering and hardship because God gets the glory, not him.**

In our culture it is no different than theirs, power is powerful and weakness is weak. It's that simple. Listen to how Frank Thielman describes this in The NIV "Application Commentary on Philippians." **"Those of us who constitute the church in Western democracies need to be reminded that the God of the Bible typically works not through the channels of economic and political power that are so accessible to us, but through the weakness and suffering that the world tells us to avoid at all costs." *The NIV Application Commentary, Frank Thielman pg. 69***

If we get the right persons elected, then we will see the power of God in our country. If we can use these people to coerce people into acting more "Christian," then we will see such an unleashing of God's power that there will be revival and cultural transformation. And yet, Paul is saying that joining Jesus through suffering and hardship are the way to see his power displayed and to see life transformation.

Don't you think that when Paul is describing Jesus' story to people, even the guards whom he is chained to get a clearer picture of Jesus? He isn't a guy with a title entering the room as people turn and differ because he is wealthy and powerful and then trying to describe how he is following a man born in a manger, lived homeless and was executed like a criminal. He doesn't approach people from a position of power, but weakness. That makes Jesus' story real.

So that it has become known...**"made clear"** or known for what it really is.
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It is a way to make his chains give him a unique platform for explaining Jesus' story because he is joining Jesus' story. He is an ambassador in chains.

"Paul, it seems, has had the opportunity to explain to many around him the reasons for his imprisonment, and in explaining, to show them how "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Cor. 5:19) **Paul may be in chains, but the gospel has gone forward unfettered."** 59

Here's how suffering and hardship allow us to join Jesus' story, it is fertile soil for the gospel and... **It gives us living examples, which produce confidence.**

When I can see something being lived out in front of me by another **regular flawed person**, it gives me confidence that I can live it also. "If the Holy Spirit can enable _____ then he can do it for me."

And we see that very thing happening. ¹⁴ **And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.**

If they were encouraged because he was about to be let out of prison, then how could that be called "bold" or "without fear." It's like our dogs, they battle all the time. One is 90 lbs the other is maybe 10. At first the puppy would sneak attack Gus and then run behind me. Barking or lunging from behind her human wouldn't be bold.

If Paul can be an ambassador in chains, then I can be an ambassador where God puts me.

Listen Eagle Ridge, this is our verse. **And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. ¹⁹ For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this**

wonderful message of reconciliation. ²⁰ **So we are Christ's ambassadors;** God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" ²¹ For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin,^[e] so that we could be made right with God through Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

Talking to a friend about God, wanting to use her in the hospital, even when it is causing her suffering to be there.

Listen to this part... ¹⁵ **Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.** And then Paul describes those who do it out of envy and rivalry toward him this way. "The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment." People are preaching the gospel while he is in jail in order to elevate himself while seeing Paul degraded in prison. And yet he doesn't care, because Christ is being preached.

There are churches that get bigger crowds by focusing all their attention on a really slick show on **Sundays** and not on producing disciple makers in their people.

I might get shots because we have **women in leadership and pastors**. We might take barbs by the way we have handled our **response to COVID**. It's OK. If others succeed doing it differently, and they are preaching the gospel, then great.

These people are preaching the gospel, but have some **sort of personal issue** with Paul. **They hope that people are joining them and not Paul**. His words attest to the fact that **he doesn't care**.

Paul, in the section of "I want you to know" where it was expected, that he gave information about how he was doing personally, he gave nothing about himself. **He is only talking about how God is using both his imprisonment and his rivals to advance His Kingdom.**

"When difficult, even life-threatening, circumstances face us, we should take Paul as our example and look at how God might be working in such

circumstances to advance the gospel either in our lives or in the lives of others." Pg 64

Listen to what Paul says later in chapter 1. ²⁹ For you have been given not only the **privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him.** ³⁰ We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it. Philippians 1:29-30

Why would Paul call it a privilege to not just trust in Jesus, but to suffer for him? It's because Paul is joining his life to Jesus' story and in Jesus' story, **power and the Kingdom are on display** for the good of others.

It is a privilege to see God's power moving in my life and ministry and in people's lives around me through my son Quinten's death. No, his death wasn't good, but I get to see God redeem it. **I like the person I'm becoming as God walks me through this** and I really like that, seeing God's power released in other people's lives. **I recently heard a friend tell me** how he used a phrase that God has given me during my time of mourning, with a complete stranger though work.

Here's how suffering and hardship allow us to join Jesus' story, it is **fertile soil**, the gospel; It gives me **living examples that produce courage** and...**It helps me to see what I will put above the gospel.**

- Comfort above fruitfulness.
- My Kingdom (control) above his Kingdom (submission).
- Winning or recognition above doing it Jesus' way.
- Short term pleasure above long term fulfillment.

Paul would rather be wronged or cheated if that meant the gospel was preached. ⁷ **To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?** 1 Corinthians 6:7

Have you ever been misrepresented by someone after they left your team at work, company, sports team, study group...? I have, and in my flesh I wanted to have my actions and motives understood by the people

that were being told a different story. **That's ego. Would I put that over the gospel being advanced?**

This is the ultimate winning the battle, but losing the war example. Paul is thinking about the long game. He's not thinking about his reputation as an apostle being soiled because he has a record. He isn't thinking about someone trusting Christ and joining his rival's church instead of the one he planted. For him, the war is the gospel in all its beauty and power, obliterating all pretenders.

This is how it looks to join Jesus' story through our suffering and hardship. Suffering and hardship aren't the only way to join Jesus' story. We will see others as we go further into Philippians, but it might be the most effective.

Steps to Joining Jesus' Story:

- 1. Meditate on, memorize, and personalize Jesus' story. (5-8)**

There are six verses, therefore I'm going to challenge you to use **one verse per day** to meditate on, memorize, and personalize. I'm going to use ESV here because that is what you will see in your journals.

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, How can I join this story?

⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. How Can I join this story?

⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. How Can I join this story?

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, How Can I join this story?

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, How Can I join this story?

¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:6-11 (ESV) *How Can I join this story?*

You probably won't have it all memorized in a week but this will help you to through this series. Practice this passage so that it can be memorized by the end.

- **Actively look for God, using your suffering for good (Past and present).** Use your journal to record these thoughts.

Jesus wants us to use our hardship and suffering now as a way to join his Story and to ask him to develop in us the same attitude Jesus had.