

1 So we're continuing our study through the
2 book of Philippians. And as mentioned
3 last week, Philippians is a
4 joy-filled letter. It's noted.
5 Some call it the Epistle of Joy. It's
6 noted for the joy that is found in
7 its chapters and verses.
8 We could all use more joy, couldn't we?
9 The word joy is used 16 times in the four
10 chapters of Philippians. And what
11 makes this all the more striking are the
12 circumstances of the author as he writes.
13 Paul is in prison, and he's been put
14 there unfairly by false
15 charges. The details of
16 his imprisonment are a little bit
17 sketchy. Paul doesn't dwell on this. He
18 doesn't give us a whole lot of background
19 information on where he is and why and
20 what. A little bit of the what, we'll get
21 to that in a second. So we're not sure
22 when and where this letter happened.
23 He probably wrote it from Rome or
24 Caesarea. Those are places that had
25 a Roman guard for sure, and we know about
26 imprisonment of Paul in those places.
27 Though there are some who like Ephesus
28 better, for geographical reasons
29 primarily, as the place where Paul
30 wrote. The general consensus is that this
31 imprisonment happened sometime after the
32 events described in Acts 21,
33 where Paul has come back to Jerusalem,
34 and his opponents stir up a crowd, saying
35 that he was leading people astray, and
36 that he actually brought a Gentile into
37 the temple, which was actually untrue,
38 but ironically true at an extremely
39 deep level, as Paul the apostle to the
40 Gentiles were bringing Gentile people
41 into God's family through his preaching
42 and ministry. But his opponents drag him
43 out and beat him, But before he is
44 killed, he is saved by Roman
45 troops, which is really kind of a little
46 ironic twist in the story of Acts, that
47 Paul, the Jew of Jews,
48 representing the Jews, preaching the good
49 news of their Messiah, is being killed by
50 his own people, and he's saved by the
51 dirty pagans. It's a nice
52 touch. Paul ends up in a Roman
53 prison in Caesarea, which you can find in
54 modern-day Israel. And he's awaiting
55 trial, which is a very slow process. And
56 after two years, things don't seem like
57 they're going very well for him, and
58 there's some danger that seems to be
59 facing him of being turned over to the
60 Jews as a favor to them by the
61 by the Roman officials. So he appeals to
62 Caesar as a Roman citizen,
63 which means that he is able then to stand
64 trial and make his case before Caesar in
65 Rome. So he goes to Rome.
66 Quite an adventure aboard ship,
67 which you can read about at the end of
68 Acts. And so he is in prison again,
69 waiting for Caesar to find time

70 to hear his case. Could be a
71 while. And this is where we find Paul the
72 Apostle, sharing the good news of Jesus
73 into Caesar's household from prison as
74 the book of Acts comes to a close.
75 Paul spends much of his time, we are
76 told, chained to a Roman soldier,
77 members of Caesar's elite Praetorian
78 Guard, the ones, perhaps, who drew the
79 unenviable assignment of sitting around
80 in prison with some troublesome agitator,
81 religious zealot out of Palestine.
82 They're natural questions that would be
83 asked, I assume, at that time.
84 Like, what will this do to the
85 advancement of the Christian message with
86 its leading missionary and spokesman in
87 jail?What will this do to the morale of
88 other believers?How will this tarnish the
89 image and diminish the appeal of the
90 Christian message with such an
91 important leader under arrest?
92 And here's another question. What do you
93 suppose they talked about during all
94 those hours with nowhere else to go
95 and nothing else to do?Paul and
96 all those honored and influential guards
97 assigned one at a time to watch over
98 him. Paul is awaiting a trial
99 which could result in his acquittal and
100 freedom or in his
101 condemnation and execution.
102 How will Paul's faith and emotional
103 health be affected by such devastating
104 circumstances?The injustice
105 and the life and death uncertainties
106 about the future. And we're going to
107 explore these questions a little more
108 next week. Paul's life is on the
109 line, and it is all quite
110 unfair. Do you suppose God
111 could do something for Paul under such
112 terrible circumstances?
113 Let's hear what Paul has to say about it
114 all, shall we?Philippians chapter
115 one, verses 12 through 18.
116 Hear the word of God. I want you to
117 know, brothers,that what has happened to
118 me has really served to advance
119 the gospel, so that it has become
120 known throughout the whole imperial guard
121 and to all the rest that my imprisonment
122 is for Christ. And most of the
123 brothers, having become confident in the
124 Lord by my imprisonment, are much more
125 bold to speak the word without
126 fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy
127 and rivalry, but others from goodwill.
128 The latter do it out of love, knowing
129 that I am put here for the defense of the
130 gospel. The former proclaimed
131 Christ out of selfish ambition,
132 not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me
133 in my imprisonment. What then?
134 Only that in every way, whether
135 in pretense or in truth, Christ is
136 proclaimed, and in that I will
137 rejoice. Yes, I
138 will rejoice. Let's

139 pray. Lord
140 God, Savior Jesus, Holy
141 Spirit, I pray
142 that Christ will be proclaimed here
143 today in all that we do. From
144 me up here at the lectern, but also
145 from all of us in our
146 thinking, in our words,
147 among one another, and then out wherever
148 we go today, Lord, that
149 Christ will be proclaimed and that we
150 might rejoice in that. And I pray this
151 in your name and for your sake.
152 Amen. Under the
153 circumstances, under the
154 circumstances. This is a handy phrase,
155 isn't it? We use it, I use it.
156 Under the circumstances. Let me Let me
157 give you a few examples. Our team had a
158 good season under the circumstances. Let
159 me translate that for you. We had a
160 horrible year.
161 The choir sang well under the
162 circumstances. Translation, They
163 sounded like a gang of alley cats in heat.
164 Pastor! Not today, by the way.
165 Never, as far as I know. Okay, Happy
166 Mother's Day. Just
167 an example, not our choir. Pastor,
168 under the circumstances, it was a good
169 servant today. Ah, that means it
170 was another snorer, but you had more
171 excuses than normal. We say
172 under the circumstances when we don't
173 like being under the circumstances, when
174 the combination of us and
175 circumstances does not produce
176 desirable outcomes. The phrase
177 makes no appearance when we win,
178 when we succeed, when we perform well,
179 when things go great. After winning
180 the championship game, who says, Well,
181 our team performed well under the
182 circumstances. I've never heard that.
183 But aren't we always under
184 the circumstances? It's a yes
185 or no question. Yeah.
186 And here's the problem. Too many of
187 us are living only
188 under the circumstances.
189 Under the circumstances, God becomes
190 merely the cosmic butler, there to
191 make our circumstances better.
192 What happens when he doesn't deliver?
193 Do we fire him? Mike McKillop
194 was a leader of a Bible study in my dorm
195 when I first went to college,
196 and he became my discipling partner my
197 second year when I was a sophomore down
198 at UCLA. And when I came back for my
199 junior year, I was told by mutual
200 friends that he was in the VA hospital
201 with an inoperable brain tumor and
202 was asking for me. I went,
203 somewhat reluctantly, to visit him,
204 feeling way out of my depth,
205 going to see someone so
206 horrifically under the circumstances.
207 In retrospect, I realized this was my

208 firstPastoral hospital
209 visit. Only the guy in the bed was the
210 pastor, and I was the one being
211 visited. My friend and mentor, I found,
212 was not doing well at all under the
213 circumstances. He had a good
214 life, a young wife, many
215 plans I'm sure they were looking forward
216 to, and he was dying because
217 something evil in his head was
218 there. Something that nobody this side of
219 heaven seemed able to get rid of.
220 But Mike, I found, was doing
221 very well over the
222 circumstances. The word of
223 witness he gave me, and I still remember
224 it almost a half century later, was
225 this: I am learning like never
226 before about the sovereignty
227 of God. My friend died a few weeks
228 later. And I have reason to believe he is
229 now doing very well indeed.
230 With under the circumstances on our lips,
231 we are led into denial and distraction
232 as a way of life. Things
233 are fine. War in Ukraine,
234 social injustice, well, they don't bother
235 me. I just got a new phone that shows
236 pictures on my smart TV.
237 Suffering, it happens,
238 but under the circumstances, not to me,
239 Get over it. Death?Well,
240 it's okay. You know, the the natural end
241 of life. But under the
242 circumstances not mine,
243 Gil Wesley was a friend of mine when I
244 was doing college ministry in Chico,
245 California, many years ago. He was in a
246 prayer group with me. And there was no no
247 denial for this man in his 30s, a
248 former Florida State
249 University football player,When his
250 wife was dying of brain cancer,
251 she was not doing well under the
252 circumstances. The report that
253 my friend gave me was that she said, I
254 have never known pain like this.
255 She was doing amazingly well over the
256 circumstances. She exhibited great
257 peace and strength in her relationship
258 with God. She helped her
259 husband let go for her and
260 keep hanging on to Jesus Christ.
261 Her death, the way she died, was a
262 tremendous encouragement to many people.
263 Now this sounds like denial to the world.
264 Wishful thinking, whistling in the dark,
265 the ultimate escape from reality.
266 Of course it does. The world doesn't
267 know or serve the living God, who
268 is lord over all circumstances.
269 But what happens when God doesn't work
270 things out the way we would like?
271 Well, let's take a look at Paul's
272 amazing, joy-filled message to the
273 Philippians, and so also to
274 us. I want
275 you to know, brothers, that what has
276 happened to me has really served to

277 advance the gospel. Here
278 is the report of paradoxical reality.
279 Negative events in the past have
280 surprisingly led to positive results in
281 the present, and
282 will lead to a very positive future
283 outcome. More on that next week.
284 For unbelievers, hearing that Paul is
285 in prison because of his faith in Jesus
286 Christ, the word is getting
287 out about who Jesus is and why he
288 is important. Soldiers thought their
289 forced closeness to Paul was about dull,
290 under-the-circumstances duty
291 assigned by human superiors.
292 Some apparently discovered it was
293 about life-changing truth from a God who
294 lives and moves above the
295 circumstances. For followers of
296 Christ, hearing of Paul's faith and
297 ministry from prison has encouraged them
298 to speak more boldly about Jesus.
299 Paul's secret. At least, what I
300 can detect from here, Paul's secret has
301 three parts. We're going to talk about
302 two of them this week and one of them
303 next week. First, Paul has an
304 over-the-circumstances,
305 God-sized perspective. If you're
306 following along in your
307 bulletin, the sermon outline,
308 you want to fill in perspective in
309 that space there.
310 Paul's clear conviction is that God is
311 always at work for his good purposes, and
312 his is the work that counts.
313 Paul's constant question is, what
314 is God doing here and now?
315 The redemptive result for Paul?
316 Self is moved off of the
317 center stage position of his life.
318 And there's evidence of this movement.
319 Verse 15, Some indeed preach
320 Christ from envy and rivalry, but others
321 through goodwill. The latter do it out of
322 love, knowing that I am put here for the
323 defense of the gospel. The former
324 proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition,
325 not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me
326 in my imprisonment. What then?
327 Only that in every way,
328 whether in pretense or in truth, Christ
329 is proclaimed, and in that I
330 rejoice. Yes, I will
331 rejoice. Here
332 is my own observation. A
333 defining characteristic of
334 joyless, unhappy people
335 is this: Everything is
336 about them. I see some head nods.
337 Maybe you've experienced that yourself,
338 maybe you know somebody. We all know
339 somebody. Paul
340 is joyful. Paul is
341 different. For him, everything is
342 about Jesus Christ. Then,
343 Paul has an over the circumstances
344 Christ-led purpose.
345 And we can attach the word evangelism to

346 that. Evangelism is that wonderful
347 Greek word with two Greek words mashed
348 together. Eu, Eu, which means good.
349 And angelos, which means message.
350 Euangelion. Evangelism means
351 good message, good news, the message of
352 Jesus Christ, which we call the Gospel,
353 which we sing about in songs like
354 In Christ Alone and in Him after Him
355 after Him. The good news for all
356 people to hear and respond to, about
357 what God has done for them.
358 The word Gospel, which you hear people
359 in church use, probably fairly frequently
360 in churches like ours, Gospel
361 is an Old English way of saying the same
362 thing. From God, or
363 good, and spell,
364 Old English for word or pronouncement or
365 message. Godspel,
366 gospel, means the same thing as
367 evangelion. It means good news, the
368 good preaching, the good announcement
369 about Jesus. Now
370 don't confuse the message
371 which is good with the method
372 which is mixed, which Paul says some
373 people are preaching out of a good heart
374 with with Fairly pure motives.
375 Others, very different. Preaching Christ
376 out of a a sense of selfish ambition.
377 Using Jesus to advance their ministry.
378 People, even in Paul's day, were doing
379 that. Again, I'll just throw out this
380 phrase I've used here on many occasions.
381 Thank the Lord that we, in our
382 culture, in our Christian culture, have
383 gotten past that. People preaching
384 Jesus as a way of
385 advancing themselves. I'm glad that
386 never happens today. But it was happening
387 in Paul's day. And Paul says he
388 doesn't care. Whatever,
389 the the mixed
390 method, the mixed motives, he doesn't
391 care as long as Jesus
392 is being proclaimed. The gospel
393 is going out, the truth of what God has
394 said and done. Paul
395 uses three different words for how the
396 gospel, the good news, is presented. He
397 uses the word speak, Preach, which is
398 like a a herald's trumpet call, and
399 proclaim. And the emphasis is not on
400 how, but on what?
401 Evangelism in the church today. It's not
402 our only purpose as God's people,
403 but it is why we are still here.
404 This thought has stuck with me for
405 many, many years. Evangelism isn't
406 the only thing the church has to do, but
407 it is the reason we're still here.
408 Because everything else, we will do much
409 better in heaven.
410 Sharing fellowship, joining in
411 worship, affirming truth,
412 promoting righteousness and justice, all
413 of that, we will be doing much better
414 when we're together in glory with the

415 Lord. But there won't be any evangelism
416 there. We won't need it.
417 Most mainline churches in our culture
418 tend to underbalance in this area
419 of evangelism. Naming the name of
420 Jesus with others is counter-cultural,
421 and puts us on the front lines of real
422 and crucial spiritual battle. More
423 on this later. What's your purpose?
424 Is it exclusively under the
425 circumstances?With whom are
426 we actively sharing information about our
427 work, or our hobbies,
428 or our favorite sports teams, or places
429 to shop?With whom are you
430 actively sharing or planning to share or
431 praying about sharing the powerful and
432 saving good news of Jesus Christ?
433 How many people could you invite to a
434 ball game or a concert?How about
435 to attend a small group Bible study or a
436 church service with you?Here's a clue.
437 How much joy are you
438 experiencing?Is a new
439 Christ-led purpose what you need?
440 Finally, Paul has an
441 over-the-circumstances, Holy
442 Spirit-filled source of power,
443 and we're going to talk about that next
444 week. Paul is living under the
445 circumstances, but also connected with
446 God by faith over the
447 circumstances, and so he finds
448 real, deep, independent and
449 resilient joy where he is.
450 His over-the-circumstances perspective,
451 purpose and powermake his,
452 under the circumstances, living better.
453 And this is not denial. Nowhere is Paul
454 denying the real pain and difficulty,
455 injustice and suffering he is
456 experiencing. He simply
457 refuses to remove the ongoing
458 and redemptive presence of the
459 transcendent God from his present
460 realities. He simply will not ask
461 only, Why is this happening to me?
462 but always,Where is
463 God in this?What is he
464 doing right now?And how can I
465 join in his work as
466 matters of greater importance?
467 Paul is in touch with his own writing,
468 Romans 8:28, And we
469 know that for those who love God,
470 all things work together for
471 good. And this does not mean that
472 everything that happens is good. It
473 simply affirms that God is above all that
474 happens, good and bad,
475 and always can and does
476 use what happens, good and
477 bad, for the accomplishing of his
478 ultimately good purposes.
479 Knowing and serving the living God, who
480 is Lord over all circumstances, is
481 the way to find joy under our
482 circumstances, whatever they may be.
483 Shortly before Debbie Wesley, my friend

484 Gil's young wife, died,
485 a group of people gathered at the
486 hospital to pray for her. Gil told me the
487 story of how he went up to her room on
488 the fifth floor of the Enloe Hospital in
489 Chico, California, and helped her to
490 move over to the window, head
491 bald, clutching her hospital garment,
492 with barely enough strength in her arms
493 and legs to get there, she pulled back
494 the curtain and looked down to the
495 sidewalk below. And what she saw
496 was a group of people holding
497 hands, a large group, enough to
498 stretch all the way around the hospital
499 complex, there to say, We
500 love you. We love you, Deb,
501 and we're praying for you. And we wish
502 this weren't happening to you. And we
503 don't understand why it is, but we trust
504 that God is in control still, for
505 us, and for you, even
506 now. And what the people down below on
507 the sidewalk saw, those who were
508 fortunate enough to be on the right side
509 of the building, was a young woman
510 of great faith and newly discovered
511 strength and peace beyond our
512 comprehension, who refused to live only
513 under the circumstances. who
514 looked forward to being with her Lord and
515 Savior, who knew that God was using
516 her to do good things, like spread his
517 good news to those who haven't received
518 it yet. And the testimony of her life and
519 faith was there for people to see in the
520 TV news reports, from
521 the hospital, and in the pictures in the
522 local paper, and in her obituary.
523 And there was mysterious, deep joy.
524 in the midst of the real sharp
525 pain. I want you to know, brothers,
526 that what has happened to me has really
527 served to advance the gospel.
528 Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you and
529 we praise you for who you are and what
530 you do. Lord, we confess that you are
531 always working out your good
532 purposes to us, through us,
533 for us. Though much of the time
534 we can't see it. Much of the time our
535 perspective is is earthbound.
536 We can't help it. But Lord, we do
537 gather together and we gain strength from
538 your word and strength from one another.
539 Strength that enables us to affirm you
540 are sovereign and you are good.
541 And even when it's difficult for us to
542 understand how those things are
543 connected, they always are.
544 Lord, You have enabled
545 us to come to you whenever
546 doubts arise, when it's difficult for us.
547 We can turn to you and your Holy Spirit
548 is with us. We can turn to you and we can
549 look at Jesus and his work
550 already accomplished for us.
551 And we can find new hope and new strength
552 and new faith and new love

553 for you and for others. And
554 we can see that we are herefor
555 your above the circumstances
556 purposes. Lord, help us to have
557 your above the circumstances perspective.
558 And we need your help in this. And we
559 pray, oh, this in Jesus' name.
560 And Lord, we pray on behalf of one
561 another. We pray
562 for our church family and our ministries
563 here. We pray for those graduating that
564 it's a wonderful time. in the next few
565 weeks for them and their families.
566 Lord, we join with Jennifer in
567 giving you thanks and praise for your
568 work and her family. And we
569 ask for your healing and help and hope
570 for Leanne and Gary and Shirley,
571 the lowe's, and Barbara, and Christians
572 in Syria. Lord, we pray for families who
573 have lost loved ones, that they might
574 have that bigger than this life
575 perspectiveAs they mourn the loss
576 of their loved ones, the Shields family
577 and the family of George and of Brett, we
578 pray for our neighbors next door, for
579 your blessing for them. We pray for those
580 serving in the military, for Noah and
581 Taryn and Cody and Matthew, Weston,
582 Chase, Levi, Gary,
583 Molly, Brian, Anna,
584 Margaret, Benjamin, and Chandler.
585 Hear us now as we pray for
586 Using the prayer that you taught us,
587 saying, our Father, who art in
588 heaven, hallowed be thy name,
589 thy kingdom come, thy will be
590 done, on earth as it is in heaven.
591 Give us this day our daily bread,
592 and forgive us our sins as we
593 forgive those who sin against us.
594 And lead us not into temptation, but
595 deliver us from evil,For thine is
596 the kingdom, and the power,
597 and the glory forever. Amen. But
598 before we sing our closing hymn, let me
599 offer this Old Testament word for us
600 that comes from the prophet Isaiah
601 chapter 55, verse six and following.
602 Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call
603 upon him while he is near. Let the wicked
604 forsake his way and the unrighteous man
605 his thoughts. Let him return to the
606 Lord that he may have compassion on him
607 and to our God, for he will abundantly
608 part him. For my thoughts are not your
609 thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,
610 declares the Lord. For as the heavens are
611 higher than the earth, so are my ways
612 higher than your ways, and my thoughts
613 than your thoughts. For as the rain and
614 the snow come down from heaven, and do
615 not return there but water the earth,
616 making it bring forth and sprout, giving
617 seed to the sower and bread to the eater.
618 So shall my word be that goes out from my
619 mouth. It shall not return to me empty,
620 but it shall accomplish that which I
621 purpose, and shall succeed in the thing

622 for which I sent it. For you
623 shall go out in joy, and
624 be led forth in peace. The mountains
625 and the hills before you shall break
626 forth into singing, and all the trees of
627 the fields shall clap their hands.
628 Instead of the thorn shall come up the
629 cypress. Instead of the briar shall come
630 up the myrtle. And it shall make a name
631 for the Lord, an everlasting sign
632 that shall not be cut off.
633 Amen. Well, let's stand and sing our
634 closing hymn. You can find it in your
635 bulletin insert, Joyful, Joyful, We Adore
636 Thee.