

We Can Take joy...

by Tom Garner

We can take joy in our circumstances because God's work in us is guaranteed to be completed until the day of Christ Jesus.

Scripture: Acts 16:13

Topics: "Gods Grace", "Spiritual Regeneration"

Description

Tom Garner preaches on the key verse in Philippians, highlighting Paul's circumstances of imprisonment and suffering, yet expressing confidence, joy, and amazement in God's grace. Paul emphasizes that the good work in believers is initiated by God, not by man's efforts, and that God will continue to perfect this work until the day of Christ Jesus. The sermon delves into the nature of the work, focusing on the rebirth and regeneration done by God within believers, leading to a new creation and a desire for holiness. The purpose of the work is to prepare believers for the day of Christ Jesus, where they will be set free from the internal battle of sin. The certainty of this work lies in the character of God, guaranteeing its completion, with signs such as a desire for truth, worship, sharing faith, and holiness indicating the work of God within individuals.

Transcript

My heart soars when I read this one verse. Within the past few years it has been a comfort and breathe of fresh air to me. What we have here is the key verse for the letter written to the Philippians. This verse is the rock or foundation concerning this mans situation that he finds himself in, not only himself but the church at Philippi as well. This one verse contains some of the deepest Christian doctrine and truths that we must also get a firm grasp of today. So let us examine together the circumstances of the person who pinned this letter, and those to whom the letter was written, and for us today that read this letter that was pinned so long ago.

Let us look at the man who penned these words. What was his circumstances physically and where he was in his life spiritually. First the man, it was Paul the Apostle first called Saul of Tarsus. Paul's present circumstances both physically and spiritually are revealed to us in Philippians 1:12-14, "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear." One can but wonder when reading the situation he

finds himself in that he can even pin such a letter as this, a letter full of the riches of God's grace and joy. For you see he was imprisoned, and not only that, he was shackled between two Praetorian guards. This man Paul was suffering most cruelly for his faith and witness. He is being attacked on both sides. One side that criticizing him for his delivery of the Gospel of Grace and the other for his faith in Christ Jesus. Yet in spite of this he pins a letter that speaks of confidence, joy and wondrous amazement of the grace of God to a people that loved him and had a heart for his present discomforts which were great indeed. So then what was this that gave him this joy and confidence?

The first thing is that he was aware of the work that was going on in the church at Philippi corporately. He is confident because he knew the person who had started the work there even before he and started his work. Secondly, he knew personally the work that was growing in them individually. He understood the nature of the true Christian life, both in himself as well as the church at Philippi. It was his understanding or knowledge of God's plan of salvation that leads him to have this confidence. I am afraid that it just the opposite with us today and it was Paul's fear for the church at Philippi as well. He was afraid for them. So he takes pin in hand, even in his present circumstances and writes these beautiful words. He wants so much for these people, and for us today, to have the same kind of knowledge that gave him such confidence and joy. We can learn from him, so let us see what he has to say to this body of believers at Philippi and to us today. Within this key verse there are four major points that if we incorporate them into our lives we too can have that boldness no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, and the circumstances that surround us. We can be the same witness he was to those around him, so now let us look together at what he had to say to these people.

There is the Author of the Work.

The Nature of the Work.

The Purpose of the Work.

The Certainty of the Work.

I. The Author of the work.

Paul here emphasizes 'he which hath begun a good work in you.' We must ask ourselves, who is the "he" Paul is referring to? Who has begun this good work? To whom is Paul referring? There is but one answer for this man, and it is God himself. This is the most fundamental Christian truth that we must grasp and this is where it has to begin for us. For you see, our understanding should be this, that here and only here can it start, and my friend, Paul understood this. If one reads the account of Paul and his work in Philippi which is found in Acts 16:13-40 one must conclude that Paul did a wonderful work of evangelism in this region. In reading this account one might seem to say to himself, "What a wonderful work this man did." Yet when Paul writes this letter to the Philippians he does not refer to his work or his accomplishments. No, by no means does he take credit for the work, Paul gives the credit to whom it was due, it was God's work. Paul was happy just to be a part of the work that God had already started. We see this again and again in the scriptures regarding this Apostles life. A good example of this is found in Acts 14:27, when Paul and Barnabas gathers together the Church at Antioch, to report -- "what they had done?" -- No they gather the people together to report "what God had done through them." 'He who hath begun' was Paul's theme. It was not his eloquence or his wonderful message or his personality but it was God's work.

We have been speaking regarding Paul and his work and how Paul reflected the credit to God and what God had begun to do. He also wants the church at Philippi to also recognize this truth that it was not in them to start the work. The work itself was started by God. Paul realized that no man can desire God or seek His face because of the nature of man, which is sinful and while in that state he would never seek God. There would have never been a church in Philippi or salvation for that matter had not God begun the work. You see, it was of God!

It then is not surprising that Paul would take this stance, for he had never forgotten what God had done in his own life. He never forgot what he was till God meet him on that road to Damascus. He knew what he was, he was a blasphemer, a persecutor of the early Christian church and he knew perfectly well that he would have continued in that had not God intervened. You can read about this account that is found in Acts 9. Paul was on his way to persecute the body there and the Lord appear to him while on the way. Paul never decided to become a Christian, he never thought about it, he did not initiate the work. It was God who did it in him, and Paul therefore always refers the work to him.

Since this was true for him personally, Paul recognized that it was true for the church at Philippi as well. In acts 16:6-7 we are told that Paul wanted to go another place yet he was constrained by the spirit, in other words, the spirit prevented him from going. He had planned to preach in Asia yet he could not. Though he had good intentions, and though he thought it would the right thing to do, God had another work and wanted Paul to be there. He gave Paul a vision of a man in Macedonia calling to him, "Come and help us," and Paul then knew where God was already at work and crossed over and started there.

After arriving there he saw some women who were meeting together and praying by a riverside and he spoke to them. A woman named Lydia heard what Paul was speaking, better yet lets read the account together, turn to Acts 16:14 "And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." Do you see the work done here, the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things Paul had spoken of. She did not the work, but it was God who did the work. What we are not told, "That Lydia thought about it and considered it, and that she opened her heart to try it?" No, again I say no, the Lord Opened Her Heart. It was of God, not her own doing. For you see God brought Paul to preach to her and He opened her heart as well as her household. Paul went on the preach and the girl who had a spirit of divination was also touched by the power of God and her life was changed as well. And because of this Paul was thrown into prison and because of his imprisonment the jailer was touched by God. God was working in all of this, and Paul was beside Him in that work which was already going on in Philippi. You can read this account of the work in Philippi in the 16th Chapter of Acts. We cannot expound more on this account, but I recommend you to go home and read this wonderful account of God's working through Paul.

So in this verse we see this clearly and we also see this through Paul's life. That it is all of God, it is His work from start to finish. "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." So we can see, if it is a work which He starts, He will perform it. This is a fundamental truth I feel many have gotten away from and we must grasp this truth that Paul held so dear and that is; "that is Christianity is the result of God's action and of God's activity." It does not start from a man's idea, or man's thoughts or his perceptions, for man can not do this because of what he is, a sinner - it is of God from the beginning to the end for "The glory must be His, and His alone."

II - The Nature of the Work.

The second principle is this, the nature of the work. To understand this key we must understand his intent, you must underline the word "in", "He who began a good work" -- "not among you" -- , but "in you." Now this is of the utmost importance and is central in its truth. What Paul is speaking about is what the New Testament describes as the rebirth, new creation, regeneration, or being born again. What happens to the Christian is not reformation, or a surface improvement of his life. Salvation is not something that makes man a little bit better than he was, it is not a moral reformation in a cultural sense. No it is a vital work done by God through the Holy Spirit upon the soul. This is what Paul is saying here. It is God working "in you."

So let us take a moment to look at this process which God starts in man, since he is the author of the work, and the nature of the work is "in you." The first thing God does is to awaken us to our state and condition. God, the Holy Spirit, acts upon us and makes us see that we are guilty before God, judged and that we are under his wrath. He, the Holy Spirit, makes us see that we are dead in our trespasses and sin, and that we really do not know God. He then awakens with us a need to know God as he is. There is a quickening that comes to us, we begin to see ourselves as we truly are, and for us to see God as he is, Holy and Righteous. That lead us then into a state repentance and sorrow for sin which separates us from a Holy God.

He shows us how self-centered we truly are. self-centered and self-seeking and the dread possibilities this will produce. Then the blessed Holy Spirit kindles a fire, or desire for God in our souls, a desire for a life that is different from the way it is. We then have a longing to know this Holy God. We long to be delivered from this sinful nature that has been revealed within us. With our minds we try to discover the truth but can not. Then the Holy Spirit reveals and does the blessed work of revealing Christ Jesus to us and the perfect work already done. The reality of his work and true meaning of the cross becomes clear to us. That he, Jesus has already been done the work once and for all, then he applies that work to our souls. We then realize this not something of us, or a concept we thought of, but is something that God is doing, a work started in our hearts and lives.

After this he then applies the work of forgiveness to our lives, and forgives our sin. He then brings into us a new life, and we are made aware there is a new nature born within us, and we are a new creation born from above. For we then begin to hate what God hates, sin. We have a desire to be like the one who did the work in our place, Christ Jesus. We want more and more to be "Christ Like." This is the work the God has begun in us and will continue it in us.

He then goes on to perfect this new creation, through His Word, other believers, through circumstances even through we might consider them random chances. He fashions the clay, smoothing out the rough edges making us into vessels that are worthy for His service. This is Paul's conception of the Christian life, a member of the bride of Christ. It is not something that happens once and for all when we are converted, but is a process of forming and shaping us by God's own fashioning. Every thing that happens is part of that great process. All circumstances can be used by God to perform that work of perfecting us for that good work started by God. Now in saying this, it is nothing less than to experience this good work of God going on within our lives, and to be aware of it in our lives.

III. The Purpose of the Work.

We have seen who the author of the work is, and that it is a good work that is being done within us. That then, raises the question; "To what purpose is this work?" Paul gives us the answer, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." That is it,

the end of it all. We are being fashioned for "that day of Christ Jesus," Let us see what Paul is not saying, he is not saying; "the day of our death", but the "day of Christ Jesus." Paul understood this, he understood this great truth and that what was happening to him was leading to one purpose and one end and that was to make him ready for; "the day of Christ Jesus."

So what is this day Paul speaks of? It is the day which the Lord will complete the work of salvation in us. One might ask, and justly so, "is not our salvation complete when Christ becomes our Lord and Savior?" Salvation is ours yes, but no, it is not complete. For today if we are still alive we are still in this mortal body, and we have two natures within us, the old sin nature and the new self brought into existence by God through the redemptive work of the cross and impressed on our souls by the Holy Spirit. Still, the two natures war within us for control. Paul understood this conflict and wrote to the Romans about this conflict. It is found in Romans 7:14-25 and he ends the chapter with this verse, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin." Paul understands, and so should we, that until that day, there will be this battle and when "that day" occurs we will say, as the Dr. Martin Luther King once said so eloquently, "free at last, free at last, thank God we are free at last." So you see we will be set free, completely free, from this that wars within us. So in this day, we will see our Savior face to face and know as we are known. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known." I Corinthians 13:12.

So what Paul is expressing here is that certainty of the purpose. In all that God does and allows, it is to complete us for that day. The purposes of God is rendered in that one moment. Paul took joy in this and so should we. Paul is telling this to a church which has a deep love and concern for his well being. Paul is stating that though the world is against us, remember who is for us. The world may take all we have, and even our lives but this remains, our inheritance found in Christ Jesus can never be taken away. If you are a Christian my friend, please know, and find comfort as Paul did, you are being prepared for that Day.

IV. The Certainty of This Work.

My friend, Paul has no doubt about it, nor should we. "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." The guarantee is nothing less than the character of God. My confidence is built on nothings less than the holiness and righteousness of God. For you see, God never starts a work and then leaves it unfinished, for it would be a contradiction to His very own nature. God is not like us, for we start many new works and leave them unfinished. We start with great enthusiasm but our enthusiasm wanes and dies. We purpose to do right, but we fail. Thank God that my hope of that day does not rest upon my own will power, or upon my understanding or desire. It rests solely upon this one fact, that God would never start a work if he had not purposed to finish it. Paul wrote the Corinthians and let us read it together, it is found in I Corinthians 3:11; "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." The truth of this goes even deeper when he addresses the church in Rome, turn with me if you will to Romans 5:10; "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." If Christ died when you were an enemy and hated him, and while in that condition, Christ died for you, how much more then will God keep us and sustain you, so to the finish the work that he has begun in you. So you see the character of God guarantees the completion of it.

Now the application of it. How can we know if this good work has begun within us? If we have a desire for the truth, if we desire to meet together to worship and praise God for the work that has begun in us, if we

have a desire to see the brethren comforted as did the church in Philippi then we can say, "this is a good sign." If we want to share a testimony of the goodness that God has worked within us, if want to share our faith and then to defend the faith with it is attacked then "this is a good sign." If we hate sin in our lives, as God hates sin, and we desire holiness "this is a good sign." These are but a few signs. The Apostle John in I John gives us signs as well. If these signs are present, then a good work has begun in you. Whoever has these desires it is because God has been at work within their lives and he will continue that good work till that day.

Let us then agree with the Apostle Paul when he says, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" and be joyous in it, for God will complete the work in us. -

There maybe some that are here today, or those reading this, who can say, no, I do not see these signs in my life, I do not feel as you say, but I hear/read these words and would like to know. Then my friend, there is Good news for you today, that feeling within you is not your feeling, as we have stated, it is God the Holy Spirit that has placed that feeling within you. For the scriptures says in Romans 3:11; "There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God;" pray that God will open your heart as He did Lydia's and then believe on His word when he says to you, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." - Romans 10:9-10. For you that have been afar off God is drawing you near. If this is your desire, then realize, it is not of yourself, it is of God. Accept His good work that was wrought in Christ Jesus on the Cross for you. That desire will be fulfilled, for God will complete that good work in you.

Amen & Amen

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