

How to make Lemonade...

Philippians 1:12-26

Friends, I'm going to give you half a saying
and I wonder whether you can complete it.
How does this sentence usually end?
"When life gives you lemons ..."
"... make lemonade"

What does this mean? Can anyone put this saying into their own words?

When life gives you a really bad set of circumstances,
then instead of focusing on how bad things are,
make the most of your situation.

Lemons are bitter and not nice to eat like an orange –
but you can make something delicious out of them.
It's a bit of work, but lemonade is delicious!

Today we are continuing in our series looking at Paul's letter to the Philippians
And Paul is writing this letter as a man
 whose life circumstances are less than ideal
If there was anyone who could complain that life has given him lemons,
then it was the Apostle Paul at the time of writing this letter.
First of all, he's writing this letter from prison,
Secondly, we hear that certain people,
 people who should have been Paul's friends,
 have been seeking to harm him.
Third we hear that his future has a big question mark over it:
 he's unsure as to whether he's going to be released
 and returned to the people he loves,
 or whether he's going to languish in prison,
 or whether he's going to be executed.

Those are some pretty bitter circumstances,
yet what do we hear Paul saying in verse 18?
I will continue to rejoice.
What is it about Paul's outlook that can lead him to rejoice,
while others in the same situation might only become bitter?

It may be that *our own* personal circumstances are ones that *we wish* were different, Maybe we look at the life that, under God's sovereignty, he has given us, and we wonder how it is that God expects us to rejoice. I think if we are able to learn something of Paul's outlook and if we can adopt some of the same values that Paul adopts, then we might just start to see how lemons can be turned into lemonade.

Let's go through Paul's problems one by one
and see if we can put our finger on how exactly he approaches his situation.

At the beginning of our passage it seems that Paul's friends in Philippi
were concerned about Paul's imprisonment,
which is fair enough—it's only natural to think that
being locked up in gaol is going to be a problem—
but how much of a problem is it for Paul?

Verse 12 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters,
that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.
Right from our first verse we see what it is about Paul's outlook
that helps him respond positively to bad situation;
Paul can put up with prison because somehow it's provided a gospel
opportunity.

In vs 13-14 Paul explains to his friends that this advancement of the gospel
has come about in two different ways:

First of all, v12 it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard,
and to everyone else, that I am in chains for Christ.

If you found yourself in prison,
what might your conversations with your guards sound like?
Maybe you might be preaching to everyone about your innocence,
(maybe if you were guilty you might be boasting about what you did!)
Maybe you'd be trying to convince the guards
to make your life on the inside as comfortable as possible.
Paul sees an opportunity to speak about Christ:
As the members of the palace guard took turns to come in and guard Paul
He would have told them about why he was in chains,
how it was because of the gospel he was preaching:
a message about a man who died on behalf of sinful humanity
and who was raised back to life three days later as a guarantee of eternal life.

No-one wants to find themselves in prison,
But even though this is an unfortunate circumstance for Paul
it is still a new circumstance
and every new circumstance brings with it new opportunities,
especially new opportunities to speak about Christ.

I was greatly encouraged by one member of our church
who found herself in hospital some months back,
and even though no-one chooses to be in hospital
this sister of ours took what opportunity she had
to minister to those lying in the ward with her.
As the opportunity came up,
(and if you are a prayerful person as this person is

then the opportunities will arise),
she was able to share something of what she believed,
and offered to pray with someone she had contact with.
Not a complex thing to do,
but, gospel shaped lenses with which to see her situation.

Maybe your own situation is not what you desire,
maybe you don't live in the street you wish to live in,
maybe you don't work in the place you wish to work in,
maybe your children aren't in the school you wish them to be in.
Instead of allowing yourself to be bitter about it,
recognize that God has opportunities for you to do some gospel work.

Another benefit of Paul's imprisonment happened outside his confinement

Verse 14: And because of my chains,
most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord
and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.
Paul's example gives a little backbone to the Christians on the outside.
The local church are looking at Paul and saying
"Well, if Paul's willing to get locked up for this gospel,
then let's not shrink back in fear,
let's keep speaking up and let's join him if it comes to that"

It's an example of how powerful it can be when gospel leaders act with conviction.
That Paul is willing to suffer for this message
demonstrates that he really believes in it,
that it's bigger and more important than what this world can offer us.
Each one of us is a gospel leader in that we all have people we can influence.
Some of us do this through ministry roles here at church.
If you are a parent you are always leading and teaching your children.
Even as we discuss our week's activities over morning tea
people sense our convictions.
What would they say we really believe in?
Do they see in us a willingness to make sacrifices for Christ?
Financial sacrifices, social sacrifices, sacrifices of time and energy?
When life becomes rocky,
Can others see our perseverance and ultimate trust in God's goodness?

Acting with Gospel conviction has a fortifying effect upon those around us.
It's inspiring! Sometimes church people cry out "I want to be inspired!"
And so they look for a church with pumped up worship,
the kind of meeting that will give them a lift.
How was the church in the NT times inspired?
One of their number was sent to gaol. The pastor was sent to gaol!
And in that way Paul found that his faithfulness to his assigned task,
even under trying circumstances, was having a tremendous gospel effect.

So if prison wasn't a problem for Paul,
 what about the hurtful things being said by his fellow believers?
 Have a listen to the remarkable situation that Paul finds himself in, v15
 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.¹⁶ The latter
 do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.¹⁷ The former preach
 Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I
 am in chains.

So, it seems that there were two types of preaching happening on the outside.
 The difference was what these preachers thought of Paul.
 Some were on board with Paul and sought to preach in a supportive way,
 But there were others who really had a problem with him.

It's a bit hard to imagine how someone might preach a true gospel
 in a way that was damaging to Paul.
 V16 is the closest we get to a reason;
 that verse suggests people were questioning why Paul was put in prison.
 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here [that is, in prison]
 for the defense of the gospel.
 It seems that some were saying
 "If Paul is all he's cracked up to be, then why is he in prison?"

Paul was in a constant battle against people who thought he wasn't up to scratch
 We know that some thought he was lacking as a public speaker,
 that he was not skilled enough to hold a high position of influence.
 And now he ends up in gaol, well, he's not much of a leader, is he?
 These were not disagreements over substance
 but serious disagreements over style.
 These harmful preachers would be saying things like,
 "We're the ones you should be working with,
 don't worry about Paul, he's ineffective and old fashioned."
 and so Paul would have to fight to maintain his voice and role as an apostle.

A modern day example might be if another group of Anglicans
 were to open up a church next door in the child care centre,
 and to say to our suburb "If you want a proper church, come to us.
 We're heaps better than these clowns next door!"
 We'd be like "What?! Wait a minute!"
 Sadly I've heard of things like this happening, and often, as Paul says,
 what's really driving the new church is selfish ambition.

Christians can be really hurt each other, even *within* churches.
 Good friends of mine had their home bible study ripped apart
 because two of the members thought they could do a better job at leading,
 so they found a new location and invited all the members of their old group.
 It's really hurtful, but how does Paul respond?
 V 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.

Aren't you just blown away by this man's ability to overlook personal injury?

He's not saying that his opponents are justified in their methods,
I'm sure if Paul was on the outside he's be clearing up matters
But he is deferring to the bigger picture,
a picture where Christ fills the horizon,
and so if someone's being a jerk but is preaching Christ anyway
then Paul's willing to be very gracious.

What about the anxiety caused by an uncertain future?

Prison can't knock Paul over, Christian jerks can't bring him down,
How about the black abyss of not knowing what the future holds?

Paul cant know for sure what's going to happen from this point on in his journey,
but he seems to think that it might be one of two paths.

From verse 19 Paul discusses two scenarios.

He's hopeful that he might be released,
enabling him to visit the Philippians once more,
but he's also aware of the possibility of execution if things don't go well.
Being stuck in this kind of limbo is enough to do anyone's head in.
Many of us would know the experience
of waiting for the doctor to call with the test results.
The future is unclear, and so it's hard to be brimming with positivity.

But Paul says that despite this lack of certainty, he will continue to rejoice.

How is this so? Well, like the other examples we've seen today,
it makes a difference if Jesus is involved.

You see as far as Paul is concerned, both paths are opportunities to glorify
Christ, v 20 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.

If he lives, Christ will be exalted by his ongoing work with the Philippians,

But if it's the executioner who comes calling,

then Christ will be honored by Paul's willingness to die in his name.

Furthermore, the path of execution will bring Paul straight into the presence of God,

Verse 21, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,

And again in verse 23 I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.

It's extraordinary, isn't it?

To be facing death but to have this confidence that makes it bearable.

Is it an approach that's too hard for us lesser Christians?

Yes, it is hard, and it was too hard for Paul,

which is why in verse 20 he asks for some supernatural help:

he asks for the Philippian's prayers,

and he leans on God's provision of the Holy Spirit.

You might be amazed at what God's Spirit will do when the time comes.
I really have seen people die with what I believe to be a God given peace.
Lots of ministers have; it's once of the great honors of the job.

The secret to keeping your sanity when not knowing the future
is to know that Christ will be there no matter which path you find yourself on.
Think forward a month, a year, [10 years].
You may not know what you're going to be doing,
But you do know who you'll be doing it with,
And you know whose glory you'll be doing it for.
And I think knowing that
makes the big question mark of the future a little less scary.

So Paul knew how to make lemonade of his lemons,
but his lemonade had a particular flavor: it was *gospel lemonade*.
He could put up with a lot
provided the gospel of Jesus Christ was at work in his circumstances.
I think this challenges us to redefine what we understand to be the good life,
because we'll get upset with our circumstances
if we think that were not achieving the kind of life we want.
But, if our ambitions are gospel ambitions,
then like Paul we could discover
that our lemons might not be so bitter after all.

Pray.