

## **Philippians 1 pt. 4 v.12-18**

V.12-14 Paul's personal report - the furtherance of the gospel through his difficult circumstances.

We must remember that at this time in Paul's ministry, in fact the entire "world-wide" ministry of the gospel, limited as it was, existed and advanced in the face of hostile governments and very little worldly power or influence.

It wasn't until a few hundred years later (c. 4th century AD) that Christianity made strange bed-fellows with the imperial Roman government. We know now that turned out to hold mixed results and gave rise to the Roman Catholic church along with its inter-mingling of Roman mysticism, idolatry, and to its eastern off-shoot the reverence of images called icons.

That form of Christianity, no doubt with a faithful remnant still intact, persevered for over a thousand years. And, with Christians holding the levers of power across their disparate geographic regions, resulted in much blood shed, persecution and death even among their own brothers and sisters.

So, we say all of that in a very simplistic way just to say in a further reduced way: the grass is always greener on the other side.

When Christians lack worldly power and influence we sometimes long for it believing that we are best equipped to wield it and that we will usher in unprecedented eras of peace and prosperity.

We sometimes suppose that if we could just change the balance of power in our favor then we might be able to do more for the gospel's sake (whatever our motives may actually be).

When we do have worldly power and influence, as has happened in the “west” over the past several centuries, we long for the days of the sincere worship and dedication that we read about among the persecuted and underground churches of history.

We lament the current state of affairs, corporatized faith, and lukewarm believers.

Rarely has our longing for greener pastures played out in the idealized forms that we imagine on either end of the spectrum.

AND, contrary to that line of thinking...Paul tells his beloved family at Philippi that it is through his less than ideal circumstances: fraught with riots, shipwrecks, arrests, beatings, threats, uncertainty, fake believers, etc. -- that the gospel, the good message, advanced!

This should re-center our expectations and lives as well. No matter our circumstances God is not blind to them and He is perfectly capable of advancing His message.

Who among us can claim Paul's affliction?! Very few, if any. And yet we tend to feel as if the world has finally stopped the gospel and is chipping away at the church when we encounter the slightest bit of resistance.

But Paul saw this as actually advancing the gospel. Paul saw his situation as progress! To add a bit more detail to Paul's thinking:

“The term “advanced” (prokopēn) was used in the Greek-speaking world to describe blazing a trail before an army...Paul, therefore, saw the events as forging new territory for the gospel. They took Paul into contact with a select group of people, soldiers and Roman officials, who otherwise would have had no relationship to him, and they also prompted a renewed evangelistic

effort in the city. While others may have seen the end of missionary activity, Paul saw the new ways the gospel could advance. The events which seemed to inhibit the freedom of the gospel became its springboard. Paul did not say “in spite of” these events, but rather “through them.”<sup>1</sup>

Lest we make the wrong conclusion that this is only how God operates, by allowing the saints to be thrown in jail, let me remind you of the life of Joseph from Genesis. He actually did hold quite a bit of power and influence.

[Gen 41:38-44 NLT] “...Pharaoh asked his officials, "Can we find anyone else like this man so obviously filled with the spirit of God?" 39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has revealed the meaning of the dreams to you, clearly no one else is as intelligent or wise as you are. 40 You will be in charge of my

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 70.

court, and all my people will take orders from you. Only I, sitting on my throne, will have a rank higher than yours." 41 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the entire land of Egypt." 42 Then Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his hand and placed it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in fine linen clothing and hung a gold chain around his neck. 43 Then he had Joseph ride in the chariot reserved for his second-in-command. And wherever Joseph went, the command was shouted, "Kneel down!" So Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of all Egypt. 44 And Pharaoh said to him, "I am Pharaoh, but no one will lift a hand or foot in the entire land of Egypt without your approval."

But remember the suffering Joseph endured along the way!

[Gen 50:20 NLT] 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.

I bring this up to demonstrate that in our lives, as God is working all things out for His own glory, He uses many diverse situations and circumstances to position His people to do His work according to His will.

In Joseph's case, God used terrible tragedy to bring Joseph to a position of power, to demonstrate His own glory, and to provide for the burgeoning nation of Israel -- His special people.

In Paul's case, God used terrible suffering and hardship to bring the message of reconciliation to the highest levels of governmental power with the end result being Paul's death.

He uses ALL THINGS for His will -- the good and the seemingly bad.

Consider this: it is death, the shameful death of Christ, that reconciles us to God in the first place!

And, it is the hard uncertainty and grind of life that results in a strengthened faith and perseverance among the saints.

[Rom 5:3 NKJV] ...we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;

[Mat 5:10-12 NKJV] 10 Blessed [are] those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great [is] your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This might seem counterintuitive to us. We might ask, "Why would a good, kind, loving God, choose to advance his message of reconciliation through broken, messed up, stressful, anxiety inducing, trying circumstances?"

AND yet...our lives serve as the object lesson - we are the proof that is in the pudding!

God has wrought such a glorious work in our own fallen lives, this is how He works, taking the seemingly irredeemable and transforming it into something glorious, beautiful, and holy.

AND, people who are outside the kingdom get to encounter the gospel as we operate in those areas of life that are marked by distress, anxiety, uncertainty, and death because we worship the Living God -- the God of the resurrection.

What began as death in our lives turned to life and this promise is extended to all.

That is why Paul was able to maintain a sense of hope even during his imprisonment and he was able to pass that hope on to others.

V.13 He communicates this idea that from the soldiers who were personally guarding him to everybody else around, they all came to know that Paul was a prisoner of Jesus Christ FIRST regardless of what his physical captivity may indicate.

This is remarkable because rather than being seen as a poor, pitiful, persecuted Christian, or even a political criminal, these people came to view Paul's circumstances as uniquely positioned in Christ.

And, in this situation, rather than petitioning the believers in Rome, and the believers in Philippi to do their best to bust him out, it appears that Paul revels in his captivity in Jesus.

Paul wasn't some criminal getting what he deserved but a Jesus follower who was on a mission; appointed by God to bear Jesus' name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. (Acts 9:15) And he did so enthusiastically!

V.14 More than spreading the gospel throughout the area to unbelievers, Paul's circumstances, as rough as they were, as restricted as his movements and activities may have been, actually bolstered the confidence of fellow believers! They saw what God was doing through Paul.

MOST (not all) of the brethren grew more confident because of Paul's situation.

Notice that not everybody was on board with this - as is always the case. There will always be hold-outs, half-committed people, nay-sayers, and grumps.

But, MOST of the believers saw a boost to their own confidence by observing Paul's conduct. What a glorious ministry! Paul's chains didn't dissuade them or cause them to cower but built them up!

“The fundamental change expressed...must be rendered in some languages as ‘becoming bolder constantly,’ or ‘are constantly more and more bold.’”<sup>2</sup>

They saw that earthly chains were insufficient to bind God's word.

They were moved to say something! What were they saying?

THE WORD! (τὸν λόγον) -- “This absolute use of “the word”

---

<sup>2</sup> I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 21.

occurs frequently in Paul to describe the gospel, the message about Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

This speaking forth of the word they did without fear. Not that they had never been afraid; but what they were witnessing removed their fears. It’s almost as if by seeing Paul continuing to preach and teach and labor even in his chains showed them the real power of the gospel, and the reality of their calling and faith.

What was there to be afraid of? Well, chains for one thing! Persecution, hardship, death.

We still fear to speak the gospel today as well -- for much more minor afflictions. We fear we might be misunderstood, or stereotyped. We fear we might be excluded. We fear we might lose our tax exempt status as a church. We fear we might be scorned or laughed at as outdated relics of an ancient faith.

---

<sup>3</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 116.

We want so badly to fit in but we've literally been called to stand out, to be a special unique people.

[1Pe 2:9-10 NKJV] "...you [are] a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once [were] not a people but [are] now the people of God..."

We've been called to proclaim His praises, to speak the word boldly, to say something!

Please note that we are not called to say just *anything*...but the one thing - the good message, the gospel: God has reconciled us to Himself by the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And we are not called to be people of fear regardless of the chains that await us.

[2Ti 1:7-9 NKJV] 7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called [us] with a holy calling...”

However, even as MOST of the family of God were moved to boldness, shed their fear, and spoke forth the Word - there were others who did something a little different.

V.15-17 The gospel is preached from both good and bad motives.

Paul, and the Scriptures as a whole, were/are not naive to the human condition. Where there is an opportunity to seize a

position of relative advantage over others for one purpose or another - control, money, ego, etc. -- humans will seize that opportunity.

“...emboldened by Paul’s imprisonment...the motive of some is less out of love for the gospel than it is out of a desire to rub salt in his wound.”<sup>4</sup>

Many have found some measure of ugly success doing just that with the gospel.

I want to be careful to make a distinction here about what Paul is saying.

We find in these verses that Paul does not issue a scathing rebuke to those who preach the gospel from a position of envy, selfish-ambition, insincerity; who are literally seeking to kick a

---

<sup>4</sup> Fee, 117.

man while he's down. This is a bit confounding because we know from other writings just how much Paul opposes false teachers.

BUT, what are they preaching? The gospel.

Can men with bad motives preach the gospel? Yes. Does this happen today? Perhaps more than we will ever know. Ministry attracts all kinds of people for all kinds of reasons - not least of which is because of the platform!

It is an ugly reality that there are people in ministry who are doing it for really terrible reasons.

NOW, this is not the same as those who are preaching "another" or a different gospel. (GAL 1:6)

Inasmuch as is discernible from this portion of scripture we see that the gospel is actually preached. So, we have to balance

these thoughts: do we pray that all people would preach the gospel from sincerity and goodness? Yes! Are we guaranteed that? No.

Also, we must understand when it is that we are to “call a spade a spade;” when we are to discern the wolves in sheeps clothing who aren’t preaching the gospel at all but some mutilated form of scripture meant to prey upon people.

Paul even states that he “has been appointed for the defense of the gospel?” (v.17)

God’s Word is clear about discerning false prophets and teachers:

[Mat 7:15 NKJV] 15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

[Jde 1:3-4 NKJV] “...I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all

delivered to the saints. 4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

[Phi 3:2 NKJV] 2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!

So, we wouldn't give license to Joel Osteen or Kenneth Copeland or Benny Hinn to continue taking advantage of God's people and claiming it's the gospel because what they teach isn't actually the gospel, it's not actually God's Word, it's garbage decorated with religious sounding language and presented to hurting people in order to take advantage of them.

The beauty of those kinds of false teachers is that you can typically discern their falsehoods through careful bible study.

Whereas, the guy who is preaching the gospel straight up and down week in and week out with bad motives is oftentimes indiscernible, unknowable, because that motive lives hidden in his heart, not exposed on his sleeve.

We ourselves revolt at the thought! But Charles Simeon (late 18th - early 19th century Anglican) challenges us to introspection:

“Few, indeed, would acknowledge that they were influenced by such vanity as this: but, if they would mark what inordinate satisfaction they feel in a crowded audience, and what disappointment in a thin attendance, they might see, that, to say the least, their motives are very questionable.”<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand - by God's grace, some preach out of love - this division of hearts in the pulpit continues today. And what can we say about it? Matthew Henry writes this:

---

<sup>5</sup> Charles Simeon, *Horae Homileticae: Philipians to 1 Timothy*, vol. 18 (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1833), 19.

“It is God’s prerogative to judge of the principles men act upon; this is out of our line. Paul...rejoiced in the preaching of it [the gospel] even by those who do it in pretence, and not in truth. How much more then should we rejoice in the preaching of the gospel by those who do it in truth...though it should be with much weakness and some mistake!”<sup>6</sup>

Those who preached out of love understood Paul’s place in the kingdom - it’s not a competition.

V.18 What then? What is the conclusion of this dichotomy of good and bad motives? So what?

**Only that in every way Christ is preached.**

---

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2322.

The idea here is not that Paul approves of false teachers teaching a false message; but that insincere, duplicitous teachers are proclaiming Jesus...with a right message but a wrong heart.

Now listen, that matters. Those people shall answer for their trespasses.

[Jas 3:1 NKJV] 1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

But...at least the gospel goes forth. What's amazing about that is that God can do so much with so very little.

As long as Christ is declared - Paul has reason to rejoice - and so do we all. Be filled with the fruits of righteousness so that you can confidently say, "I have preached Christ from sincerity, love, and truth." And know that God is building His kingdom, even with broken tools like us. Even in the midst of circumstances that we

find trying. No chains shall ever hold the gospel. No prison cell shall ever silence Christ's messengers.