

“THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL”

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18

REV. CHARLES R. BIGGS

Last week we looked at the attitude and character and the congregational practice of believers who are deeply affected by an understanding of the love of God and being part of the FELLOWSHIP OF THE GOSPEL. We learned that joyful prayer, affectionate grace and confidence in Christ would characterize that congregation (1:3-11).

Today, we learn of the ADVANCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL, and how God mysteriously makes His Gospel known and how He makes it spread through the power of the Spirit and the preaching of CHRIST ALONE.

May God grant our congregation a greater participation in the advancement of God’s Gospel here in our community and around the world. May we come to understand the importance of Christ being preached to ourselves, our community, and people around the world, and the power that we have been given through the Holy Spirit from on high to make that happen by God’s grace. Amen.

Three points: (1) Importance of Gospel Advancement; (2) How the Gospel Advances; and (3) The Glory of God in Gospel Advancement.

I. Importance of Gospel Advancement

Key: Selfless service (look at the Apostle Paul’s attitude and main concern and his focus on Christ away from self).

Paul shows us the importance of Gospel Advancement.

Paul shows us his selfless service in Christ’s Kingdom for the advancement of the Gospel.

What is most important to the Apostle Paul is that Christ is being proclaimed and made known! Paul’s affections are focused on the Kingdom of God; what is important to God is important to Paul!

- Read Philippians 1:12-18; what is the key verse? What is Paul’s main concern?

^{ESV} Philippians 1:18 “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.”

The advancement of the Gospel is more important and dear to him than his own life!

Paul lives for God's glory. As he prayed for the Philippians in 1:11 that they would be "...Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

Paul is revealing that righteous fruit in his self-less-ness here.

- How are you doing in advancing the Gospel of Christ? How do you think our congregation is doing in our neighborhoods, workplaces and community?

What advances the Gospel?

Seeking God's Kingdom more than mine! Seeking to make Christ name more than I'm seeking to make a name for myself.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:8-10:** Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel,⁹ for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. *But the word of God is not bound!*¹⁰ *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*

As the Apostle Paul says in 1:18a: "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, *Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.*"

This is the heart of the passage: Preach Christ! THIS IS WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT!

The Philippians ask: "How are you?"

Paul responds: (NOT!) "The food is awful, just awful!" "Man, I wish someone would come get me."

"Does anyone care anymore about me?!"

No; Paul responds: "Here is how the Gospel is doing..."

The Philippians ask: "How are you doing?"

Paul hears: "How is the Gospel doing?"

Barth: "To the question how it is with him the apostle must react with information as to how it is with the Gospel."

Let us be reminded that Paul was a prisoner in Caesar's dungeon in his household, the Praetorium in Rome (1:13- "Whole imperial guard"). Praetorium or "Imperial Guard" (ESV) were specially chosen men to guard Caesar: "Caesar's bodyguards". This was an elite group of warriors, a "special forces" of Rome, a "few good men"; or Darth Vader's Storm Troopers, Sith Lords, Elvis' chosen bodyguards, etc. ☺

Paul is in chains faced with possible death, and yet in his weakness the gospel is infiltrating the enemy's territory!

The gospel of the LORD Jesus Christ, the King of Heaven, has infiltrated lord Caesar's house, the king of Rome. In other words, we have the very strategic invasion and onslaught of the Kingdom of God, militantly storming the enemy's gates with the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul could have easily have focused on himself as a prisoner in bond and chains; Paul could have easily have slipped into an unhealthy self-focus that would have robbed him of joy, and made him ineffective as an instrument of God's Gospel grace and power.

But Paul's focus was on what was most important to God! **Christ was preached!**

Why was this so great?

There is power in the preaching of Christ!

The difference between Christians and religious folks is:

Religious folks believe you have to work hard and do more to get into heaven.

Christians believe that Christ has worked hard and invites all who hear him to believe and trust in Him- -alone, without payment, without addition.

Christians know that Christ **has done for them what they could not do.**

The Gospel is not a self-help program.

The Gospel is not another religious way to God.

The Gospel is a declaration, a proclamation before the whole world that Jesus has come into the world to save sinners.

The Gospel declares that Jesus lived and died, and was raised from the dead, to God's right hand to be received as King and Lord.

The Gospel is a declaration of what God has done for sinners in Jesus.

The Gospel is not a call to do, but to believe!

- **God’s Power in Preaching Christ**
- Why is it so important to preach Christ and the cross of Christ from the pulpit and one on one as we seek to advance the Gospel?

The GOSPEL proclaimed has the:

1. Power of God to change lives.
2. Wisdom of God, but is considered foolishness to unregenerate mankind.

Acts 1:8; Romans 1:16-17, 15:13-19; 1 Corinthians 1:17-18, 2:1-5; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5; 2 Timothy 1:6-14

- Both individually and corporately, we must **proclaim the Good News of the Gospel.**

What is Gospel proclamation? What is preaching Christ as “good news” rather than merely preaching; or preaching the Bible or morality?

- **Paul rejoices in his circumstances.** What does this teach you about true joy in Christ?

Paul places the highest importance on what matters most to God; what is important to God is important to Paul!

Paul places the highest importance on the Advancement of the Gospel, and therefore nothing can take away His joy. His joy is deep within because of His trust in God.

For Paul, even being in chains could not take away his joyous freedom in Jesus and he wanted God’s people to know this and believe this!

- Joy is not based on circumstances, but a deep and confident commitment of contentment in Christ because of God’s sovereignty (Phil. 4:13).
- What is most important to you? What is most important to the Apostle Paul? Joy comes to us because what is most “dear” to our affections; what we love most is occurring.
- Paul rejoices that Christ is being made known and the Gospel is progressing. *The advancement of the Gospel is more important and dear to him than his own life!*

- Paul has Jesus Christ; he proclaims this hope he has in Jesus Christ alone. This is what is most important to him; he cannot lose anything- -great joy!!
- To have the joy of the LORD, we must learn to see circumstances as God sees them; we must believe by God's grace that what God says is true; we must go more on this than on our feelings.
- Real joy comes from asking God for affections that are focused on Christ alone; we must be rid more and more of ourselves and our own self-focus.

Let us learn from God to be thankful for whatever circumstances he brings into our lives because they are His sovereign way of drawing us near to Him.

We don't always think of Gospel Advancement as the most important priority in our lives...

We don't always rejoice in our circumstances...

Because we don't understand how God works...even mature believers often have a hard time remembering how the Gospel makes advances in this world!

The advancement of the Gospel should have a priority of importance in our lives no matter what situation in which we find ourselves for God.

II. How the Gospel Advances

Key: God's mysterious power in our weaknesses; through "hindrances", God makes a highway for the high speed advancement of the Gospel that is above and beyond anything we could ever ask or imagine.

"Hindrances to the Gospel"

Are there really any hindrances to God's Work?

Do we not confess that He is sovereign and omnipotent and ruling and reigning over all history and people and things?!

Are there really and truly hindrances?

No, but from our human perspective, we believe certain things "hinder" God's work of advancing the Gospel.

We would say: “If only I could get out of *this situation*, if only *this thing would change*, then I could **really serve the Lord**”.

The Philippians were concerned that the Gospel could be hindered in their estimation upon hearing that their church planting pastor, the Apostle Paul, had been imprisoned.

But Paul says: **“I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me, has really served to advance the Gospel....My imprisonment is ‘for Christ’ or ‘in Christ’.”** (1:12-13).

In Greek there is only one letter difference between the word for ‘advance’ and ‘hindrance’; a tiny little sigma: prokopane- advance/ proskopane-hindrance.

Perhaps you have a physical handicap? Perhaps you’re in a hospital bed, in great pain and barely able to move?

Perhaps you’re in a neighborhood or some of your family members are committed to a false religion or cult?

Perhaps you’re dealing with and trying to live and be the gospel to a stubborn family member?

Perhaps there is some weakness, or sickness that hinders you from making the Gospel known in your estimation.

Maybe you just “don’t know enough” or “fear others” (this is common, see 1:14).

In all these circumstances, you might be tempted to think of them as “hindrances” to the advancement of the Gospel. Perhaps these situations might make you think of yourself as too weak?

What would make you more confident and faithful to God in speaking the Gospel, living the Gospel, and making it known before a dying world?

You must learn to see your weakness as exactly where Christ wants you to be.

You must see that your situation is exactly where Christ wants you to serve.

You need to confess to Him that the reason you fear is because you have truly been trusting in your own strength, eloquence, power, and abilities.

He wants you to trust in HIM!

THIS IS WHERE GOD WANTS TO MAKE HIS GREAT AND GLORIOUS STRENGTH AND POWER KNOWN THROUGH YOUR WEAKNESS!

NO ONE COULD EVER SAY THAT IT WAS YOU WHO DID IT—ONLY GOD COULD HAVE ADVANCED THE GOSPEL RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW—THIS IS GOD’S METHOD.

Through women with murdered husbands on the mission field called to make the Gospel the most important thing in her life and serve God powerfully through her weakness.

Through women who are paralyzed from the neck down, permanently handicapped, never able to walk and finding speech greatly difficult. In this situation, God has called here to show his power through weakness.

Through men who have been beaten, stripped, hungry, and persecuted, God has shown power in weakness.

Through the Apostle Paul in a Roman prison; God advanced the Gospel and made it known to the whole imperial guard that his bondage was for Jesus or “in Jesus” (1:13- “Praetorium” or “Caesar’s Palace”).

Paul actually says (literally!) that the Gospel is advanced because His bonds or chains “make manifest” (phanerous- v. 13) or “make evident” or “make plain” that Christ and His work are present in ‘Caesar’s Palace’.

Paul’s imprisonment, his chains, “publicized” or “promoted” the Gospel because all knew that Paul was there because of the Gospel of Jesus.

Paul’s chains “preach” or “declare” or “visible show” the Gospel of Jesus?

Life in death; courage in the face of fear; strength in weakness; hope in hopeless situations.

To you in whatever situation you find yourself: God has called you right here right now in this congregation to advance the Gospel through your weaknesses?

How can you show God’s Gospel? Through chains? Sicknesses? Irritations? Setbacks? Physical and/or mental handicaps?

Can you do it? Yes!

Will you do it?

Our problem is that we don't see God's work in weakness well enough- -we lose faith in God because we are ultimately focusing and depending on ourselves!!

An unnecessary and unhealthy self-focus or focus on self in any situation only aggravates us and makes us more unlike Christ, and focused on self.

A self-focus, aggravates our sinfulness and robs us of our joy, and can leave us wallowing in self-pity rather than making the Gospel known.

Self-pity will blind you to what Christ is doing in your life.

Paul could see clearly that God was working through and in Him and he rejoiced- -he was full of joy!

Pray for self-forgetfulness in your daily life.

Pray for a focus on Jesus in His glory and beauty moment by moment and don't lose this focus; when you leave your time of prayer, don't leave the presence of God.

Pray to see what God is doing → Watch, serve, rejoice!

Too hard?

You say: "**This is kind of super-Christian stuff** - -this is faith for the Apostle Pauls- -not for me."

Wrong. Paul says in Philippians "Brethren, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us"; elsewhere Paul writes: "Be imitators of me" (see Phil. 3:17; 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1).

Listen carefully: ^{ESV} Philippians 4:9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me- practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

This means that you can do it by faith in Jesus, but you don't.

If you find this too hard? Then, you're not focused enough on Christ.

You must be focused on the power of the Gospel that saved you!

Ask yourself:

What has Christ done in his suffering for you?

He left His glory at God's right hand to become a slave and die the accursed death on the cross for you.

He who was equal with God become nothing for you.

Can you not become nothing for him?

Can you not leave your seeking your own glory to suffer with and for him?

Yes, in Christ you can!

This is not only a problem of self-pity but also arrogant pride.

- Humble yourself!
- Can believers truly and accurately, with our finite minds, estimate the work God is doing in and through us to make the Gospel known? Why or why not? (Meditate upon Psalm 131:1-3); Romans 11:33-36).

Psalm 131:1: "My heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me."

Romans 11:34, 36: "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ...³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

The humble do not seek to know God's ways that are higher than our ways, nor his understanding, nor his mind if it has not been revealed.

Rather, they humble before God are trusting...they calm and quiet their souls like a weaned child with its mother...leaning and trusting God.

- What are some "hindrances" to making the Gospel known that are particularly unique to Reformed Churches?
 1. One is: "Rationalism" masked by confessionalism" says: "Too hard for common folks to learn the Reformed faith, we should dumb it down.
 2. Reformed Confessional folks can make the mistake of underestimating the power of God in their witness and unfortunately become unnecessarily in-grown (like a bad and painful toenail).
 3. Is Christ preached here?

4. Is Christ held forth in Word and Sacrament? Then why would there be hindrances?

As Confessional Reformed folks, we can too easily become ingrown where our only outlook and vision is toward our own congregation (this has historically been a weakness of Reformed congregations at times). We want and desire to have a vision of reaching folks in our community and do this by faith.

Remember the Gospel is the power of God for salvation for all who believe. Do not underestimate God's power. Do not be a functional Rationalist and say something like: "Well, Reformed truth is too difficult for evangelism; or our congregation is not tailored for unbelievers," etc.

We should NEVER underestimate God's power! If God nudges you to bring a neighbor, invite them to the service of worship! If God nudges you to invite your friend, neighbor, etc. don't try in your own finite mind to determine whether they would come or not.

Just invite them with the love of Christ; pray for them to come to worship. Is the Gospel preached at our congregation? Is Jesus preached? Then, believe in God; believe in His power through the Gospel through this preaching (that the world by nature calls "foolish"- 1Cor. 1:18ff; Rom. 1:16ff) at KCPC, God would call His elect.

Let us be faithful.

Let us ask:

How can we better interpret our "hindrances" in light of God's sovereignty in making the Gospel of Christ known?

When did I last see the glory and beauty of Christ enfleshed?

It wasn't in a well-dressed, healthy-looking preacher (although that's also a place where it can be found by God's grace through weakness, ☺).

I saw Christ and His Gospel Advance in Cecil Ball, suffering with two broken arms, weak with cancer, and in pain at 85 years old last Thursday.

Before that, I recall Rev. Robert Lucas and Charles Waddy who suffered painfully and mentally for many years before they both died and went to be with Jesus.

Through these men, the Gospel Advanced, and continues to advance as God works through weakness and makes His power known in Jesus Christ! Amen.

These were examples of weakness pointing to Christ and His Gospel; it caused me to see the "fellowship of Christ's suffering" that we're all called to in union with Jesus.

I saw the glory of the LORD!

How can you better see your sufferings and afflictions in your life as not only “for Christ” but “in Christ” (see Phil. 1:12-14, 3:11)?

ESV 2 Timothy 1:8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God...

Biblical Images: “Power through Weakness” all through the Bible (Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Israel, Job, etc).

Picture of Jesus, the Suffering Servant:

Imprisonment of Paul (fellowship of suffering- Phil. 3:11) → Powerful delivery of sinners

Infiltration of Caesar’s Empire- Binding the “Strong Man” in his own house (Praetorium at Rome).

Jesus the Suffering Servant:

Imagery of Jesus going down into the prisons to set the captives free (Isaiah 61:1; Psalm 107:13-16)

YOU the Suffering Servant like Jesus!

BOLDNESS BEYOND BELIEF!

COURAGE YOU WOULD NOT BELIEVE!

Paul’s “hindrances” become advances for the Gospel, but also boldness and courage to other brethren (1:14).

Notice how Paul begins with the Philippians’ **CONCERN** (v. 12a) → Paul shows his **CONFIDENCE** in God (v. 12b) → **COURAGE IN CHRIST** (V. 14).

- Why do we fear making the Gospel known to others? What do we specifically fear? How can seeing others suffer be used by Jesus to grant us courage in witnessing?
- We gain courage in Christ when we see others stand strong in their circumstances and let God advance the Gospel through them, especially in their weaknesses!

- The courage to stand firm (see 1:14) comes because we come to trust in the power of God, not in man's wisdom, power or eloquence:

1 Corinthians 2:4-5: "...And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Whatever things once seemed important to us, whatever once was considered a hindrance in our lives, let us rethink prayerfully what is most important to God, and seek to see how God is working through each one of us particularly in our weaknesses to make His power known.

Let us focus then with a new found, grace-filled confidence and boldness in making the Gospel known to our community as a congregation.

LET US SEEK TO GLORIFY GOD IN WHAT WE THINK IS IMPORTANT; LET US SEEK TO GLORIFY GOD IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES HE CALLS US TO; LET US GLORIFY GOD IN FOCUSING ON CHRIST IN ALL WE DO AND SAY.

III. The Glory of God in Gospel Advancement

Key: Glory of God

Our Aims and actions in the Christian life should be for the Glory of God.

- Are our motives important in our preaching and making Christ known?

Thomas Brooks gave this wisdom: "Two things make a good Christian, **good actions** and **good aims**."

Though a good aim does not make a bad action good, a bad aim makes a good action bad."

We should aim at the glory of God in all we do (1 Cor. 10:31).

The Apostle Paul contrasts between two kinds of people, BOTH ARE PREACHING CHRIST. Some preach out of envy and rivalry and some are controlled and constrained by God's love (1:15).

Envy/Rivalry

LOVE

Those preaching Christ here are not the false prophets of other places in Paul's letters, especially the Judaizers that were preaching not Christ, but a false gospel (that was no gospel at all! Gal. 1:6-12).

Paul is speaking in Philippians 1:12-18 NOT of FALSE PROPHETS, but of FALSELY MOTIVATED PROPHETS.

Although Christ's Gospel was truly preached; the preachers did not truly understand the love of Christ demonstrated through weakness in the Gospel.

Who were these? No one but God seems to know for sure (many commentators have been perplexed by this!). What is clear is that here is another revelation of sinful man's ability to take a good thing and make it bad.

Our motive for serving Jesus, especially and particularly in making the Gospel known should be God's love for us in Jesus!

Let us be compelled, constrained, controlled by the love of God in Christ:

ESV 2 Corinthians 5:14-15: For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

- **Our motives reveal our understanding of the GOSPEL.**

What is envy and rivalry but a desire for power?

What irony that some are preaching the Gospel of Christ seeking to get power?

In envy, we desire to have something someone else has; it is pride for power, to have more.

In rivalry, we are trying to show that we have as much power, gifts, whatever than someone else.

Envy and rivalry are opposite attitudes to the humility that comes through weakness.

Envy and rivalry oppose God's power in weakness and humility.

- **The Gospel proclaims a Great and Glorious Savior, Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who considered equality with God not something to be grasped at- -but made himself nothing.**

...For you.

The cross stands at the center of history as possibly the BIGGEST HINDRANCE and weakness that man has ever been confronted with! Yet this is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.

Christ was taken prisoner, beaten, crushed, killed- -for you who believe.

The Gospel proclaims that Christ who is God in the flesh was taken captive so that He might gloriously remove our chains and be free to serve Him!

All of us who were allied with the world, the flesh and the Devil were transformed and transferred from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of the Son of God (Col. 1:13-14).

This is power in weakness.

Let us advance in making this great gospel known!

Let us pray that what is important to God would be important to us.

Let us pray that whatever situation we find ourselves, we would understand that this is God's will to advance the Gospel.

Let us pray that whatever we do for Christ in Word and deed to do it motivated by love in making Christ known!

CRB