

Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

The Word Of Power
October 7th, 2012
Philippians 1:12-18
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to Philippians 1:12-18. If you are tracking with the RMM reading plan then you would have read this passage this morning. Let me give you just a little bit of background before we address the text. Philippians is generally understood as being one of the Prison Epistles that the Apostle Paul wrote during his imprisonment in Rome. Paul seems to know these people well. This letter is very personal, very positive and very Gospel centric. Paul's hope is that when he gets out of prison, he will be able to use this little church as a base for expanding mission into Europe. It therefore has a very missional flavour and that sets us up well to consider this strange little text beginning at verse 12; let me read to you from God's Word.

¹²But I want you to know, brethren, that the things *which happened* to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, ¹³so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; ¹⁴and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

¹⁵Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: ¹⁶^EThe former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; ¹⁷but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁸What then? Only *that* in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. (Philippians 1:12-18. NKJV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Paul's Concern: That The Gospel Of Christ Is Preached

If you want to understand this text it is actually more helpful to read it backwards. Commentators agree that the main point of the passage is actually in verse 18:

¹⁸What then? Only *that* in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, **Christ is preached**; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. (Philippians 1:12-18. NKJV)

Paul says: “Here is the only thing I care about: The Gospel of Christ is preached. I don’t care by who, I don’t care much how, I don’t care much from what motives. If the Gospel of Christ is rightly proclaimed, I’m good.”

To understand the power of this statement you have to reflect a bit upon the circumstances. Paul was in prison in Rome. He had been falsely accused, his trial had stretched on so much longer than everyone had thought. Here was the world’s greatest preacher and missionary chained up in a Roman house under guard when he should have been out preaching the Gospel. It must have been killing him. His friends in Philippi were concerned about him and so they wrote to express that concern and Paul says this: “My circumstances do not hinder the Gospel, on the contrary they serve the Gospel, therefore I am content. Don’t worry about me. I only care about one thing and that one thing is doing fine. Relax.” The Philippians are worried about peripheral things, Paul is only worried about the main thing. The Gospel is advancing. His prison time has actually served to advance the cause of the Gospel – he’s been writing letters and he’s been arguing the Gospel before the courts and before influential people and he’s been converting his guards. The Gospel is on the move.

The other thing that was happening was that Paul had inadvertently stirred up the local preachers to greater efforts in their own Gospel proclamation. He talks about this in verses 15-16. It seems that when Paul arrived, being this world famous preacher who was setting the world on fire, the local preachers were intimidated. They were some of them flat out envious. Imagine for example that D.A. Carson or Tim Keller or Mark Driscoll or some other world famous preacher got arrested in Orillia. Its house arrest though so every Sunday hundreds, even thousands of

people are filling the house and overflowing onto the lawn and you've got the biggest church in town now meeting around this guy's prison cell. That was what was going on in Rome. The local preachers are jealous and so they say to themselves: "We better hit the books! We better get into the Word! We better stop offering our people slop and swill because we'll lose our influence if we don't pull up our socks and start preaching!" So they work themselves to the bone preparing meatier and better messages and Paul says: "What do I care? I don't care whether you're preaching the Gospel to win back your church or to diminish my influence – all I care is that you're finally preaching the Gospel!" Preach the Gospel out of envy and spite if you want to, just PREACH THE GOSPEL!

Now let's be very clear, Paul is not saying that he doesn't care what they preach as long as they preach – he is not saying that anyone who stands in the pulpit and says anything is on our team in some way or another. Let's not forget that Paul also said:

⁸But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 6:8-9. NKJV)

Paul was addressing motives in Rome, not content. If you get the content right, I'm not too concerned about your motives. The Gospel is powerful in and of itself.

That brings us to the point I want to reflect on this morning; Paul's conviction that the Gospel was powerful in and of itself.

Paul's Conviction: The Gospel Is Powerful In And Of Itself

Paul says this sort of thing in multiple places throughout the New Testament. Our memory verse last month is perhaps the most well known:

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel ^κof Christ, for it is **the power of God** to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "*The just shall live by faith.*" (Romans 1:16-17. NKJV)

He said the same thing to the Corinthians:

¹⁸For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is **the power of God**. (1 Corinthians 1:18. NKJV)

Paul was absolutely convinced that the Gospel correctly proclaimed was powerful in and of itself. That is a profoundly interesting thought; that is a profoundly convicting thought because today, I see very little evidence that we still believe that. When I hear famous pastors today interviewed on T.V. or in magazines they talk a lot about the importance of other things but they talk very little about the importance and the priority and the POWER of the proclaimed Gospel. Paul's confidence in the power of the preached Gospel is a rebuke to much of how we do church in the 21st century world. In the 21st century church we far more commonly locate our confidence in:

False Locations Of Power:

1. Deeds of Mercy

Think about that. How many times have you heard this quote: "Preach the Gospel at all times; if necessary use words." That has become the mantra of the modern day Church. It is generally attributed to St. Francis, although scholars say that St. Francis never said that and that it is an apocryphal saying that doesn't appear until several centuries after his death. But even if he did say it, it would still be galactically stupid and nonsensical. What in the world does it mean to preach the Gospel without words? Obviously the saying means to imply that non-verbal communication of the Gospel should have priority but think about that for just a minute – what can you communicate with non-verbal forms of communication? A lot. A ton. You can communicate mood, tone, nuance, attitude and emotion. That's all good; but do you know what you cannot communicate? Content. Right? I can communicate all kinds of things to you non-verbally. I can communicate that I am bored and that I think this sermon is too long. Watch. I can communicate that I think you are pulling facts out of thin air; watch. I can communicate that I think you are over emotional and irrational; watch. But how could I communicate non verbally that Aristotle tutored Alexander the Great at the Macedonian court not far from Philippi between 342 and 339 BC? I can't! That's impossible. Content requires verbal proclamation and content is key to the Gospel.

Listen I am not saying that deeds of mercy are not important – they are. They flow necessarily from the hearts of truly converted people but they do not themselves have the power to convert people. Tim Keller says it this way:

If we confuse evangelism and social justice we lose what is the single most unique service that Christians can offer to the world. Others, alongside believers, can feed the hungry. But Christians have the Gospel of Jesus by which men and women can be born again into the certain hope of eternal life. (Tim Keller)

If you put your trust in; or if you think the power is located in deeds of mercy you will find yourself on a fool's errand. Look at Paul's ministry. There are precious few stories about soup kitchens and clothing bins in the Book of Acts. What there is is an awful lot of Gospel preaching. Deeds of mercy support proclamation and they show forth conversion, but they are not where the power is located. The problem is that deeds of mercy are still respected in our culture and Gospel proclamation is not and so many pastors and many ministry leaders put the emphasis on the deeds of mercy so that they can maintain the respect of the culture. When you do that you sacrifice power.

2. Signs And Wonders

In the 80's and 90's there was another false location of power associated with the charismatic movement and an approach to evangelism which became known, interestingly enough as "Power Evangelism". But they didn't mean what you and I might mean by that phrase. Let me read to you the definition of power evangelism that you find on Wikipedia:

Power evangelism is a form of [evangelism](#) which relies on the supernatural power and gifts of the [Holy Spirit](#) to reach new converts and work through [born again](#) Christians. (Wikipedia on-line dictionary)

What does it rely on? The signs and wonders of the Holy Spirit. The term comes originally from a book by John Wimber and is carried on today by people like Marc Dupont. The basic idea is that you heal a few people, cause a few people to be slain in the Spirit and then once everyone is convinced that God is in this, then you preach the Gospel. People then assign credibility to the message, and the messenger because of the signs and wonders. Now what is wrong with that? Signs and wonders did accompany the first apostles as they went out to preach the Gospel, signs and wonders do continue in the church, no one here would deny that, so what is wrong with that definition? The word "relies". The Apostle Paul RELIED on the Gospel as preached.

Sometimes the Spirit moved to heal someone in the service, many times he did not. Paul did not leave a service saying: “No one was healed today I guess the Spirit wasn’t working”. Paul did not RELY ON signs and wonders. He put his confidence in the Gospel preached. He believed that the Gospel was powerful because it is in the Gospel that the Spirit moves in power to save. The Gospel is not designed to be externally impressive it is designed to be internally subversive. It enters our hearts and our minds and in the Spirit’s power it undercuts our pride, our reason, our self reliance and by it he shows us our utter helplessness and our need of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. Power Evangelism puts the spotlight on the messenger and the benefits potentially to be received – not on the guilt that needs addressing in Christ. It confuses eternal benefit with present benefit and makes people hunger for wellness rather than regeneration. It is a fool’s errand because the Bible itself warns us against trusting in signs and wonders rather than in Gospel TRUTH. Paul explicitly warned about that:

⁹The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, ¹⁰and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. ¹¹And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, ¹²that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:9-11. NKJV)

What kind of fool builds a ministry around the authentication of signs and wonders when the Bible itself prophesies that one of the characteristics of the end times deception is a ministry built around signs and wonders at the expense of saving truth? Signs and wonders happen on both sides of the spiritual divide. Do not pant after them, do not exalt in them, do not trust in them. Signs and wonders are granted and withheld at the pleasure of Almighty God; the Gospel is powerful in all seasons.

Lastly and I think most commonly the modern day evangelical church, particularly the conservative or reformed branch of it – tends to locate its confidence in:

3. Programs And People

We have been infected with pragmatism for at least the last 30 years. Meaning, we rarely ask anymore “is it true” but we always ask “will it work?” What colour of carpet will be most welcoming to newcomers? What programs are most effective at attracting young families? What video curriculum is the most slick and current? What 40 day adventure is being marketed by the

big box California mega-church this month? Those are the questions we ask and they reveal to us our lack of confidence in the Gospel. Think about Children's Ministry for just a second. How much time do you spend TEACHING THE BIBLE and how much time do you spend doing crafts? How much time do you spend making bricks out of playdough and how much time do you spend actually teaching the story of the Exodus as God's redemption of his own people from slavery and death? What we spend our time on tells us what we are trusting in. Evangelicals trust in programs.

Evangelicals also trust in people. I think in general Evangelical churches give their staff too much credit when things go well – and probably too much blame when things don't go well. Having a good staff is important, I don't mean to denigrate the importance of a good staff team, but at the end of the day, the Gospel mission does not depend on having an all-star staff. The Gospel will go forward in Orillia based on your individual confidence in it. Why did Paul say that he was confident about the cause of the Gospel?

¹⁴and **most of the brethren in the Lord**, having become confident by my chains, **are much more bold to speak the word** without fear. (Philippians 1:14. NKJV)

Paul was confident because through his imprisonment and example, a higher percentage of the brethren – the membership, the Christian population in Rome – were made bold to preach the Gospel. Whatever the reason, whatever the motivation, the net result of my imprisonment in Rome and my squabble with the local pastors has been that the Gospel is on every tongue. Pastors are preaching it, members are preaching it, soldiers are preaching it and I'm preaching it. Everybody is preaching it and when that happens, you are bound to see results. When it comes to Gospel preaching, more is better than special. The magic is not in the special people – the magic is in the Gospel message. The Gospel is essential, the messengers are interchangeable.

There is an obvious immediate application of this to our situation. I know that many of you are very disappointed that Roger will no longer be joining us. Those of you who had the chance to meet him know that he would have made a huge impact on our church. He would have been used of God to help us grow and to move in some new directions. But God is in charge. God has different plans and we must not allow ourselves to worry about that. It was never about Roger. The people parts are interchangeable – the message is essential.

Now why does God do it this way? Why does God put all this power to save and power to transform inside a message – inside a spoken word? Why does He do that?

Why Does God Do It This Way?

The Apostle Paul suggests two reasons:

1. So that no one can boast in the presence of God

Paul made that argument at length in 1 Corinthians 1:

²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, **it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.** ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ **the power of God** and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.... ²⁷**But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise ...** ²⁹so that no human being^f might boast in the presence of God. (1 Corinthians 1:21-29. ESV)

Becoming a Christian is not about being smarter than anyone else. There is a reason that God did not choose to save people through science or through math. If the Gospel were a scientific mystery that could be solved in the laboratory then it would be accessible only to the wise and the privileged; if the Gospel were a math problem that could only be solved through complex formulae and BEDMAS then only the intelligentsia would be saved and everyone who was saved could boast that it was because they were smarter or more insightful or better trained than all the rest of us. But the Gospel isn't something you find in a test tube or on a chalkboard; it is not a riddle to be solved or an equation to be understood. It is a message to be heard and believed. The content of the Gospel is embarrassingly simple. When I was a boy I was taught the ABC's of the Gospel.

A- All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

B – Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

C – Call upon the name of the Lord and thou shalt be saved.

A,B,C – a child can understand that. A couple of weeks ago we talked about The Gospel in 5 G's:

G1. God. God is large and in charge, he is the creator of all things and he has the right to set the rules for all of human life.

G2. Guilt. All human beings have fallen short of God's perfect decrees and are therefore GUILTY of sin against our creator.

G3. Grace. God has given grace to us freely in the life, death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ. Whosoever believes and trusts in this grace shall have eternal life.

G4. Gratitude. A person who has truly received this grace will now express gratitude and thanks through obedient living and works of service.

G5. Glory. The end of all things is the glory of God. The saved person shows forth God's goodness by living out a transformed life and obeying God fully through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit such that God is magnified and glorified among the nations. The saved person is caught up into God's eternal glory upon Christ's return and there he will glorify God and ENJOY HIM FOREVER.

Whether your Gospel presentation 3 points or 5 points it is embarrassingly simple isn't it? I mean, a CHILD could understand it; who wants to build your whole life on something a 6 year old can understand? Think about that. My son Max understood and put his faith in the Gospel at age 6, Madison was younger than that – but Max does not yet have the intellectual capacity to understand the theory of evolution. Max giggles every time he hears about it. He mocks it. He thinks it is ridiculous that anyone could believe that monkeys over time become people. That sounds stupid to him. He does not have the intellectual capacity to understand that it is actually a very impressive and complicated theory. Now hear me correctly on this – I do not believe in or subscribe to the theory of evolution – don't send me e-mail about that – I am just saying that my son can't understand it. It is too complicated, too involved, there are too many loose associations and complicated inferences. He can't follow it. He gets the Gospel though and therein lies the rub. A lot of people in our world cannot humble themselves to trust their souls to any truth claim that can be understood by 6 year olds. They think themselves worthy of a more complicated reality. They want to climb an intellectual mountain, plant a flag and declare themselves the captain of their own souls. The Gospel was designed to frustrate and thwart that desire. It is not complicated. It is simple. It is child friendly. There is no occasion for human boasting in the

simplicity of the Gospel. It is that way by design. Make no mistake, God put the power of salvation inside the Gospel message in part so that the proud would be excluded.

2. So that the proud are excluded

Jesus said that explicitly:

²⁵At that time Jesus answered and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that **You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent** and have revealed them to babes.²⁶Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. ²⁷All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and *the one* to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*. (Matthew 11:25-27. NKJV)

God designed the way of salvation EXPLICITLY to exclude the proud – those who think they are wise and smart and super intelligent. That’s why it is not found in a test tube, that is why it is not the right side of an equation on a blackboard – FAITH COMES BY HEARING AND HEARING FROM THE WORD OF GOD. The whole process of coming to faith is designed so that only the humble can find it. If your spine is stiff and your nose is high you will never find the way of salvation because it runs through a little doggy door and you have to get down on your knees to see it. Everything about the Gospel works against its reception by the proud. The proud want to believe in something respectable – they want to receive truth from important people wearing white lab coats – that is truth you can be proud of! But Jesus died on a cross - Paul preached in chains! God did not recruit many nobles to preach the Gospel, he recruited fisherman, tax collectors and near sighted fundamentalists. Not a white coat or three piece suit between them. The content and the means demand humility of spirit.

this is the one to whom I will look,
to the humble and contrite in spirit,
who trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2. NRSV)

Conclusion:

I confess that I had a variety of motives for preaching on this text. Once again this was not the text that I told Jody I would be preaching on. Part of the reason I chose this text is that I think that this is very good news. If this is true then it is also true that circumstances can never hinder

the Gospel. Paul wasn't worried about being in prison because the Gospel begins with the Sovereignty of God and so this must serve God's will and God's will is for the Gospel to be preached so these circumstances must serve to advance the Gospel. And indeed they did.

And if this passage is true then our various imperfections cannot and do not finally hinder the progress of the Gospel. People in Paul's day were preaching the Gospel out of envy and spite and still the cause of the Gospel was not hindered. Obviously it is better still to preach the Gospel out of love and a hunger for God's glory but the point is that the Gospel is not hindered by our relative lack of sanctification. The church has never been perfect, her preachers have never been perfect, her members have never been perfect but **STILL THE GOSPEL IS POWERFUL IN AND OF ITSELF**. Isn't that a relief? Praise God!

And lastly, if this passage is true then the success of the Gospel mission ultimately is not hindered by our various programmatic deficiencies. With Roger and Carrie not coming there will be a step back in some of our programs for at least the short term. There are things that will start later, other things will be scaled back – many of our big plans for this year depended upon their participation. Maybe that's the point. Maybe they depended too much on their participation. Maybe the quality of our staff was becoming a hindrance to our trust in the Gospel. Maybe we are becoming so slick that the Gospel is no longer foolishness to the Greeks – maybe it looks worldly wise and altogether attractive. Maybe we need some clunk around here. Maybe we need some stall so that God can move in the margins. We'll see. I'm not worried because my Gospel begins where Paul's does: with the Sovereignty of God. God is large and in charge and he does all things well. He means to lift up the Gospel in this town. He does not mean to lift us up, our programs up, our people up – he means to lift Christ up through the simple, plain spoken preaching of the Gospel which is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed, from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith. Amen church? Amen. Jody will you come and lead us in response?