

Message #6**Philippians 1:12-18**

When we come to this portion of Scripture, we come to things you just would not expect:

- 1) You would never expect that imprisonment could further the Gospel; you would expect it would hinder the Gospel outreach.
- 2) You would never expect other believers would become bolder when a believer is facing execution; you would expect they would be more timid.
- 3) You would never expect jealous antagonists would preach the truth; you would expect them to attack the one they envy.
- 4) You would never expect an imprisoned believer, who is waiting for a decision to live or die, would be rejoicing; you would expect him to be sweating and weeping.

Frankly, what God did was just the opposite of what we would expect. He was sovereignly working out His program in ways we would never expect. The man God used so dramatically in all of this was the Apostle Paul. This man had tremendous stability and faith when he was in the most miserable of all circumstances. There is a tremendous lesson to learn from this text:

WHEN A BELIEVER REALIZES THAT GOD IS SOVEREIGN AND IS WORKING OUT HIS WILL AND PROMOTING HIS WORD, THAT BELIEVER CAN HAVE STABILITY AND EVEN JOY IN THE WORST POSSIBLE HARDSHIPS OF LIFE.

The final years of Paul's life were characterized by imprisonments, beatings, poverty, abandonments, rejections and plots against his own life. **Yet in the midst of all of that we not only find Paul stable, but joyful.**

One of the things that produced this in Paul was his grasp of the sovereignty of God. He knew that God was using everything that happened to him to further His work and promote His Word.

When Paul writes verse 12, he does not know whether he will live or die. He begins by saying, "I want you to know." The Philippians truly cared about Paul and they were very concerned about what had happened to him. They loved him, they supported him and had sent Epaphroditus to see him. That is why he wanted them to know personal things. He did not do that with most of the churches.

He knew and he wanted the Philippians to know that all of the negative things that had happened to him happened for the "greater progress" of the Gospel.

That word "greater progress" is interesting because it was a military metaphor that spoke of a scout who went in front of the army as a pioneer, whose primary responsibility was to identify and remove obstacles, thus making progress possible.

Paul believed that every adverse thing that happened to him happened as a pioneer scout which opened paths for Paul to proclaim God's Word. When he wrote **verse 12**, he did not know whether he would live or die. When he wrote II Timothy 2:9, he knew he was going to die and he still believed the same thing. "For which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound."

Paul's stability and joy came from knowing that God was sovereignly behind all the adversity of his life and God was using that adversity to advance His Word and accomplish His will. Paul believed his imprisonment accomplished two things:

ACCOMPLISHMENT #1 – Paul's imprisonment spread Paul's testimony. **1:13**

Now we would initially think that imprisonment would suppress your outreach and would stifle your influence. But it didn't with Paul.

The word "imprisonment" seems to suggest that Paul was bound while being captive in Rome. In fact, the actual word means to be bound as a captive (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 102).

According to historical records, a bound prisoner either had guards bound to him or guards who watched him 24/7. Those guards would change shifts every six hours. So every six hours, Paul would get a new set of guards with whom he would share Jesus Christ. As a result of this the Gospel was the talk of the "whole praetorian guard." Everyone was talking about Paul and his message.

In fact, the truth about Jesus Christ became well-known to everyone. Do not overlook the fact that the imprisonment was "in Christ." Paul was in prison because of his faith in Jesus Christ and that fact became known to everyone.

Paul was not in jail for military reasons, political reasons, ecclesiastical reasons; he was in prison because of his union with Jesus Christ. This truth was the talk of the Roman world.

Everyone was discussing the fact that Paul was in jail because of his faith in Jesus Christ and his communication of the Gospel. Paul found great joy in knowing that. He found great joy in knowing that his being in jail had actually caused a greater progress of the Gospel.

God is in the business of sovereignly turning negative situations into positives:

- 1) Jesus Christ was killed because of satanic political and religious leaders and God used His death to save millions.
- 2) Roman Emperors went on a killing spree of Christians in the first century and, as a result, Christianity grew and spread all over the world.

- 3) King Charles hated and persecuted the Puritans and so the Puritans moved to the United States and, as a result, more Bible translations, theological books and mission work has come from the United States more than any other country in the world

No matter what negative we face, it is comforting to know that God can work in the midst of the negatives to spread His Word and work.

ACCOMPLISHMENT #2 – Paul’s imprisonment spread God’s Word. 1:14-18

Here is another oddity. You would naturally think that when a power-crazed emperor like Nero had locked up Paul and was contemplating whether or not to execute him for his faith in Jesus Christ, it would intimidate other believers to keep silent. It did in some people. In fact, notice Paul says, “most of the brethren” (v. 14), not all. As J. B. Lightfoot said, there are some believers who are so cowardly that they always “held back” from speaking up for Jesus Christ (*Philippians*, p. 101).

What is amazing is that most did speak up. Most were not intimidated by Paul’s imprisonment and Paul’s imprisonment had just the opposite effect.

The fact that Paul was so bold and joyful and confident in his own hardships rubbed off on others. They became more confident and courageous and they overcame fear and began to proclaim the truth about Jesus Christ and the grace of God. **Many other believers were winning the battle over timidity and were confidently speaking out for Jesus Christ because of Paul’s imprisonment.**

By the way, **verse 15** shows us clearly what real evangelism is; it is preaching Jesus Christ. Some people think if they throw something about God into a discussion that is evangelism. Some think if they say you need to go to church or you need to read the Bible that is evangelism. That is not evangelism. Evangelism is proclaiming that only Jesus Christ can save you from sin.

So the obstacles and hardships and sufferings of Paul became the basis for more people speaking up for the truth of God. That brought Paul a great deal of joy. There is nothing more thrilling to a true teacher of God’s Word than knowing that others are proclaiming the truth because of your influence.

Now during the course of Paul’s ministry, he ran into several different types of preachers which he identified in his epistles:

- 1) There was the Satanic preacher who preached works (II Cor. 11:13-15).
- 2) There was the accursed preacher who preached law (Gal. 1:7-9).
- 3) There was the last day’s phony preacher who is a self-centered charlatan (II Tim. 3:1-6).

The common denominator among these three groups of ministers is that they were all unsaved and lost and heading to eternal condemnation.

In Philippians, Paul identifies two other types of preachers, both of whom appear to be true believers. Although Lightfoot thinks they were Judaizers who did preach Christ for a time, but their real motive was to get people back under the law (*Ibid.*, p.103).

Type #1 - There is the pro-Christ, anti-Paul preacher. **1:15a, 16**

Paul was a powerful and impacting man of God. This caused other believers to become jealous of him. In fact, the word “strife” suggests that some believers from their own jealous self-seeking ambitions were always contentiously against Paul. They would continually argue with him because they were jealous of him.

Now when we look at this first type of minister, we may make two observations:

(Observation #1) - They did preach the right message. **1:15a, 16**

These men who were jealous of Paul did preach the truth about Jesus Christ and the grace of God. These men were not Judaizers who preached works and tried to mix law into grace. These were true believers who preached Jesus Christ. **They accurately understood and communicated the true Gospel.**

(Observation #2) - They did not preach with the right motives. **1:15a, 17**

The thing that motivated them to preach was not their calling, but their ungodly jealousy. They were not preaching out of pure motives to communicate truth. They were not preaching from motives that were holy, sacred, pure, undefiled. In fact, according to **verse 17**, they were actually hoping to put more pressure and distress and more hardships and tribulation on Paul.

They were out preaching Christ as free as birds and Paul was locked up for preaching the same message. John Chrysostom of the A.D. 300’s, said they wanted “to excite the hatred of his persecutors and so render his condition worse.”

I am certain they thought that if Nero saw a bunch of other ministers who were following Paul’s example, he would possibly view it as some insurrectionist movement and he might be prompted to execute Paul. But Paul’s thinking on that was to live was Christ and to die was gain (Phil. 1:21). The fact that they were preaching Christ actually brought him great joy.

Not all people who teach the truth do so with pure motives. I personally know of a church in which a Sunday School teacher wanted to take over the Pastorate. He did his best to study so his teaching would seem better than the pastor’s teaching. Then he got a group of people and ultimately got the minister ousted and he was put in charge. His motivation for teaching truth was jealousy. By the way, he didn’t last long. He ended up out of any responsibility through immorality.

John Calvin said he saw this in his own life. He wrote: “Paul assuredly says nothing here, which I myself have not experienced. For there are men living now who have preached the gospel with no other design, than to gratify the rage of the wicked by persecuting pious pastors.”

Paul rejoiced that God’s Word was being preached. But ultimately the Lord will reward those who have been preaching with wrong motives (II Tim. 4:14).

Can God use some immoral televangelist or money-greedy fraud to communicate truth about His Son? Can God sovereignly use some religious crowd manipulator to actually save someone? The answer is yes. There are many ministers who will be in hell that God used to save others so they would not be in hell.

Type #2 - There is the pro-Christ, pro-Paul preacher. **1:15b, 16**

There were others who loved God and they loved Paul and they preached out of “good will.” The Greek word means they preached from motives that were approved by God and were pleasing to God. They were not envious of his gifts and abilities, they loved them. They knew of his stand for Jesus Christ and the Word of God.

These verses make it absolutely clear that God knows and evaluates one’s motive for ministry. Ministering for God is a great privilege, but if the motives are wrong it will bring great judgment (II Tim. 4:14).

If you faithfully serve Jesus Christ and accurately communicate the truth, God will greatly use you and you will affect the lives of other people. Some of those people will love you. Some of those people will be envious and jealous of you. There won’t be a thing you can do to stop it. So just leave it to God.

In **verse 18** Paul says here was my attitude—I rejoiced that the truth about Jesus Christ and in the fact that the grace of God was being proclaimed.

Paul knew that the Word of God was living and active and when it is accurately proclaimed, it does cut into souls regardless of the motivation of the minister.

Dr. John Eadie wrote: “Truth is mighty no matter what Spirit it is published. The virtue lies in the gospel, not the gospel teller; in the exposition and not in the expounder.”

What we do see from this text is that our human circumstances, no matter what they are, come from the hand of a Sovereign God and they may be used to further God’s Gospel and Word. Adverse circumstances may actually be used by God to spread His truth.

See this is so foreign to most churches that teach that the key to ministry success is wealth, crowds, power and popularity. Fact is, in most of those churches very little accurate truth is even communicated.

What we need to remember is God is a God who often does His greatest work through weakness and even suffering.

Now we are not suggesting that we disregard the great blessings God has given to us. But we must never lose sight of the objective, which is to proclaim the truth about Jesus Christ and often that truth is proclaimed best by us when we find ourselves, metaphorically speaking, in chains.