

Philippians 1.12-18a Sermon / COB / 08.14.16

Introduction

- † **[1: Title]** Which do you think is worse, A. your heart is right but you screw up; or B. you get the task right but with wrong motives? Most of us would say B, I think. But is this context dependent?
- Let me give you a specific example. Suppose there were two people in Parkesburg. Person A has a heart of gold, seeking to glorify and serve Christ, but shares the wrong gospel. Person B shares the gospel correctly, but does so out of a sense of rivalry and selfish ambition, trying to build his/her influence and church to be more influential than we are. Which is worse? A. your heart is right but you share the wrong gospel; or B. you share the gospel correctly but your heart is not right? Now most of us would say A. This is one issue that comes up in our passage today.
- † Another is how our own suffering might help us witness for Christ. When we hurt, we often resent the cause of our pain; we sometimes question why God has allowed our pain; we usually think the pain affects only us. I would say all of those thoughts might be in error.
- Think of a medical missionary, who gives up all that life as a wealthy American doctor has to offer to go live in some primitive, muddy, village. This missionary offers free medical care to anyone who comes to the clinic, travels to the patient if that is necessary, is willing to respond anytime day or night, gives generously of everything in possession, risks his/her own life through exposure to diseases, war, terrorism, crime, and other problems. Would that say something about the strength of the missionary's faith?
 - Would that faith and the consequent willingness to sacrifice and suffer for it bear witness to those who encounter the missionary? Now what if the missionary were arrested, charged with sharing the gospel in a closed society, and threatened with torture and death... and in response the missionary simply reaffirmed faith in the mission, in the gospel, and in death's deliverance to Heaven. Would that make an impact on people? We will talk about that today.

Exposition

- † You see in this picture from Philippi the artist has made Paul bald. He is always bald in such images, one more reason to like him.
- **[2: 1.12-14]** Today we are studying something Paul wrote, Philippians 1.12-18a. When I say "a" I mean the first part of 1.18.
 - We should always remember that the verse numbers are not original to the text: they were imposed on the Greek text in the sixteenth century by a single scholar named Robert Estienne, and implemented shortly thereafter by the English translation known as the Geneva Bible, on which the King James partially was based. They are helpful to identify which verse we mean, but sometimes Estienne's judgment of where a verse starts or ends was off a little.

Philippians 1.12-14 NET: I want you to know, brothers and sisters [in Philippi], that my situation has actually turned out to advance the gospel: The whole imperial guard and everyone else knows that I am in prison for the sake of Christ, and most of the brothers and sisters [in Rome], having confidence in the Lord because of my imprisonment, now more than ever dare to speak the word fearlessly.

- † **[3: brothers]** The NET Bible uses “brothers and sisters” to translate the Greek word ἀδελφοί. ἀδελφοί in κοινή Greek could mean “brothers” or “brothers and sisters,” or even “fellow members” of the church.
- What is important is that this term of endearment reflects the deep love of the relationships in the church. We talked two weeks ago about the new κοινωνία [or fellowship] called “the church” and the strong bonds between members. Paul calls the Philippian believers and the believers in Rome his brothers and sisters.
- † **[4: I want...]** Paul begins with “I want you to know” to highlight a defining idea, something that he really does want them to know, because it will make a big point in his argument.
- If you wrote a letter from prison, you would probably tell your friends how you were doing and what you were experiencing. Not Paul. His concern for himself is how his imprisonment affects the gospel mission; his concern for the Philippians is that they learn that his imprisonment actually has helped to advance or further the gospel mission.
- † **[5: advance]** How did Paul react to being imprisoned? Did he sulk? did he despair? did he try to blend in? No, he continued pursuing the gospel mission, regardless of his circumstances!
- Had his part in the gospel mission been impaired by his imprisonment? No! Paul’s imprisonment furthered or advanced the gospel, allowing him to bring the gospel to all the guards and many others in Rome, and his actions encouraged other believers in the area to pursue the gospel mission with more boldness.
 - **[6: actually]** The Greek word μάλλον means “actually” in this context. The term “actually” here signals to us that Paul expects this news to surprise his readers, to be a surprising alternative to their negative expectation, and that he is countering an argument from the antagonists.
 - And Paul might have chosen the word “advance” [προκοπή in Greek] because they would expect the word for hindrance [προσκοπή; one letter difference]. When they saw this, they would say, “Wait, is that a typo? did Paul misspell that word?” The wordplay highlights the surprise distinction.
 - From the letter as a whole, we believe the Philippians were wondering if Paul was out of God’s favor, because God had not delivered Paul out of jail for the past several years. They no doubt also wondered how Paul could carry on as a missionary if he was in jail. Paul is putting those doubts to rest.
- † **[7: context]** At the start of this letter, Paul and Timothy identified themselves as slaves of Christ and reminded the Philippians they were saints in Christ regardless of life’s circumstances. Then Paul expressed his thankfulness for the Philippians in the past partnering with him in the gospel mission and expressed his confidence that God would complete that work in them. Then Paul prayed that they would grow spiritually to where they could discern what was of God and what was not, knowing that would result in them continuing to believe in the true gospel and partnering with Paul in the gospel mission.
- 1.12 starts with a Greek connector that signals a new idea related to what has just been said. Why does Paul offer them this encouragement about his imprisonment at this point in the letter, right after praying they would discern what is correct? The inference we should draw,

which the Philippians should have drawn, is that Paul is in prison by God's will to advance the gospel, not as a sign of God's punishment or abandonment!

- Being jailed is a negative experience, but instead of hindering his mission work, Paul says it advanced the gospel mission. Greek scholar Steven Runge says Paul is dropping a theological bomb on their flawed perspective about his situation, he is shattering their delusions.

† **[8: imperial guard + everyone else]** Because of Paul's imprisonment, the whole imperial guard has heard the gospel of Christ.

- These were elite soldiers, who primarily served as a special bodyguard for Caesar. They also acted like secret police and spies and provided security for the games in the city. Perhaps they also guarded those likely to end up as victims fed to the lions at those games.
- The way Paul wrote in Greek "the imperial guard and everyone else" suggests "everyone else" were the others employed directly by Caesar.
- All these people now knew Paul was in chains for the gospel. Surely they had not all met Paul, so those who had must have started talking about him and what he said, and this must have created some social buzz. Today we would note Paul had thousands of "shared" postings on Facebook.
- I saw on YouTube that the official Pokémon channel has 1.3M subscribers, and the video of Alola Forms and Z-Moves for Pokémon Sun and Pokémon Moon [whatever those are] had 3.2M views, upwards of 33,000 comments, and no doubt many thousands of "shares." Another sign the end might be approaching, at least of our culture. But my point is this kind of thing was happening with Paul's teaching among the highest servants of Caesar, except it was all word of mouth, which makes it even more impressive.

† **[9: for the sake of Christ]** Paul said they all knew he was in prison for the sake of Christ.

- Paul was arrested because of his defense and confirmation of the gospel of Christ in Jerusalem, which angered non-believers there.
- Paul remained in prison because of his loyalty to Christ: he would rather suffer in prison for the gospel than compromise and get out. Normally soldiers would think of the chains as representing the power of Caesar, the state, but they also were evidence of Christ's power in Paul's life, that he was willing to suffer imprisonment for the gospel of Christ.
- As a result of Paul's imprisonment, they all now had heard the gospel, and it seems that is why God wanted Paul in prison.
- How Paul wrote this in Greek suggests he is in jail because he is *in Christ*, and part of his discipleship is to be a slave of Christ, willing to suffer for Christ, or as he will say later in the letter, to share in Christ's sufferings as he experiences the power of Christ's resurrection [3.10].

† **[10: top line]** This offers a contrast in top-line and bottom-line reasoning. Using human reasoning [what we call the bottom line], it seems at least like this is the end of Paul's career and ministry, maybe even his life, so it seems like God is not working to help Paul, not answering the Philippian prayers for his freedom, and therefore it makes sense to think God might be angry at Paul and the Philippians or that God has abandoned them.

- But really God is using these trying circumstances to advance the gospel mission. The top line perspective based on God's revelation is that this suffering was part of God's plan, it had a good purpose for the gospel. Thus the Philippian readers and we should infer that our suffering also might serve some purpose for God, and therefore we should be encouraged as we endure it.
 - This is why it is so important to take our thoughts captive, not only to ask whether our thought is from God, the flesh, the world, or evil, but also to ask whether our whole way of thinking is based on biblical revelation or human logic without that revelation. We can easily misinterpret things that happen to us, assigning them a theological value that is unwarranted by scripture, but which seems to make sense to flawed human reasoning from our upbringing and culture.
 - In the lament psalms, an author like David will begin lamenting his miserable circumstances and maybe even shout at God for not helping, but by the end he is praising and thanking God because he trusts in God's future deliverance. Note that it is not that the circumstances change, it is that the attitude changes as the psalmist adopts God's top line perspective.
- † **[11: the word]** How we interpret our own suffering and how we decide to react will affect other people. Our decisions are not just about ourselves or just between ourselves and God, they can inspire or discourage those around us, even people we never meet. Part of following Christ is to witness to non-believers and fellow believers as to the reality of our faith in the gospel we share.
- Paul's strong witness for Christ in even the most dire circumstances, his continued walk in faith and obedience despite personal suffering and sacrifice, not only resulted in many conversions of people to faith in Christ, but also in the encouragement of other believers to trust in the Lord enough to become more bold in sharing the gospel!
 - Scholar G. Walter Hansen wrote, "When believers heard that Paul used his chains as an opportunity to express his faith in Christ, even to the palace guard, they were emboldened to proclaim Christ fearlessly even when they might have been intimidated to keep their mouths shut."
- † **[12: dare]** "Dare" translates the Greek word *τολμάω*, which is to show boldness or resolution in the face of danger, opposition, or a problem [BDAG].
- The other Roman believers now had more courage, more boldness, more resolution or intentionality to share the gospel despite the danger of violence or imprisonment for themselves and their families.
 - In much of the world, Christians have these same fears today. They too must be emboldened by Paul's example to dare to speak the word fearlessly in their societies. What about those of us who live in a place where our worst fear is mild mockery and social exclusion, should we not also be bolder to speak the word of the gospel of Jesus Christ, if we truly believe? Should not we be inspired by Paul's example also?
- † As we will see in a couple of weeks, the Philippians were starting to suffer because of their faith, because of their defense and confirmation of the gospel.
- One reason Christians suffered in a town like Philippi was that they no longer in good conscience could participate in the emperor cult activities. In the ruins of Philippi, there is a cultic temple right in the center of town. Everyone took part in these ceremonies, it was part of the social fabric of the community. To withdraw from the activity was to snub the people and dangerously

hint at disloyalty to the emperor. This was a town largely comprised of former soldiers, who would have scorned those few who were turning away to Christ.

- But Paul was witnessing to the elite soldiers of the emperor himself! And the Roman believers as a result were boldly witnessing in the capital. In this passage, Paul is encouraging the Philippians to continue suffering with him for the gospel.
- Though evil can bind the messenger in chains, it cannot bind the message! In fact, Caesar's chains unleashed the power of the gospel of Christ in Rome!

† My former mentor, Bob McNabb, was a missionary church planter in Thailand for ten years. He told me in Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim countries, these issues are still very real today. The religions of these lands so permeate every aspect of life, that when you proclaim faith in Christ you are removing yourself from the social fabric of the society.

- This augments the hostility you already would expect when you reject the predominant religion in a strongly religious culture; it in fact makes you a pariah, as you lose your family, your friends, your job, and your participation in countless little cultural norms.
- As a result, those who are bold enough to confess faith, to defend and confirm the gospel, are all-in at the church, embracing their brothers and sisters in Christ as true family, pouring their lives into the gospel mission, Christian ministry, and church fellowship, a lot like what happened in churches in Philippi and other Roman cities so long ago. Nobody wants to be persecuted, but I long to see the same effects on the church here.

† **[13: 1.14-18a]** Let's re-read 1.14 and continue through 1.18a.

Philippians 1.14-18a NET: ... most of the brothers and sisters [in Rome], having confidence in the Lord because of my imprisonment, now more than ever dare to speak the word fearlessly. Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. The latter do so from love because they know that I am placed here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, because they think they can cause trouble for me in my imprisonment. What is the result? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed, and in this I rejoice.

† **[14: placed]** Notice that in 1.16 Paul mentions he has been "placed" for the defense of the gospel. The Greek verb *κεῖμαι* could mean that God *set* Paul right where he wanted him, in prison, so Paul would continue his defense of the gospel there.

- Or it could mean that God *appointed* Paul for the defense of the gospel, a subtle reference to Paul being appointed as an apostle by Christ. Paul brings up his apostleship in most of his letters, because it is a source of his theology and adds to his credibility: he has apostolic authority, granted by Christ, and is empowered by the Holy Spirit to write binding teaching, some of which would become scripture in the New Testament. If he is talking about his apostolic appointment, notice that this was not negated by imprisonment nor did imprisonment reflect that appointment being taken away.
- Perhaps Paul is referring to both these issues. Certainly his imprisonment was part of God's plan for Paul and his gospel mission. In Matthew 16.24, Jesus said we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him! Are we willing to see this in our circumstances, when we are suffering, instead of thinking God has abandoned or cursed us?

- † **[15: preaching]** Preaching Christ in 1.15 is the same as speaking the word in 1.14: it is preaching the gospel, preaching about Christ crucified and resurrected to be our savior from sin.
- In 1.14, Paul said most of the believers in Rome had been emboldened by his example to preach the gospel even more fearlessly. Now he elaborates. **[16: allies]** Some Roman believers *know* that God appointed Paul as an apostle and placed Paul in prison for the sake of the gospel mission; they understand that there is nothing shameful in his imprisonment. These people are preaching Christ as Paul's loving allies and partners.
 - **[17: rivals]** Others are preaching Christ out of selfish ambition, *supposing* to cause Paul pain as they seek to usurp Paul's place. These people look to cause Paul some inner distress, probably by building up their ministries and reputations while he languishes in prison.
 - Contrast these two groups: a selfless group who are aligned with Paul [whom they love] to do the work of Christ out of goodwill; and a group who are selfishly, fleshly ambitious, envious of Paul's ministry and hoping he will feel bad as they surpass him in influence. Based on 1.14, all are brothers and sisters in the church, true believers, with the correct gospel. That fact should lead us to check our motives for our participation in ministry, for our desire to build this church: are we out to glorify Christ or ourselves?
- † **[18: result]** I love how Paul reacts to this situation. The NET Bible takes some of the fun out of it with their "What is the result?" translation. I would translate like the Holman Christian Standard Bible or the NIV: they record Paul asking "What does it matter?"
- Paul's reaction to these Roman believers who dislike him is "What does it matter?" "So what?" He is not affected by those who oppose him, so long as they are preaching Christ accurately. And they are: he says in 1.14 and 1.18 that they are proclaiming Christ, speaking the word of the gospel.
 - Paul does not live for himself, so he is not troubled by his imprisonment or the idea of others surpassing him in influence. All he cares about is glorifying Christ and pursuing the gospel mission. So he rejoices at Christ being preached, regardless of whether it hurts his position personally. He chose to rejoice! Again this is something we should emulate. We should check our hearts: are we guided by petty jealousies and selfish ambitions or is our only concern to have fruitful ministry for Christ, accurate presentation of the gospel, everywhere?
- † If they had been preaching the gospel incorrectly, like the antagonists, then Paul would have been against them and upset with their work. But these people had good content even if their motives were bad. Paul critically characterized those motives as envy, rivalry, and selfish ambition, but he chose not to care about their motives if the true gospel was preached.
- If another church in town were more successful than us, and considered themselves rivals with us, but were preaching accurately, I would praise God for their work, even as I prayed for a better relationship.
 - I think our problem around here is there are many whose motives are good but the content of their gospel is bad. Some well-intentioned people in this area preach a gospel of works or a gospel of grace + works or a gospel of grace but then you need works to keep your salvation or a gospel with an incorrect or incomplete identification of Jesus or a gospel that neglects the atoning work of Jesus. What good are those gospels? They can only lead you astray.

- Let us check both our message and our hearts, so we also will help advance the gospel mission.
- † Summing up Paul’s attitude, scholar Gordon Fee wrote in his commentary, “He has learned by the grace of God to see everything from the divine perspective. This is not wistfulness, but deep conviction – that God had worked out his own divine intentions through the death and resurrection of Christ, and that by his Spirit he is carrying them out in the world through the church, and therefore through both himself and others.”
- In other words, Paul sees the big picture and trusts in God’s plan, even if it required Paul to suffer, because his singular goal is to advance the gospel of Christ and bring God glory.

Conclusion

- † **[19: title]** Paul wanted the Philippians to know that his imprisonment for Christ had resulted in the advance of the gospel mission. The elite soldiers of the imperial guard and others working in the highest levels of the national government had heard the gospel and observed Paul’s witness through sacrifice and suffering. The Roman church had observed Paul’s courage to share the gospel even while in prison, and had responded with greater courage to share the gospel themselves.
- Paul wanted this to impress and encourage the Philippians, as it should us. Like the Philippians, we too suffer through many things, and God calls on us to make sacrifices to truly follow Christ as his slaves. Whether we suffer persecution or health problems or financial setbacks or other disappointments in life, we can inspire praise for Christ and faith in his gospel if we choose to respond to hardship like Paul did, continuing to walk by faith and obedience, trusting in God and his plan, accepting the need to sacrifice and suffer in order to shine God’s light the brightest, and relying on the Holy Spirit to sustain us and empower us moment by moment.
 - We also can learn to rejoice even while suffering. It’s not easy; I won’t kid you, you are still going to suffer, but we also can experience a transcendent joy, if we accept the truth of God’s revelation. We have to trust God and his plan, even when we have to suffer; we need to accept that suffering is part of following Christ; we have to learn to live for Christ and to rejoice in Christ’s saving work for us, the work we now do for him, and the work others are doing for him; we need to remember that our resolve to walk in faith and obedience even when suffering could be a strong inspiration to others, both believers and non-believers, as a witness that our faith and empowerment are real, and thus our suffering might serve a purpose for God. In all this we can choose to rejoice.
 - LeeAnn and I prayerfully are working on absorbing this perspective for ourselves. I hope you will too. It’s not easy. I have fifty years of fleshly human thinking to overcome! But by God’s grace, we all can grow to have his perspectives and his attitudes, to be informed by scripture, both led and fed by the Holy Spirit, so we can rejoice even when suffering. That will be our most convincing testimony for Christ! Let’s pray. . .