

WORKING OUT GOD'S GOOD WORK IN YOUR HEART

Studies in the Book of Philippians - Part Five

Sunday, January 31th, 2016, 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #1860

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HOW OUR LIVES ARE TO MAGNIFY CHRIST IN THIS WORLD

Philippians 1:12-18 - "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, [13] so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. [14] And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. [15] Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. [16] The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. [17] The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. [18] What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice...."

Our text opens with five words that can roll off the tongue quicker than the mind can process them - *"I want you to know...."* (12). As the Philippian believers contemplate Paul's circumstances in prison they are moved to prayer and compassion. They love Paul and are concerned about his condition. Paul wants to tell them something they may be missing. He *"wants them to know"* something that isn't as obvious about what he's going through, but which is the most important thing they can learn. So Paul's about to say some things that aren't quickly *self evident* about his imprisonment for Jesus.

That's what today's teaching is all about. And we need to *"know"* this because it teaches us *how Jesus is magnified* in all the circumstances of our lives. And there's nothing more important to *"know"* than that.

1) PAUL WANTS THE PHILIPPIAN CHRISTIANS TO KNOW HE DOESN'T EVALUATE HIS LIFE BY THE PLEASANTNESS OR UNPLEASANTNESS OF HIS CIRCUMSTANCES

Philippians 1:12 - "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel...."

The striking feature of Paul's response to their questions and concerns for his welfare is he makes almost no direct reference whatsoever to what is happening to him. He will hint at it a bit later on. But as he launches into his response about what's happening to *him* he begins by talking about what's happening to the *gospel*.

"Paul, we're worried about you. We fear for your life. You're not a young man anymore. What's happening to you? Please let us know!"

"Let me tell you what's happening to me. The *gospel* is being advanced. *That's* what's happening!"

Could this be what it means to be *"in Christ Jesus?"* Is this what Paul means when he says *"For me to live is Christ....?"* Is this what Paul means when he begins this letter to the Philippian believers calling himself a *"slave"* of Jesus Christ. It seems for Paul these were not thoughtless religious labels. They were the most *accurate description* he could come with for the way he actually *lived* his life and *viewed* everything that happened in it.

Paul didn't know how to *separate* describing his *life* from the *gospel*. True, he says certain things had *"happened"* to him. But he only gives them glancing attention - *"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel...."* (12). *"What has happened to me...."* That's it. That's all he says. He doesn't even say *what* was happening.

If you want to know how it is with *him* the only way he can paint that for you is to describe how it is with the advance of the *gospel*. And Paul wants the Philippian believers to *see* this in his response. "Here is something *I want you to know* (12). This is how life in Christ *manifests* itself. There is no other *measuring stick* for how it is with me than how it is with *Christ's kingdom* and the *gospel*."

This is *big*. There is a *talked* about and *sung* about love for Christ and there is a *lived* love for Christ. Ponder it deeply. Paul has sacrificed his life for Jesus Christ and the gospel. For Paul, to live *was* Christ. We all *say* the same thing. But we don't all

mean the same thing. What we frequently mean when we say *“to live is Christ”* is “I’m forgiven and going to heaven when I die.” But that’s not what Paul meant at all. Paul meant when you ask him how it is with his life he can only say, even though he may be scraping his sores in a mouldy prison cell, *“The gospel is advancing! That’s how it is with me.”*

That’s the big picture. That’s Paul’s heart. Now Paul is going to unpack some details. He’s going to describe the process. He tells us *two ways* the gospel was advancing through his circumstances:

2) **CHRIST WAS MAGNIFIED AND THE GOSPEL WAS ADVANCED WHEN PAUL CHOSE SUFFERING FOR THE KINGDOM THAT COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED**

Philippians 1:13 - “...so that it has *become known* throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest *that my imprisonment is for Christ.*”

Paul doesn’t *have* to be in prison. He has committed no real crime. The evident *cause* of his chains is his commitment to and proclamation of Christ. The important words are “...*my imprisonment is for Christ*” (13). People have *noticed* the *reason* for Paul’s imprisonment. Rather than complain and become bitter and react like prisoners usually did, Paul uses his cell as a *lampstand for the light*.

The guards have heard the gospel of Christ from Paul’s lips. In fact, the gospel has reached places it had not been before. How else could the gospel reach the Roman Imperial prison guard except through a passionately Christian prisoner? This is the point to which Paul fastens his mind. Paul is working out the *logic* of God’s purpose in his imprisonment.

In other words, the *effect* of Paul’s imprisonment is much greater than the Rome’s *intention*. As people see Paul’s commitment to Christ, and as they observe he *chooses* chains over *renouncing* Christ, the preciousness of Christ becomes modelled by Paul and pondered by the guards and prisoners.

What would make a Roman citizen stay in prison when he didn’t have to. It was only his proclamation of the gospel that held Paul in chains. And everyone around Paul was shocked and confused by Paul’s priorities.

People notice what you *prize*, not what you *praise*. They examine what you give the most *time* to. They listen to your most passionate topic of *conversation*. They evaluate what you won’t be budged from. And, perhaps most of all, they are enticed to what pumps the most *joy* into your life. That’s it. They are constantly looking to see what makes your heart sing.

What is there about your actual daily life that makes people ask questions about Jesus Christ? You can’t fake this. It’s not the “I love Jesus” bumper sticker or the “What Would Jesus Do” bracelet. They want to see a 24/7 demonstration of what it means to be *“in Christ Jesus.”*

And the time this becomes most refined - most laser-like in clarity - is what makes your heart sing when they can’t see external reason for a song. Paul’s imprisonment made Jesus look precious because Paul is more pleased with the *advance* of the gospel than he was upset at the *loss* of everything else. He wouldn’t avoid the prison by abandoning Christ, so obviously Christ must be exceedingly precious.

I said there were *two* ways in which Paul’s imprisonment advanced the gospel. The *first* way was the gospel was reaching *new ears*. It was reaching the Roman guard and the fellow prisoners. We *know* this is the case because of the way Paul wraps up his letter to the Philippians - **Philippians 4:21-22** - *“Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. [22] All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household.”*

Now we consider the *second* way Paul’s imprisonment advanced the gospel:

3) **SEEING PAUL’S SACRIFICE FOR THE GOSPEL GAVE COURAGE TO OTHER CHRISTIANS TO BOLDLY PROCLAIM CHRIST, EVEN IN THE FACE OF DANGER AND PERSECUTION**

Philippians 1:14 - “And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

This verse is simply astounding. Not only did the gospel reach fresh *ears* through Paul’s imprisonment, it also opened fresh

mouths. Not only were the unevangelized reached, witnesses were made bold.

Someone has to be **first** to stand up for Christ against the mentality of the pack. Some serious, unintimidated Christian has to be the **pace-setter**. You are not the only one who benefits from your open, sacrificial commitment to Christ. Perhaps, without you being aware of it, by seeing my efforts, other Christians will pick up the pace in their walk with Jesus.

This is a wonderful truth. I may or may not do the best job ever in my small service to Christ. There may be others who will teach better or learn more or reach more of the unsaved. But whatever I lack in gift or talent, if some other Christian moves on to greatness in ministry because they were kicked in the pants by my example my reward will be meted out, not only on the basis of **my** talents, but **theirs** as well.

Please note that this lesson is drawn right out of our text. Paul didn't measure the success of his ministry in Philippi **just** by what **he** was doing in Philippi. He evaluated his ministry by the number of **other** people who were propelled into ministry in **other** places by what they saw of **his** commitment to Christ in prison.

Get the big picture. There is more going on than you think. Faithfulness - especially in the face of difficulty and opposition - spawns courage in others that you may only hear about when Jesus comes again. **Prove** to someone what God can do with a very ordinary person. This gives Christ great glory.

Please allow me to go just a bit farther with this great truth. I think it helps frame some tricky theological questions. What about people who almost seem **called upon** to deal with hardships others rarely face? Why does that happen? Could **part** of the answer be God wants to **prove** His keeping power to others by the way He keeps **your** life strong through trial?

Could it be He knows others will find it easier to treasure God through trials - unexplainable trials - because they've come to believe maybe He **can** keep them because they've already **seen** Him keep you? I say it again. Your commitment to joyful sacrifice for Christ gives courage to those you may never meet. Treasure this truth.

4) **FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR JOY BE UNBENDING IN YOUR DEFENCE OF GOSPEL TRUTH BUT ALWAYS LEAVE PEOPLE'S HEARTS AND MOTIVES WITH THE LORD**

Philippians 1:15-18 - "**Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. [16] The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. [17] The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. [18] What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice...."**

What gave Paul's imprisonment power to reach the lost was his **joy** in Christ Jesus, especially when he had lost everything else. And what gave other Christians **courage** from Paul's imprisonment was his willingness to suffer for the gospel.

Then something very important happens in our text. **Verses 15 through 18** fit the context by explaining how Paul **resisted** and **defeated** one of the greatest joy killers in all the world.

In essence, he kept his joy centered in the gospel rather than his own reputation or concerns. He kept his joy by considering only how the actions of others effected the **gospel**. He wouldn't dwell for a moment on how their actions effected **him**.

We need to pause over these verses for just a minute. We need to carefully separate what they **do** say from what they **don't** say. Paul rejoiced even if these people proclaimed the truth about Christ from very corrupt hearts. He's very clear that these people **weren't** sincere. They proclaimed Christ out of "**rivalry**" trying merely to "**afflict**" Paul (17).

They were probably jealous of the success Paul's ministry had in Rome and wanted to turn people against him while he was shut up in prison. They were probably proclaiming Christ while they were belittling and slandering Paul. And Paul hears about all this while he can do absolutely nothing about it. If you're not very careful and very spiritual something like that can destroy your soul. But Paul isn't worried about any of that because these people are, at least in Paul's words, still "**proclaiming Christ**" (17,18).

What you **won't** find in these verses, nor in any other verses in the New Testament, is any love or joy in the heart of Paul for people who were spreading a **different** gospel or **false** teaching about Christ.

Galatians 1:8-9 - "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. [9] As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed."

2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15 - "For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough....[13] For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. [14] And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. [15] So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds."

This is Paul's standard response to people who preach "**another gospel.**" They may be very sincere. They may be morally upright. But Paul has no use for any of them for ten seconds if they aren't proclaiming New Testament truth about Jesus Christ.

But the flip side in our text today is Paul will treasure **any** true presentation of the gospel, regardless of the motives of the one presenting it. His heart is so **passionate about Christ** and so **removed from self-interest** his joy can't be diluted by what others **think** of him or what they may **do** to him. To Paul Christ is all that counts. "**Christ is proclaimed,**" says Paul, "**and in that I will rejoice**" (18)