



IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH
SERIES: TOGETHER FOR THE GOSPEL
SCRIPTURE: PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18
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INTRODUCTION

Last week, we began a new series called “Together for the Gospel.” As we think about that theme in a Sunday school setting, let’s remember the big idea we introduced: true joy and unity are found in gospel partnerships. When someone believes the gospel, it doesn’t just affect one part of life, it reshapes everything. We begin to orient our whole lives around the good news of Jesus Christ.

Think about the different seasons of life. In times of sorrow, where do we turn? As believers, we turn to the gospel for comfort, remembering what Christ has done for us. In times of peace and blessing, we again turn to the gospel, but this time with gratitude, thanking God for His grace. And in moments when God gives us opportunities—whether in conversations, relationships, or unexpected encounters—we share the gospel openly and confidently. Because our lives are centered on the gospel, our relationships are shaped by it too. That’s why gospel partnerships bring such deep and lasting joy. There really is

no stronger bond than sharing in the mission and message of the gospel together.

Now, as we move into this week's lesson, we're focusing on a new theme: joy comes from knowing that the gospel can be preached in all circumstances. No situation is beyond God's ability to use for His purposes. In our Scripture passage today, we find Paul writing to the Philippians from prison. And yet, what's remarkable is that his joy has not disappeared. Instead of despairing, Paul rejoices because he sees that even his imprisonment is being used to advance the gospel. While prison may have limited Paul physically, it could not stop the message of Christ from spreading.

Text

Philippians 1:12-18

¹²I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

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

Explanation

As we begin to unpack this passage, notice Paul's heart. He knows that the Philippians might be tempted to feel sorry for him or discouraged because he is in prison. But instead of inviting their pity, Paul reassures them. He wants them to understand that he is joyful and hopeful. Why? Because the gospel is advancing.

It's interesting how Paul begins in verse 12: "I want you to know..." If most of us were writing a letter from prison, what would we focus on? We might describe how difficult things are such as the conditions, the discomfort, and the hardships. But Paul's priority is completely different. The main thing he

wants his friends to know is not about his suffering, but about the progress of the gospel. His circumstances are secondary; the mission of Christ is primary.

This wasn't just a one-time perspective for Paul, but a consistent pattern. Earlier, when Paul and Silas were imprisoned in Philippi, they didn't respond with despair. Instead, they prayed, sang hymns, and shared the gospel with the jailer (Acts 16:25-34). Later, when Paul wrote what we believe to be his final letter, 2 Timothy, he again mentioned his chains (2 Tim. 1:16-17). Yet even then, he focused on how the message of Christ continued to be proclaimed. He wrote in 2 Timothy 4:17, "But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it." Over and over, we see that Paul viewed his hardships not as obstacles, but as opportunities for the gospel.

In this passage, Paul highlights two specific ways the gospel was advancing.

First, he explains that the whole imperial guard had come to know that his imprisonment was because of Christ. These guards were not ordinary soldiers. They were elite, tasked with protecting the emperor. And yet, here they are, assigned to watch Paul. Rather than seeing this as a setback, Paul saw it as a mission field. As guards rotated in and out, and as visitors came to see him, Paul consistently spoke about Jesus. Over time, it became widely known that he was in chains for Christ. What an amazing reminder that God can place us in unexpected situations to reach people we might never otherwise encounter.

Some of you might like to note how Acts 28:16-31 aligns with Paul's description here in Philippians. According to Acts, when Paul arrives in Rome, he was able to stay by himself, but with a soldier guarding him. We probably shouldn't think of Paul in a dungeon or jail cell, but maybe something more like a house arrest. On one occasion, a great number of Jews had visited him in his lodging where Paul expounded morning till evening about the kingdom of God and about Jesus from the Law and Prophets (Acts 28:23). Acts 28:24 tells us that not everyone, but some were convinced by Paul and believed. The book of Acts concludes, "He lived there for two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ and all boldness and without hindrance (Acts 28:30-31).

Second, Paul says that other believers became more confident because of his example. Seeing Paul's boldness, they were encouraged to speak the word of God without fear. This is an important lesson for us: bold faith is often contagious. When one person steps out in courage, it can inspire others to do the same. But Paul makes it clear that this wasn't just human influence—it was

the work of God in their hearts. They became “confident in the Lord.” Their courage didn’t come from thinking they were safe, but from trusting God even in the face of risk.

It is worth noting that Paul says, “most” of the brothers. Imagine what that might look like in our own community. What if the majority of believers around us spoke about Christ with that kind of boldness? What kind of impact could that have?

Now, Paul is joyful and optimistic, but he is also honest and realistic. He doesn’t pretend everything is perfect. He acknowledges that while many are preaching Christ with good motives, some are not. Some preach out of envy and rivalry, while others preach out of goodwill.

Those who preach out of goodwill are motivated by love—love for God, love for the gospel, and perhaps even love and support for Paul. They understand that Paul’s ministry is about defending and proclaiming the truth of the gospel. Even in prison, Paul’s focus is not on defending himself, but on defending the message of Christ.

Scripture gives us a clear picture of Paul’s motives. Here are a few examples:

- 2 Cor. 2:17 – For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.
- 1 Cor. 9:19–23 – ¹⁹For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²²To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.
- 2 Cor. 5:11–15 – ¹¹Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. ¹²We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. ¹³For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵and 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.

- Rom. 1:14-15 - ¹⁴I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. ¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

He speaks of sincerity, of becoming all things to all people to win some, of being compelled by the love of Christ, and of being eager to preach the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation. These passages remind us that Paul's life was driven by a deep love for God and a desire to see others come to know Him.

On the other hand, there were those who preached Christ out of selfish ambition. Paul says they were motivated by envy and rivalry, even hoping to cause him distress. We don't know exactly how they thought they would afflict Paul. Perhaps they believed they could outshine him, gain more followers, or diminish his influence. Whatever their reasoning, their motives were not pure. One wonders if Paul had a similar group in mind when he wrote Romans 16:

And yet, Paul's response is surprising. He does not become bitter or defensive. He does not engage in rivalry. Instead, he rejoices. Why? Because despite their wrong motives, they are still preaching Christ. They are not spreading false doctrine or a different message; they are proclaiming the true gospel.

This of course does not mean Paul approves of selfish ambition. Rather, it shows us his priorities. His greatest concern is that Christ is proclaimed. He refuses to be drawn into jealousy or competition because his focus is on the bigger picture of advancing the gospel. In this, Paul models the very attitude he later teaches in Philippians 2:3-4: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." His life demonstrates what it means to live with gospel-centered humility and joy.

So as we reflect on this lesson, we are reminded that our circumstances do not limit God's work. Whether in hardship or ease, whether surrounded by support or facing opposition, the gospel continues to move forward. And like Paul, we can find joy, not in our situation, but in the unchanging truth that Christ is being proclaimed.

Discussion Questions

- Have you ever found that the gospel advances through suffering more than through comfort?
- What stands out to you about Paul in this passage?
- For Paul, the *whole* imperial guard knew that he was in prison for Christ. Of the people around you, how many people know that you are a Christ follower?
- Have you ever been emboldened for Christ after seeing someone else first demonstrate boldness? Do you think anyone has become emboldened after watching you?
- Paul understood that some preached Christ with poor motives. Do you ever find yourselves considering the motives of others? Can it be helpful or not? How so?
- We can be honest, do you ever struggle with having the proper motives behind your ministry?
- How common today, do you think there is envy and rivalry among Christians or between churches?

Conclusions or Applications

TOGETHER FOR THE GOSPEL IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

Philippians records how Paul was in prison, yet the gospel advanced. Scripture is clear that the gospel can advance under any circumstance. Paul, in 2 Timothy 2:8-10 is worth noting:

“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! 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.”

A person might be physical bound, but the word of God is never bound. Faithful witnessing will produce fruit. The word of God will go forth.

So too, 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 reads,

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”

Though our outer bodies might be wasting away, the life of Jesus can be manifested in our bodies. When we proclaim the gospel even in hard situations, it shows that the power belongs to God and not to us. Let each of us be faithful messengers for Jesus even in the midst of hard things.

TOGETHER FOR THE GOSPEL WITH RIGHT MOTIVES

Our text today also reminds us to fight for right motives. We all know the temptation of doing ministry for the sake of being seen by others. Jesus warned of practicing righteousness for the sake of receiving human praise. He once cautioned, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 6:1). It can be helpful anytime we have ministry opportunity, to pray and ask the Lord to help us to serve out of genuine love and humility. We can put our motives in check and we can redirect compliments and recognition to praising God.