



PHILIPPIANS: THE GOSPEL ADVANCES IN THE MESS

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Jeff Vanderstelt

Scripture Reference: Philippians 1:12-18

Hi, my name is Dolores and I'll be reading scripture today. We will be reading out of Philippians chapter 1 verse 12 through 18. Please stand for the reading of God's word.

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

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Good morning family. I want to just start with prayer before we dive into this text together. Let's pray.

Father, we come to you and we continue to thank you for your ongoing presence in our lives during these days. Thank you for your provision that you take care of our needs. Thank you that we belong to your family so we're not alone. And Lord we thank you for your word that we get to hear from you again this morning. We pray as we look at it together that you would inspire us, convict us, and give us great confidence in the gospel during this time. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

I want to remind you that Paul is writing from prison in Rome to the church, the house church in Philippi, and Philippi is a Roman colony, so it's a mirror reflection of Rome. In fact, they designed it to look just like you were in Rome.

So what is happening in Rome with Paul will definitely affect what happens to the church in Philippi. And Paul wants to encourage them and let them know that the gospel still advances, that the gospel advances in the mess of all the stuff we face in the world. And it's true for us too that the gospel will continue to move forward, that God will still accomplish his purposes in any situation.

That what seems like a hindrance maybe to the church in Philippi to the people that know Paul really well was actually not a hindrance. That what seems like a hindrance leads to gospel advancement. That's what we're going to see in this text, and it's true for us, too family during COVID-19 we need to have a change of our perspective.

It's so easy for us to look at what we're facing as a hindrance instead of an opportunity as something that's going to keep the gospel from moving forward instead of something that's actually going to thrust it forward.

So we're going to see in this text is that the gospel advances first in you, we'll see that in Paul, but also happens in you. Then it goes to others, and then as we grow in our confidence in Jesus we'll spur on more and more believers to share the gospel as well. So first of all, the gospel advances in you.

Aside from Jesus Christ, there probably is no other man in all of church history who suffered more than the apostle Paul. I mean this, this guy experienced multiple near death floggings. Was stoned, almost died through that. Went through several shipwrecks, was rejected on all sides, including from Christians and Christian leaders. Then he's falsely accused. He's put in chains, he's brought to prison in Rome. Where he's been there for about two years without even getting a trial.

And so you'd look at his situation, you'd think, man, this, this is the end for Paul. He doesn't have a ministry anymore. You think the church in Philippi has probably going, man, what's to become of our partner in the gospel?

And it's interesting how Paul starts his address in verse 12 look at chapter 1 Philippians chapter 1 verse 12 he says, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

Now notice this first, Paul doesn't even describe in detail what happened to him. I mean, he's writing his letter in chains, chained to a guard who's with him all the time. So he's probably got skin is worn down from the metal coming across this skin over and over again, every time he moves. He never gets to be by himself. I'm sure he's feeling incredibly claustrophobic. I mean, just imagine what he's going through. And I'll tell you, if I was writing the letter, I probably would have started and said, Doxa, want to let you know it's really bad here. I am not comfortable. I am so tired of being around this -- I probably would have complained. I mean, I think my tendency would be to want to have you feel pity for me.

But Paul doesn't do that. Paul just simply says, I want you to know that what happened to me and that's it, and you wonder how in the world can he do this? And here's the key. Paul isn't looking at his chains. Paul is looking through his chains. He's not fixated on the object of his suffering. He's seeing his suffering as a lens through which he can see the work of God and see what God's up to.

He's able to do this, look through his chains instead of be consumed by looking at his chains because he is absolutely obsessed with the gospel. And he's obsessed with the advancement of the gospel. See, the apostle Paul was so radically changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. He went from a man who was persecuting followers of Jesus to becoming one who is being persecuted because he follows and worships Jesus.

And his heart was completely transformed by Jesus Christ. The gospel was the power of God that saved Paul forever. And so he is captivated by it. He loves it. He is obsessed with it. It's the greatest news and the most incredible power that Paul has ever experienced.

And he's able, because of his obsession to not look at his chains but see in the suffering success, he's able to look at loss and see gain. He's able to see what others would see as a hindrance, as an opportunity for the gospel to advance.

How about you? During the season, how are you viewing your circumstances? Are you looking at them? Are you looking through them? Are you seeing them as the object of your attention or a lens through which you might be able to observe the work of God bringing about the advancement of his kingdom right now?

I want to ask you this cause this will be a clue for you. What are you most passionate about? What is the passion of your life? What is the pursuit of your life? What is the thing that you are aspiring to, that you're obsessed with? Is it to have a great job, a fulfilling career, to travel, to make a lot of money, to make sure your investment portfolio is set up really well, to get married, maybe have kids, hope your kids turn out really, really great. I mean, what is it?

To be clear, all of those things are good. The problem is they're not good enough to be obsessed with. They're not significant enough to aspire with the aim of your life toward. See, here's the deal, whatever you find yourself chasing after aspiring toward aiming at, whatever you're giving your life to will become for you the greatest obsession.

And if you get it, if you attain to it, if you acquire it, it must be able to satisfy and sustain you in the worst of times. It must be good enough that it'll help you get through the loss of your job. That it'll help you get through the loss of money. That it will help you get rid of the loss of comfort. That it will take you through the situations that are so despairing. Loss of health, eventually loss of life.

Here's the deal, Paul knows that only the gospel of Jesus Christ can absolutely satisfy in the worst of times and sustain through them.

See, remember family, in the gospel we have a God who suffered for us. He loved us so much he took on flesh in the person of Jesus, gave himself on the cross for our sins so that he could overcome the disease of our sin and cleanse us forever from all our sin. And God not only loved us enough to die for us, but he loves us enough to never leave us or forsake us. Not only did he cleanse us from sin, but he cleanses us so that he might come dwell in us by his Spirit so that we would never be alone in this moment, God is with you. You're not alone. If your faith is in Jesus Christ, you've been cleansed of your sins and made a home for God. He comes and dwells with you by his Spirit.

And what's also good about the gospel is not only do we know we're cleansed and that he's with us and will never leave us or forsake us, but Jesus went to the grave and overcame sin and death for you and me, which means God is bigger and more powerful than anything we will face in this moment. He has overcome for us.

And even though we will face death, all of us, we don't have to face death without hope because we know Jesus passed from death to life. So we pass through death to eternal life with him.

See, Paul knows these realities, so when he's in chains facing what will likely be his death, as far as he knows, he knows that he has no need to give into fear. He doesn't have to live as a hopeless man. He has the gospel and he cherishes it and he knows that no matter what happens, that will never change.

Family, what are you obsessed with? Make it the gospel.

As you think about your isolation, remember, God's with you. As you think about your fears, remember, he overcame for you. As you think about your failures, remember, he died to forgive you and make you acceptable before God through Jesus Christ.

As you think about your present needs, remember, God was willing to give you his own son. How will he not also with Jesus give you every other thing that you need right now. And as you think about the future, remember, Jesus is Lord of all. He's already got the future in his hands, secure for you.

See, Paul wants the church to know that the gospel is working in him. It's advancing in him. He wants you to know it's advancing in you too. If you will press in to these truths, the gospel will be to you better news than ever before. In fact, one of the beautiful things about suffering is that it purifies us and it actually enables us to grow deeper roots into Jesus Christ.

Paul also knows that the gospel is advancing to others. He wants the church to be encouraged that the mission did not stop. In fact, it sped up.

Verse 13, So that has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

Now the Imperial guard is made up about 90 sorry, 9,000 elite Roman soldiers who received double honor, double pay, and the most special of tasks. They really are like body guards to Caesar and have authority to really stand up on behalf of Caesar.

Now one of the not so exciting tasks that they were given is that they were also to be chained to imperial prisoners like Paul. So Paul is getting a new guard probably a couple of times a day or a couple times every 24 hours chained to him.

Now just think about this. Paul can't go anywhere and what does God do? God just brings him a new person to come to church every few hours, church in the jail cell. And that guard is going to hear some good news. I'm sure Paul is sitting there, you know, as he's getting ready to be unchained and rechained, he's probably sitting there praying, Okay, Jesus, thank you. I get another one. Here's another one who I get to share the good news with.

And the guard gets chained to him and probably the first thing the guard's going to ask is, Okay, so why you in chains? What's going on? And Paul is probably going to say, Well, I'm in chains because I belong to Jesus Christ. I serve him. Jesus Christ humbly and obediently submitted himself to death on a cross. Because of God's will to send the son Jesus to save us from our sins, Jesus willingly died on a Roman cross under Roman power.

And when he died, he died for my sins. He died for your sins, to forgive you before God. And this same Jesus was buried, but he didn't stay dead. He was raised up to new life. He is the exalted King, the Lord of all. He's above every rule and every authority, and he's called me to proclaim this good news to everybody I can proclaim it to, including you right now. And one day he's going to return and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is the true Lord, that he is the one we were all called to worship.

And the good news is that Jesus died for me so I'm willing to be in chains for him. That he was buried for me, so I'm willing to die for him. That he was raised for me so that he would also raise me to new life one day.

Just imagine, Paul's getting to do that over and over and over and over again. The gospel is not being hindered one bit. It's advancing! And what's amazing is that Paul is able to say the imperial guard, 9,000 soldiers are hearing the gospel. That's gigantic! And he says the rest as well -- and you might want to ask like, Oh, well who are the rest? Well, remember Paul is writing this letter to the church in Philippi to give them the good news of what's going on and when he ends his letter, if we look at it in chapter 4 verse 21 and 22 we hear who some of the rest are.

It says, Greet every Saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

I love it. What Paul is saying is I got to share the gospel probably a couple times a day. They went out to the soldiers, the soldiers spread the news, eventually Caesar's household starts to hear it, and many from Caesar's household come to faith in Jesus Christ.

The gospel is not being hindered at all. The gospel is advancing.

See, Paul can't go anywhere. Paul stuck just like you and me, but God was not stuck. God is everywhere and God can do anything he wants to get the gospel out and to bring the advancement of the gospel through any means he chooses.

We might feel like we're stuck, but I'm telling you family, God's not. He's not stuck. He has this under control. In fact, I'm convinced that we might get to see some of the most fruitful evangelistic efforts we've ever seen as a church right now. If we'll step into that.

If we will let the gospel advance in us personally and then advance through us to those who don't know Jesus, who knows if we won't be looking back 10, 20, 30 years from now and say, That one year when we were all stuck in our homes, but we all realized that God wants the gospel to advance through his people was the time we all had courage to finally tell the truth about Jesus to people who need him desperately.

I mean, what kind of chain reaction might we kick off by believing that God wants to take what feels like a hindrance and make it an advancement through us?

D.A. Carson, during a sermon he preached about Joseph and his situation, shared about the faith journey of Peter O'Brien, he's the author of one of the commentaries that I'm using as I'm studying and preparing for this series. And he shares this story about his faith journey. He says this, When he was a youth, neither of O'Brien's parents were Christians, but his mother became greatly impacted by the faithful witness of a neighbor. This neighbor was a simple lady with sincere faith in Christ, who unfortunately lived with an incurable disease and suffered day after day. But she never complained. Her attitude and witness made a tremendous impact on O'Brien's mother, who eventually came to trust in Christ Jesus as her savior.

Now, humanly speaking, it was because of the simple lady's faith that O'Brien's mother became a Christian. Because of that, O'Brien later believed. Carson goes on to say he would then go on to seminary and get a PhD and then he would go to us to India and make the gospel known for years. After that he went to Australia and he taught and he wrote several extraordinary commentaries, one of which I'm studying from, as I said.

Now suppose you had said this, you had said to the simple suffering woman, here's the deal, if you will glorify Christ in your suffering, then as a consequence Indians are going to be converted. Pastors are going to be trained. Thousands of sermons are going to be preached. All you have to do is suffer faithfully every day.

I'm sure she would have said, you got it. I'm in. I'll do it. If that's the result of my suffering, I'll do it. I'll do it joyfully.

But she didn't know. She didn't know the result of her suffering, but she trusted in a God who is sovereign over it, who can work through it, who brought a woman to faith as a result of it and then a family --

Family, I want you to hear this.

None of us know the result of what's going to happen during this time. We don't know how the gospel transforming us and giving us peace in the midst of the storm, the gospel giving us the sense of presence of God when we feel alone, the way in which we handle ourselves in such a way that online through our media posts, or when we speak over the fence with our neighbor, or walk down the street and yell across the street -- we have no idea how the gospel is advancing in us affecting the gospel going through us -- we have no idea the impact that's going to have and how far reaching it might be, but I want you to believe that it could be. That your conversation with somebody might be the domino that leads to hundreds and thousands of people coming to faith in Jesus.

See, family, we're never going to have a situation like this again, likely. I hope we don't. But it's not a hindrance, it's an opportunity. Don't waste the pandemic on self pity. Don't waste it on selfish ambition. Think about what God might want to do through your life.

If you haven't gone public yet with your faith in Jesus Christ, now is the time. Now is the time for you to share your story. If you haven't yet shared your story like many have, do it. Go online, write it out if you don't want to videotape yourself. Get out, show the world that Jesus is your savior, that you are obsessed with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And if you haven't yet reached out to your neighbors, do so, now. Obviously in proper social distancing, but now's the time. You know where they're at. They're all at home. I mean everybody is at home. I've met more neighbors in the last couple of months than I have in the last five years because they just want to get out and walk. We shot across the street to each other. Our neighbors next door to us joined us for a fire pit the other night. We kept a distance of course, and they brought over a bottle of wine that they drank and so we didn't touch anything, but we just talked for two and a half hours about God and our relationship with God, and it was such a beautiful opportunity to get to be a witness to our neighbors.

Family, don't waste this. We have an incredible opportunity. It's not a hindrance. Yes, we are hindered, but it isn't a hindrance, it's an opportunity.

And as we do that, hope in Christ. Don't get fixated on the chains. Look through the chains for the opportunity to make Christ known, and don't become slaves to fear. That's this next part that Paul wants to show how what he went through spurred others on to be courageous and bold.

Verse 14, Most of the brothers, he says, having become confident in the Lord, listen to that, they become confident, not in themselves, not in the government, not in anybody else, to save them or change things. They're confident in the Lord by his imprisonment. Paul's imprisonment led them to have more confidence in Jesus Christ, in his ability to do a marvelous work in this moment. And he says, as a result, they're much more bold to speak the word without fear.

He says most of the brothers, and he's saying pretty much the entire church has now mobilized. They're confident, they're bold, they're not giving into fear, they're proclaiming the gospel. It went from Paul, the gospel preacher, to every believer preaching the gospel. What was his hindrance, his chains led to their freedom from fear to preach the gospel with courage and boldness. See the fire jumped from Paul to everybody else. Now everybody else is burning with passion to make Jesus known. The gospel is advancing through every believer now in the church.

I love this. So often, the example of a few can embolden the courage of many. We know this, we know this from the stories of people who've gone before us. Some of you may have heard of Jim Elliot, missionary to the Auca Indians, and when he and his friends landed on the beach, they were immediately speared to death. They never even got to start the mission. You could look at that and go, what a failure, what a waste, but it wasn't because it was through their courage and faithfulness that hundreds of students from Wheaton college and other places were encouraged, emboldened, and had the faith to step out and enter into the mission field. And a great harvest of souls was brought into the kingdom as a result of Jim and his friends losing their lives for the sake of the gospel.

May have heard of Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley. In 1555 in Oxford they were burnt at the stake. They were English reformers being a faithful witness to Christ Jesus and they were burned on the stake for their faith. And Latimer shouted out as he was suffering, Be of good comfort master Ridley and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out.

The example of those two martyrs, not only fanned the flame of spiritual revival, but has led to countless numbers of people from that day on entering into the mission field, boldly proclaiming the gospel, realizing it's worth the loss even of our life so that Christ might be proclaimed and souls might be saved.

See, the martyrs can be that for us. In fact, I'd encourage you maybe during the season you might even want to pick up Foxe's Book of Martyrs and begin to read of these heroes who didn't give into fear but became bold in the face of suffering for Jesus's sake.

We can be that for each other. Just as Paul and his bold testimony was a great encouragement and emboldened the church. We can do that as we step up and give testimony to Jesus's faithfulness in our life and we watch each other do it. Then will we need to encourage each other and spur each other on by example.

Jesse Bradley is a pastor at Grace Church, Grace Community Church in Auburn, and he and I are friends, and he was sharing recently when we called the church to share their story and hashtag it "JesusChangedMyLife". He said he gave that challenge to his church and there was a seven year old girl who took the challenge seriously. And she proudly and boldly proclaimed her story making Jesus the hero. And as a result her parents were challenged by her example. They were afraid to do it, they weren't going to do it, but because of her and her stepping out, they then had the courage to do it and both parents went on then to share their stories as well. I just love the fact that a seven year old girl was an example to the church and created a courage for people to step out -- I mean what do we have to lose by making Jesus the hero of our story by telling the world that he's the only hope? What do we have to lose?

What we'll lose is the opportunity to see our friends, our family, our coworkers come to faith in Jesus Christ to experience the joy of the gospel, transforming their life. If you're one of our friends or families that's listening in, and doesn't yet know Jesus. We want you to know, we boldly proclaim the fact that all of us need Jesus Christ. We need his death on the cross to forgive us of our sins. We need his power over death to give us hope for the future. We need the hope that he's coming again to make all things new. We need to know for certain that it doesn't end with death, but we get to move through death and live everlasting life with Jesus forever.

We want you all to hear that. And family, I want you to believe and then not shrink back. Don't give into fear.

I was really encouraged by Denise Ghioni, we were having an elders meeting this Sunday and just checking in on each other. And she's working presently in a COVID-19 care wing. So she's just walking right into the middle of the mess all the time. And I know we have a lot of people in our church who are on the front lines doing that, and man, thank you so much for your courage.

And as Denise shared, she said, You know, Jeff, there's Christians that are working at this same place and many of are just choosing not to come into work out of fear. And I just loved that Denise was just saying like, we're Christians. That's not us. We don't give into fear. We walk right into the middle of the mess knowing that the gospel is going to advance and God's going to have his hand over us and it'll be up to God. God has to give the okay on what's going to happen to us or not.

And she just spurred us on, her example of courage, of being a woman of faith, a woman who we should look to and say, God, will you help me to have that same kind of courage so that I'll share my story, so that I'll make Jesus known, so that I'll reach out and care for others in ways that they'll see Christ in my life.

Now, Paul continues. Almost every Christian in Rome is now preaching the gospel. He says, most are doing that. But not all of them are doing it for good reasons. Look at verse 15, Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of

love, knowing that I'm put here for the defense of the gospel -- what he means there is they know I'm in jail because I'm willing to die for the gospel, and they love me so much and they love the gospel so much and they love people so much that they're willing to share the gospel to everybody they can. But the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

See this group of people, they're envious of Paul's fame and his impact. They want to do whatever they can to rub it in his nose, and so it's like in their freedom to preach and not be in prison. They're doing it primarily out of rivalry, out of envy.

J.A. Motyer says this, They expose themselves to the danger of spiritual schizophrenia. On the one hand, they were apparently faithful gospel preachers committed to declare a selfless self-sacrificing, unself-seeking Christ. On the other hand, they privately and secretly indulged a different set of values, self seeking, self regarding, moved by desire to hurt one whom Christ had died to save. They were double-minded. Their public lives warred with their private lives, and their tongues with their thoughts.

Remember last week, Paul prays for the Philippian Christians that their love would abound more and more in knowledge and discernment that they may be pure and blameless. And now Paul is letting them in on this reality that there are people actually preaching the truth of the gospel within pure motives.

He wants them to see that the message of Jesus should be matched by the motives of Jesus. That the methods should actually match the very heart of the gospel.

It's interesting that Paul doesn't give us a lot of details about these people. He speaks in generalities here, and I think for good reason. I think if he would have given us greater detail, if he would have given us the names and the exact ways that they were fighting against him, then I think most of us would have been able to distance ourselves. And say, yeah, that's not me, I'm not like that at all.

But Paul doesn't do that, he stays in generalities. He keeps it unclear enough so that the church in Philippi has to do a gut check, do a heart check, and say what's going on in my motives?

See, I think he wants us to do the same thing, Doxa. I want to ask you, do you proclaim belief in the good news of the gospel while you're holding a grudge? While you're withholding forgiveness, while you're entertaining envy, while you're spurring on rivalry between brothers and sisters? I mean, are you preaching and saying you believe the truths of the gospel, but they don't actually shape how you live?

Do you proclaim a gospel of God's generosity while you're hoarding right now? Do you proclaim a gospel of God's power and protection while you're living in self-protective fear right now?

Let the message of the gospel sink deeply in you enough that the motives for why you do what you do and the means by which you do them are shaped and formed by the gospel so that the very message you proclaim looks like it shaped the life you live.

But I love this -- even though others are doing this to Paul, he's still celebrating because they're preaching the gospel.

Verse 18, What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

See, Paul is so obsessed with the gospel that he doesn't care if he gets hurt by the very people who are preaching the gospel for wrong motives. Talk about a gospel obsessed man. He's rejoicing in his suffering, he's rejoicing in his persecution, he's rejoicing in his rejection. Why? Because the gospel is being proclaimed and the gospel is going forth.

Doxa, that's what I want for us. I want us to be gospel obsessed. I want us to pray as a church in such a way that we'd say, God, don't let us waste this opportunity. Help us not to look at the chains of COVID-19 but to look through them for the opportunity, for the gospel to advance both in us and through us and by every one of us.

That's my prayer, family. COVID-19 isn't a hindrance, it's an opportunity. Let's step into it and see what God might do as he advances the gospel in us, through us, and if possible through all of us at the same time. Let's pray.

Father, Oh, I want to be so obsessed with the gospel. I want to love Jesus more than anything. I want others to meet Jesus so they can understand how much you love them, Father. That they don't have to go through this moment without knowing you care for them, that you're with them. That you'll be powerful for them, That you'll provide every need they have. God make us a church that's obsessed with the gospel and has hope in the midst of what feels like a hindrance to see it as an opportunity for the gospel to advance. We pray you would do this Jesus for your glory and fame, for our joy and the good of those that we know, in Jesus name. Amen.

Family as you move on from this moment, want encourage you on the tab that says "notes" to tap on that and you'll see us leading you in a time of response, where you can take a moment to be quiet and reflect and with those who you're with right now, have a bit of a conversation about the message and how God might want to apply it in your life and through your life. We also give you direction on how to take communion if you'd like, to give -- thank you so much family for continuing to support the work. And then also how to end with a benediction.

Man, I can't wait to see all of you face to face soon. Until then, I love you family, and I'm praying for you. And I'm praying you will be obsessed with the gospel.