

God uses Difficulties to Advance the Kingdom

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Date: 20 September 2020

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[0:00] Thank you, and thanks to all of you for having us here this morning. Turn with me in your Bibles to Philippians chapter 1.

I always enjoy our time here together. We love the opportunity to drive over the hill, as it were, and get to join you on a Sunday morning. It's always a joy to be part of a faithful, gospel-centered church.

I love coming here because we hear the gospel in your songs, and we hear the gospel in your prayers, and we hear the gospel in your greetings to us. And so we're just grateful to come together to share in the fellowship of the gospel, to have the opportunity to fellowship around the Lord's Word together.

And we'll get to do this together this week, this morning, as well as next Sunday, and then Jim will return. So grateful for your pastor, Jim. He's such a blessing every time I have an opportunity to spend time with him, usually over the phone, talking, catching up, praying with one another. He is always such an encouragement to me, and so it's a joy for me to be here together with you and minister the Word of God in his absence. A lot has happened since last time I was here.

[1:15] 2020 has been a wild ride. Quite the roller coaster of a year already. It's not really gone as we expected since January, right? The world has moved on, it seems.

Things are different now in ways that we can't always quantify, but seem so obvious at the same time. Even some of our words in 2020 have taken on a different depth of meaning.

Think about the word masks. It's not just a Halloween thing anymore. Or distance. Social. Or essential.

Our church had to go a number of weeks at various times where we weren't able to meet because we rent the theater from a local high school in Prescott.

Even though we were allowed to meet, the high school was not allowed to rent us the space, and so we had to do church completely online for a while, which, as you know, is a poor substitute for the real thing.

[2:19] When we were finally able to meet together again, though, it was like a huge family reunion that's been like 10 years in the making. Everyone's so thrilled to be together, to see each other's faces, to shake hands, and to hug.

I'm going to see if I can adjust this so it doesn't sound like I'm spitting in your face there. All right. Here we go. It's customary when you're coming back together like that, right, not seeing each other for a while, to kind of give a personal update.

How are you? How have things been for you over the last, what has it been, six weeks since we've seen each other? I mean, it was six weeks we were not really able to fellowship with other believers in a meaningful way.

So how are you? How have things been? How have you guys been affected? This is what happened to us. And many of us have been given new obstacles in life in 2020. It has not gone as we expected.

So it begs the question then, what do we do when things don't go as we expect them to? What happens when things get in the way of what we thought the plan was?

[3:24] Well, this week and next, I want to look together at a personal update from the Apostle Paul to the Philippians. I think it'll be particularly helpful because Paul is writing from circumstances that didn't go his way.

You could say it went badly for Paul. He's writing from prison. He's facing serious obstacles as he's writing this letter to the Philippians. And so we'll talk about what it looks like to face those obstacles, what to do when things get in the way of our plan for our Christian life, how to respond when our

circumstances seem to be standing in the way of our expectations.

That's very much the kind of thing that Paul had in mind in our passage that we're going to look at this morning and next Sunday. So Paul's walking through a thought process here that explains how the advance of the gospel looks, even when we face opposition from believers, and even when we face opposition from unbelievers.

So look with me at Philippians chapter 1. I want to read verses 1, sorry, verse 12 through 18. He says, Philippians chapter 1, starting in verse 12, 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 obedient 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 goodwill.

[4:58] The latter do it out of love, knowing that I'm 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. So this whole section then is a personal update from the Apostle Paul, but Paul sees his personal update, you'll notice, through the lens of the advance of the gospel.

Looking at the bookends of this thought process here, look there in verse 12, it says, he says, what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. And in verse 18, in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, or the gospel is advanced, is another way to say it, and in that I rejoice.

And then again in verse 25, eventually he's going to say, at the end of this update, which we'll look at the second half of next week, he says, verse 25, I will remain and continue with you all for your progress, that's the same word in the Greek as advance, in verse 12, for your progress and joy in the faith, so your advance and joy in the faith.

And so, Paul's personal update really is, comes to the Philippians through the lens of the gospel. We know, as believers, that our lives are about a mission to advance the gospel, for people from every tribe and tongue and nation to know the truth that their sins can be forgiven before a holy God, they can stand righteous and holy and just and justified before him because of what Christ did on the cross.

[6:34] That's the gospel, the good news. And we want everyone to know it. We want everyone to be saved. And so the Lord has sent us out, even Jesus' last words to his disciples, go therefore and make disciples of every nation.

So Jesus sent us all out into this world to share this truth of the gospel. And so Paul, as one of the disciples of Christ, goes. And just as we, as one of the disciples of Christ, go and spread the gospel with our lives in wherever the Lord has placed us.

As believers, that's our greatest passion. But what about when we seek to do that and it doesn't go the way that we expect? It seems that there's some huge obstacle.

What happens when something gets in the way of that? And in particular, what happens when we are directly opposed by unbelievers? Well, that's the first thing Paul addresses here, starting in verse 12, is the opposition he's facing from unbelievers.

He says, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. Paul is speaking specifically of his imprisonment when he says, what has happened to me?

[7:42] We know this because he says that specifically five times in these verses. Imperial guard, my imprisonment, my imprisonment. He's very clear that what he means by that is the opposition from unbelievers who have placed him in prison seeking to stop him from spreading the gospel.

He'll mention that again in verses 15 and in 17. So Paul is saying, my imprisonment has advanced the gospel. That's ironic, right? Since the mission that Jesus gave us is to go make disciples of every nation and being in prison, Paul can't go anywhere.

Certainly not to another nation. Paul anticipates that this will be a surprise to the Philippians to hear that somehow him being thrown in prison has advanced the gospel. He thinks they're going to be surprised by that.

Rightfully so. Seems strange. You can tell that he anticipates that because he uses the word really. He says, what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. That word in the

Greek could also be translated rather.

What has happened to me has rather served to advance the gospel. In other words, the intention was to stop the gospel from spreading. Rather, what has happened is the gospel has advanced. See, we expect the same what the Philippians would have expected.

[8:51] We expect that favorable results will always come through favorable circumstances. We expect that what we want to happen will always happen when things go well for us.

But that's not how God works, is it? Sometimes God intentionally uses unfavorable circumstances to bring about favorable results. Sometimes God intentionally uses difficulty and obstacles to bring about wild success and advancement.

And he does that, obviously, so that it's clear this wasn't Jason Drum's plan for Jason Drum's life because Jason Drum wouldn't have put so many problems in it. This was all part of the unworking of God's plan and it points to him when you seem to get favorable results from unfavorable circumstances.

It points to the fact that it wasn't the circumstances, it wasn't the people, it was the God over the circumstances and the people who brought about the results. So how is it then?

I mean, Paul says, I want you to know, brothers, and how pastoral of Paul. I want you to know, brothers, this is important to me that you understand this, I want you to know, how is it that this advances the gospel?

[10:11] I want you to know that what has happened to me has advanced the gospel. The Philippians had to be sitting there reading this letter going, didn't? He was, they threw him in prison, right?

Did I miss something? So how is that then? Well, this isn't theoretical for Paul. He's not just kind of like speaking spiritual platitudes. Oh, well, you know, it's advanced the gospel.

He really means this and he says in the very next verses two ways that the gospel has actually been advanced through his imprisonment. He's giving them examples. He wants them to know real clearly. Verse 12, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel the first way that's happened, verse 13, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

In other words, while Paul has been in prison, he has seen this as a divinely intended opportunity to share the gospel with the guards. And he says at this point, all of them have heard.

The guards, all the people that work there in the area, in the prison system or perhaps in the rest of the whatever facilities may have been adjacent to that. He says, all of the imperial guard and all the rest have heard.

[11:30] This probably wouldn't be a surprise to the Philippians since one of the people in the Philippian church, one of the very first people to get saved in Philippi. If you go to Acts chapter 16, Paul shows up in Philippi, starts preaching in the gospel.

Lydia is the first person to get saved. She invites people over to her house. Paul gets thrown into prison for preaching the gospel, preaches the gospel in prison, and what happens with the Philippian jailer?

Right? There's a big earthquake. The jailer expects these prisoners are going to run out. They don't. The prisoner, the prison guard is literally about to kill himself because he thinks he's going to be in trouble because all the prisoners have left.

Paul is like, stop, stop, stop. We're still here. And the prison guard's like, how in the world are you still here? The earthquake opened the doors. Why haven't you left is the idea.

And so Paul shares the gospel with him. The prison guard says, what must I do to be saved? And guess what? The prison guard and his whole family get saved and baptized. Some of the very first members of the church that Paul is now writing this letter to from prison.

[12:33] So when Paul says to the Philippians, I want you to know, brothers, what's happened to me has really served to advance the gospel because it's become known throughout the whole imperial guard. You have to imagine the Philippian jailer sitting there like, mm-hmm, I knew all about that.

Yep, I lived through that. I remember that. That's just like Paul, isn't it? Second reason that his imprisonment, this apparent obstacle, has actually been a part of accomplishing the advance of the gospel is in verse 14.

He says, and most of the brothers having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment are much more bold to speak the word without fear. In other words, Paul stood up for the truth of the gospel to the point of being thrown in prison.

He didn't back down and his boldness has now inspired a confident boldness in other believers in the area who've been there to see this all happen.

Then, most of the brothers, he says, are much more bold to speak the word without fear because Paul was thrown in prison.

[13:38] Because of an obstacle, more people are boldly preaching the gospel now. So just think, we don't know how many, but he says, most of the brothers.

That ought to be quite a few, right? He doesn't say two or three of them. He says most of them. So most of the brothers are now emboldened to preach the gospel, to speak the word, which they might have just been sitting at home quietly instead.

Now the gospel is advancing in another way because of this obstacle that Paul is facing. It's interesting, you know, there's a difference between a sprint and an obstacle course.

A sprinter knows that their whole goal is to get out on the track and run as fast as they can from the beginning to the end and never stop running, never slow down, go, go, go, win the race.

But an obstacle course runner, I think of, you know, you see the YouTube videos of Tough Mudder and the Spartan Race, these races where, you know, these people go, it's like a 10-mile race and there's these huge walls that they have to scale and ropes that they have to swing from and barbed wire, or they have to crawl through the mud under, right, and people are throwing tomatoes at them and it's like this intense obstacle course.

[15:03] A sprinter and an obstacle course runner are signing up for different things. If a sprinter showed up at the starting line, the starting gun goes off and he takes off running and all of a sudden sees mud and barbed wire, that sprinter is going to be really confused because he didn't expect that on his race.

I think the Christian life is often compared to a race. In fact, even in Scripture, Hebrews 12, 1 explicitly says, let us run with endurance the race that's set before us.

But I think that too often, while we know that our lives are all about a mission to advance the gospel, as believers, that's our greatest passion, our problem is too often we expect the Christian life and the Christian mission to be a sprint when in fact the Lord means for it to be more of an obstacle course.

Sometimes something stands in the way, we jump back as though a sprinter confronted by mud and barbed wire, confused. How could it be? I'm trying to advance the gospel here. How could it be that something's getting in my way?

But in fact, those obstacles are intentionally meant by the creator of the race and the runner to be a part of the race. So Paul faces a major obstacle in the race here.

[16:26] He's being directly opposed by unbelievers who are trying to stop him from spreading the gospel, but he doesn't see it as something standing in the way of the race. He sees it as part of the race.

He gets this. Paul knows that the Christian life and mission is not a sprint. It's an obstacle course. When he faces obstacles from unbelievers, he sees them not as a hindrance to the race, but as an opportunity and a part of it.

Think with me for a moment at how this ought to inform and affect the way that we view our lives, our mission, opposition that we may face from unbelievers.

I mean, Jesus actually promised that this would happen, right? So we shouldn't be surprised, right? John 15, 20, remember the word that I said to you. Jesus told his disciples, a servant is not greater than his master.

If they persecuted me and they did persecute Jesus, they will also persecute you. There's a promise that we typically don't like to crochet or like cross thread and put up on the wall, right?

[17:30] But that is a promise from Jesus. If they persecuted me, which they did, they will persecute you. So let's think together for a moment about the opposition that we may face from unbelievers, right?

What if unbelievers make fun of you in front of other people for being a Christian? What if they make fun of you behind your back and you find out about it? What if they try to get you fired from your job because your integrity makes them look bad?

What if they sue your company because of your stance on morality regarding LGBTQ issues? What if you're on a mission trip and you encounter actual opposition?

What if our church is the next one to be attacked by some crazy lunatic on a Sunday morning who wants to stop the gospel from spreading?

What if the government takes away church's 501c3 status so that you can't afford property tax on your building anymore? What if sharing the gospel with someone is deemed to be hate speech?

[18:38] They start shutting down Facebook accounts and social media accounts because you posted about Jesus Christ and that's against the law now. What if they start throwing Christians in jail?

What if, like Paul, they throw your pastor in prison? All of these things are very clear realities to basically every Christian in church history that lives outside of the 250-year parenthetical prosperity of the church in America.

What we really have in America as a church, as Christians, is unique. I mean, it makes us wonder when we hear Jesus say things like, a servant's not greater than his master.

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. And we think, Hannah, I don't know about that. I don't really get a lot of persecution. It's easy to feel like these are all distant realities because we have enjoyed such a unique time of relative peace as a church, as Christians, for the last 250 years in America.

But I think we need to be prepared to be the persecuted church that Jesus promised we would be. I was reminded of this just a few weeks ago.

[19:57] I got to the office one morning and sitting down to check email, check voicemails, those kinds of things. And I got a voicemail from a woman that I just want to read you an exact transcript of the entire voicemail.

But this is, I have to tell you, the radio edit so that you don't have to put a parental advisory explicit lyric sticker on this sermon. She said, you have got to be blanking kidding me.

Are you actually holding church at the high school? Are you paying rent? Public schools are secular. I want you the blank out of my kids' school. And I want you the blank off of the sign on Sundays.

I am so sick of this. I'm calling the secretary of state next. You guys are ridiculous. And I'm so sick of you shoving your ridiculous, untrue religion down everyone's throats.

I'm tired of seeing it. I think all religions are garbage. I hope you burn in hell. Click. You may not realize it, but there are people out there who really hate us.

[21:11] This was a really good reminder for me of that. Because I tend to live in my little Christian bubble, my little Christian family, and we have Christian homeschool, and we go to our Christian church, and I have Christian friends over for our Christian barbecue, and we have Christian fellowship, and I rarely get to interact with unbelievers as much as I would like to.

This is a great reminder that there are people out there that hate us. It's a great reminder, and you shouldn't be surprised, because this is exactly what Jesus promised us. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

But we have to remember, let's just assume that lady calls the secretary of state, and she gets our church kicked out of the high school theater on Sunday mornings, and we have nowhere we can meet.

We have to remember, the obstacle is part of the race, not a hindrance to it. That's not something standing in the way of our mission.

It is part of our mission. These obstacles are a part of the advance of the gospel, and those are the very things that the Lord uses to advance his gospel so that he gets the glory, not us.

[22:26] Wow, look at those great pastors over at Canyon Bible Church of Prescott. Look at the great service they hold on a Sunday morning. Look at the great way they're able to meet in the theater. No, it would be just like the Lord to make sure none of us get the glory for what he's doing through our churches.

So Paul says, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me, imagine your pastor writing this to you from jail, has really served to advance the gospel.

It's become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. This opposition Paul faced has brought about the opportunity for more unbelievers, not less, to hear the gospel, and that's often the case.

So when you face opposition from unbelievers in your desire to advance the gospel, you be ready. You go to preach the gospel, opposition comes, guess what that is?

An opportunity to preach the gospel. Second reason, his imprisonment. This obstacle has actually been a part of accomplishing the advance of the gospel. Most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by his imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

[23 : 34] See, when we stand up for the truth of the gospel, we embolden one another. To stand up for the truth of the gospel. So be ready to stand up for the truth of the gospel and look to the examples of other faithful believers who, even in our day and age in America, are facing persecution.

People, unbelievers, trying to stop them from advancing the gospel, look to them, see their example, let it embolden you to be that much more bold to go out there and the rest of the week preach the gospel to unbelievers.

We should expect we will face opposition from unbelievers and when we do, those obstacles somehow, in the sovereign and wonderful hand of God, actually become a part of the advance of the gospel.

That's incredible. So we expect to face opposition from unbelievers. What about when we face opposition from other believers?

Well, that's exactly what Paul talks about next in his letter to the Philippians, starting in verse 15. He's going to describe the opposition he was facing from actual believers. He says, verse 15, look at it with me there, some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.

[24 : 56] The latter do it out of love, knowing that I'm 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.

He says, some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. So there are other believers preaching Christ who are envious of Paul and actually seed themselves to be his rival even though they're preaching the gospel.

That's amazing. We know these are true believers preaching the true gospel because of how Paul talks about them here. They're not false teachers. These aren't unbelievers thinking that they're preaching the gospel.

This isn't a cult or a sect. Paul speaks differently about false teachers. I mean, you're familiar with how he talks in the letter to the Galatians, right? He even says, oh foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?

He talks about the false teachers there as preaching a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all. That's Galatians 1, verses 6 and 7. And so Paul's really clear when he's talking about false teachers.

[26 : 02] Here he says they're preaching Christ. He's concerned about their motives. They're preaching Christ, but they're doing it from envy and rivalry. I mean, you can imagine, right, think about the way that people in our day think about famous evangelical pastors.

Oh, did you hear the most recent podcast from so-and-so? Did you see the latest blog from so-and-so? We talk about famous evangelical preachers. But imagine the Apostle Paul showing up in your town.

Imagine if a famous evangelical preacher showed up in our town and all of the Christians are like, whoa, it's him, he's here, right? And all the pastors are kind of standing over in the corner like, huh, yeah, okay.

You can see how it could get awkward for pastors here when Paul shows up and all of the Christians are enamored by Paul, excited about Paul, and there are some pastors here who sinfully, because envy, rivalry is sin, selfish ambition is sin, but there are pastors here that Paul says are preaching Christ from envy and rivalry out of selfish ambition.

You can see how they're like, ah, why are all these people going after Paul? I've been preaching here for so long and now they're running after Paul. Oh, it's the apostle Paul. So you could see how this could happen.

[27 : 28] Others were jealous of Paul, perhaps of his popularity. And so he says, the latter do it out of love, knowing that I'm put here for the defense of the gospel, but the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

I'm just trying to imagine how a pastor could get up on a Sunday morning and preach, hoping to afflict Paul in prison. But he's attributing selfish, sinful motives to them.

I mean, but you can imagine, right, a pastor preaching and saying something like, so you guys really want to, you know you want to follow Paul? Well, look where that got him. I mean, he's in prison. Let's be careful about that, guys.

Let's not make sure, let's make sure we're not following the wrong people here. We follow Christ. We only follow Christ. So you can see how pastors could be saying things like, clearly the Lord isn't with Paul.

Paul's in prison. We're out here. We've been a faithful witness. Obviously, Paul blew it somehow. This had to be really distressing for Paul, because while they preach the true gospel, these believers are actually opposing Paul, not because of his theology, but because of personal reasons, envy, rivalry, selfish ambition.

[28:47] These must have been the first century equivalent of discernment bloggers. So how does Paul respond to all of this?

You can imagine how heartbreaking it must have been for him. Yet, this is how he responds. Verse 18, he says, what then? Only that in every way whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed. And in that, I rejoice. Notice Paul's joy here is connected not to his personal advancement. It's connected to the advance of the gospel.

And so after all of their efforts to oppose Paul personally, they have only succeeded in doing the very thing that he cares most about, and that is to advance the gospel. So even believers, are opposing Paul in some ways, and yet he says, it's okay.

Because even in their desire, their selfish ambition to oppose me, they're preaching Christ, the gospel is advancing, and I rejoice. And the reason for that is because all human circumstances lie in God's hands.

[29:58] And because God's purpose is to advance the gospel, and because Jesus promised that I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not stand against it. The gates of heaven will also not stand against it here.

He says, I will build my church, the gates of hell will not stand against it. That's a promise from Jesus. And so, because God's purpose is to advance the gospel, even when other believers seek to oppose us as Christians, God can and will still use them to advance the gospel.

We can still rejoice in the Christian life of a brother or sister who is opposed to us. Because we don't have to take it personal. We can say like Paul, listen, they might be opposed to me, they might have a problem with me, I'm just grateful they don't have a problem with Christ.

I'm grateful their eyes have been opened to the truth of the gospel. I'm grateful the Lord is using them to spread the gospel. Praise the Lord. I wish we had a better relationship. I wish things were well between us.

So much as it depends on me, I want to be at peace with all men and I'm going to seek to do that. But even though they oppose me, I can rejoice that they've been born again and that God is using them to spread the gospel because that's my greatest desire is that God's gospel is advanced.

[31:16] So like Paul, we would do well to find our joy in the advance of the gospel, even amidst personal opposition from other believers. You know, the first translation of the Bible into English was done by William Tyndale.

It was not received very well by many believers in those days and many who were not believers but thought they were. Tyndale's New Testament that he had translated from Greek was the first translation from the original Greek into English.

Can you imagine a world without an English Bible? But more than that, it was also the first English Bible to be printed on paper, on a printer, not just hands copied.

People claiming to be Christians opposed William Tyndale on every side. He had to find a secret printer and print these New Testaments in secret to try to hide it from other people who said they were Christians.

And even though Tyndale was not super excited about his first draft of the translation, he's like, yeah, there's some things I would want to change and some updates I already see that I would want to make.

[32:29] Nonetheless, getting the Bible into people's hands in English is the most important thing. Let's just go ahead and push it out. And so, they took care of his first draft translation into English being mass printed and they sold it to try to get the Bible into people's hands so they could read the

Bible in their own language.

That spring, they printed 3,000 copies of Tyndale's New Testament in English. They shipped these Bibles hidden in bales of cotton because it was such a secret project.

Just imagine how much work went into this, okay? Everything seemed to be going great, which is what people always say when the story is about to turn. Everything seemed to be going great. But by summertime, the church officials in England had discovered this secret circulation of Tyndale's New Testament, they confiscated every Tyndale Bible they could get their hands on. And they declared the purchase and sale, distribution, and even possession of the Bible in English to be a serious crime. The officials came up with a really smart plan.

[33 : 38] They went and started purchasing. They couldn't get all of the Bibles because they wanted to destroy them. So what they did was they went around and started purchasing all of the Bibles from people to try to get them all back and then they burned them.

You can imagine how Tyndale must have felt to know that years of translation work, years of difficulty finding printer after printer because he had to go through a few because one of his printers got drunk and told about the secret plan and it's a long story.

But Tyndale went through a lot to try to get this New Testament printed. to only see it go up in flames. Can you imagine? Because of the opposition of people who said that they're Christians. Well, their plan quickly backfired because God is still sovereign and on the throne and he's going to advance his church and the gates of hell won't stand against it. The money from all of those Bible sales eventually got back to Tyndale and so they now had the needed resources for Tyndale to produce a revised second edition which he was much more happy with and to have 6,000 Bibles twice as many as the first time printed and distributed.

You see, the Lord advanced his gospel not in spite of the obstacle but he actually used the obstacle. The very people seeking to oppose the advance of the gospel were used by God in order to advance the gospel.

[35 : 05] So the very Bibles that they sought to stamp out actually doubled in quantity. It was the obstacle itself that became the means by which God advanced the gospel.

And you have an English Bible in your hand sitting in your lap today in part because of that very event. So what if, like the Apostle Paul, like William Tyndale, what if we face opposition from other Christians?

What if believers oppose you for some reason? What if other Christians speak ill of you? What if they leave your church because you confronted their sin because you love them?

What if they start talking bad about Cottonwood Bible Church? What if you're accused by other Christians of being too legalistic because you want to live a holy life? What if a Christian gossips about you to one of your friends?

God will use those very things to advance his gospel. And in a day when there's so much like church competition, we need to be praying for the gospel advance in other churches instead of joining in the competition.

[36 : 23] Because all human circumstances lie in God's hands and because God's purpose to advance his gospel cannot be thwarted even when other believers seek to oppose us in some way.

God can and still will use them to advance his gospel. This is true when unbelievers oppose us and it's true when believers oppose us.

Because of that, because of what we know to be true about this, we can always look at opposition as we seek to advance the gospel. We can always look at opposition in our current circumstances and know this will be used by the Lord for the advance of his gospel.

And in many cases we may not see how he uses it. But we can know that the Lord uses even opposition to advance his gospel. So we can look at our current circumstances and no matter how much opposition we face, we can have confidence that the Lord can and will use those circumstances to spread his truth, to advance his gospel and to build his church.

But sometimes it's not our current circumstances that keep us up at night. Sometimes it's the ever-looming uncertainty of the future that bothers us so much.

[37 : 46] So we think about what will happen if we don't know all that will come. it is so uncertain what the future holds.

That's horribly troubling for me and I know it is for you too. So how do we manage to live our lives without an absolutely paralyzing fear of what may come?

How do we carry on with the advance of the gospel knowing that the future is so uncertain? Well, that's exactly what Paul talks about in the next passage. That's exactly what we're going to talk about next Sunday.

So I look forward to that time together with you and I'll close in prayer. Father, we rejoice in your goodness to us. We rejoice in the way that you sovereignly orchestrate the affairs of mankind so that no matter what happens, Lord, your church is built.

Lord, from a human perspective, we do often see opposition. We see opposition from unbelievers wanting to stop us from advancing the gospel and we're convinced that we'll see more of it in the days ahead.

[39:03] Father, we commit this all to you. We commit it all to your good and sovereign will knowing that even as unbelievers seek to oppose us, you'll use the opposition to advance your gospel.

Lord, we rejoice in that. We rejoice in the fact that even when believers oppose us and Father, there is too often opposition amongst fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let it not be so. Lord, work in our hearts that which is pleasing to you, give us a depth of fellowship that causes opposition and rivalry to be driven from the church.

But Lord, we're sinful, we're broken. And so we know it's going to be a reality in our lives. And so, Father, give us a confidence that you will use even opposition from other believers to advance your gospel.

Lord, we know that this is just how you work so that you get the glory. And Father, we see that most clearly in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the very gospel that we're seeking to advance.

[40:18] It was unbelievers who killed our Lord and sought to stamp out the advance of his kingdom and his message. It was by the hands of ungodly men that he was nailed to the cross.

Father, even some of Jesus' followers, even some of the people who claim to follow him, even some of the people who claim to be religious leaders in the day took part in seeing our Lord crucified and killed.

Yet, God, in your sovereign wisdom, you used the worst thing that has happened in all of history, the greatest advance, the greatest obstacle to the advance of your kingdom, the very death of our Lord.

You raised him from the dead and you used that very event as the turning point of all of human history, bringing salvation to the nations, offering forgiveness to your people, atoning for the sins of a lost and godless world, and extending to all those who would repent and believe true forgiveness and right standing with you.

Lord, you did that and you did it when people who claim to be believers and unbelievers sought to oppose the advance of your kingdom.

[41:44] So, Father, we who have turned from our sin and placed our faith in Christ, we rejoice because we know nothing is too difficult for the Lord. And so, we commit any opposition that we may face into your hands and pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. We'll now have just a few minutes for time of reflection silently there as you sit in your seat and then we'll have some more songs and complete our time of worship together.
from beingPH.