

Dedicated to the Gospel

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Date: 21 February 2016

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[0 : 00] Many of you, I'm sure, have been following the news about Ken and Joycelyn Elliott. In case you missed it, Ken and Joycelyn are actually medical missionaries, and they were recently kidnapped by Islamists from that little-known country of Burkina Faso.

I think Joycelyn has since been released, but Ken has not as well, so please keep praying for him. Now, of course, were it not for these kidnappings, their work would have gone largely unknown in Australia.

But now that they're in the news, we actually have the privilege of hearing what great work they're doing. It's actually quite inspiring and moving to see their dedication to their work.

But here are some of the facts. The Elliott's have been in Burkina Faso for more than 40 years, where they've built a 120-bed hospital from scratch. They live in such an impoverished area that Ken is the only surgeon for about 2 million people in that region.

Just imagine that. One surgeon, 2 million people. They refuse to fundraise, though, through advertising, and so the hospital was built and is now running solely on faith-giving.

[1 : 08] They're so dedicated to their work that they only return to Australia once every five years. And the only reason why they do that is just so they can renew their Medicare entitlements.

Dr. Elliott, speaking about their mission, said this, We're meeting a need physically, but our ultimate aim is to show the love of God, the goodness and power of true medicine.

It's quite an inspiring story, isn't it? And it's amazing to see their dedication to the work. Well, today, tonight, we find the same level of dedication in the life of Apostle Paul.

Only his dedication was for the gospel or to the gospel. Now, I've divided the passage into two sections, which are the two main points on the outline. And in the first, from verses 12 to 18, we see how Paul's life has been dedicated to the gospel.

We see not just what he's done, but how he reacts to what has happened to him. Now, we know from last week's passage that Paul is in chains for the gospel. And if you read the book of Acts, you actually realize that he's been wrongly imprisoned.

[2 : 17] All he's done is preach the gospel. He's just been telling others about Jesus and his salvation. But because he's offended the religious rulers, they've conspired to put him in jail.

So now Paul is awaiting trial to prove his innocence or make his defense. Now, for any other person, ordinary person, imprisonment would have been seen as an unmitigated disaster.

And more so for someone like Paul, because as an itinerant preacher, you need to move around, don't you, to be able to do your job. But such is Paul's dedication to the gospel that we see him actually reacting positively even to these circumstances.

And so in verse 12, if you look at me, Paul is able to tell the Philippians that he's fine with his imprisonment, because what has happened to him, he says in verse 12, has actually served to advance the gospel.

Paul could see that the way that God was using his suffering for the gospel. And for that, he's thankful. And in that sense, Paul is very similar to Joseph, part of the story we heard in our Old Testament reading.

[3 : 22] If you've watched Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat, most of you might have, you also remember the story of Joseph, how he was sold into slavery by his brothers. But years later, God used Joseph to prepare Egypt and the world, actually, for famine.

And then when the famine hits, the brothers come up and turn up in Egypt to buy food. And there they discover Joseph alive and well. They were fearful, though, of retribution from Joseph.

But this is what Joseph said in Genesis chapter 45, which was read just now in verse 6 and 7. I've got the verses again up there on the screen. And Joseph says this, For two years now, there has

been a famine in the land, and for the next five, there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. In fact, Joseph repeats himself in chapter 50 of Genesis in verses 19 and 20. Because the brothers, obviously, need it more convincing. And he said, Don't be afraid in that chapter. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

[4 : 35] And so throughout Christian history, followers of Jesus, people of God, have seen adversity as opportunities for God to work. And so it's in the same way that Paul could see how his trials were serving to advance the gospel.

So he says in verse 13 in Philippians, It has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. That is a positive thing, he says.

If you're a common criminal, no one takes notice of you, right? The guard is just another statistic.

But for Paul, he was different. He was willing to put the gospel before his own well-being.

And so it led naturally for people to ask why, to wonder, what is so great about the gospel that Paul would suffer for it? And such was the interest that even those outside the prison, because we hear Paul saying everyone else, which I take it to mean outside, apart from the palace guards or within the prison, everyone else has also come to know that Paul was in chains for the gospel.

His influence was not just where he was, but actually spread because of what he was willing to do for the gospel. Now, our natural instinct is to always put our well-being first, isn't it?

[5 : 51] When we suffer, it's often hard to think beyond our survival. And yet, it's often when people see how we react to trials, that it actually convinces them about the truth of the gospel.

Some years back, I was a student minister at another church, just actually down the road. There was a lady there who had breast cancer. And it was actually her third time.

And so things weren't easy for her. And yet, amazingly, she saw her sufferings as an opportunity for God to use her for the gospel. And so doing her many visits to the hospital, I think for chemo, she developed a friendship with one of the nurses there.

And so she got a chance to share her faith with this nurse. And the nurse was able to see her faith in action. How she actually responded so differently in the face of suffering compared to everyone else.

And thankfully, this nurse became a Christian. And I had the blessing of seeing her being baptized when I was still ministering there. You see, God can use our trials and challenges to show others the true beauty of the gospel.

[7 : 06] It's during these times that the way we respond shows how wonderful Jesus really is. It's not just talk.

It's walking the walk as well. So when we fail to get a job or promotion, when we miss out on being recognized at school, when we face serious illness or rejection, it's tough.

It's disappointing. But I have to say, it's also helpful just to pause and ask ourselves, may God be using this very circumstance to advance the gospel?

And if so, how might we actually then react differently? Because we know that. Now, as we read on, we find yet another way, the second way in which Paul's dedication to the gospel was evident.

Here, Paul displays another extraordinary quality, and that was to put the gospel before his own reputation. And so we read in verse 14 that because of his chains, many are actually emboldened to become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

[8 : 12] But quickly we discover, however, that there are actually mixed motives involved. Some do it, he says, for those reasons, but others do it out in verse 15, out of envy and rivalry.

Some out of goodwill and love, and these know that they're doing it because Paul's been put in prison and they're there to help Paul, to defend the gospel on behalf of Paul.

Verse 16. But by contrast, the former group, they do it out of envy and rivalry and in verse 17, selfish ambition. That is, they do it to advance their own reputation and cause trouble for Paul.

Now, it's not clear what this exactly entailed. I'm just guessing here, but one possibility might be that they were actually trying to draw people to themselves, to their ministry. Perhaps they're using Paul's chains and saying, you know, Paul's a, you know, he's a yesterday man.

He's a spent force. You know, what can he really do when he's in chains? No, no, no, no. Come with us instead. Maybe. Maybe that's what's happened. But whatever the real scenario is, and we can't really know for sure, what we do know is that Paul says that although their motives were false,

they must somehow still be preaching the true gospel, which is why Paul is unconcerned with their troublemaking.

[9 : 30] And he can even say in verse 18, when he says verse 18, what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether by false motive or true, Christ is preached, and because of this, I rejoice.

Many of us have a passion for the gospel. I know that. You know, I see you guys ministering. But it takes a certain level of dedication, doesn't it, for someone like Paul to rejoice at the gospel being preached, even when it's at his own expense.

Normally, when we do it, we're passionate for the gospel ministry that we can take credit for.

Whereas, if it's somebody else's ministry, well, sometimes we're not so keen, are we?

Particularly when that ministry is more successful than ours, or if supporting that ministry would cost us in terms of people going there, or financial support going there. That's a particular danger for us pastors, isn't it?

And for those of us in paid ministry. But you see, if we behave like that, we're actually betraying the gospel that we preach. Because the good news of Jesus is about a savior who put aside his own reputation in order to save us.

[10 : 41] And yet, if we do that, then, as his messengers, we're actually behaving exactly the opposite. At the same time, when we do such things, we're actually making it our gospel, and we're competing with others.

But the truth is, there's only one gospel, that of Jesus Christ. Well, not so poor, because his conduct was consistent with his preaching.

To use a couple of cliches, he walked the talk, and he put his money where his mouth was. I have to say, it's not easy to live like that, is it?

To be so dedicated to this one thing in your life, even when it costs you, especially when it costs you. Just consider how people just change jobs so frequently nowadays, just at the whim.

I'm not saying everybody who changes lacks dedication, but it's a symptom of it, one of the symptoms of it. I did some research. The average Australian changes jobs once every 3.3 years.

[11 : 44] So if you're longer than that, you're doing well. And if you're under 25, the statistic goes down to one year and eight months. And so if you're under 25 and you're doing better than that, then good on you as well.

I'm sure Paul would have found it hard at times to do what he's done. And yet, Paul remained dedicated to the gospel. He was able to do this. And so the question we have to ask is, why? What makes him able to persevere? What enabled him to maintain his dedication? Well, that's how we're going to move to the second half of our passage.

As we look at it, I think in that passage he shares with us his motivation and that will help us to answer those questions. And so in verse 18, Paul continues by saying, yes, I will continue to rejoice.

That is, I will keep doing what I'm doing. I will persevere and continue to rejoice in it. Why? Because through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

[12 : 50] And the key word that I want to focus on there is deliverance or salvation. So first, Paul is able to keep on doing what he's doing because his hope is that his dedication will lead to his salvation.

Now, I don't think here that the word deliverance or salvation means that he's talking about his release from prison. salvation, because if we read on very quickly, he says he's not sure whether he'll live or die.

Instead, I think he's speaking about the last day, deliverance before God. He's talking about the time when he will have to give an answer to God. And so the deliverance of salvation he speaks of, I think, is from God's judgment.

Now again, I don't think that what he's thinking is that he needs to keep doing all these things, being dedicated in order to earn his salvation. salvation. So this is not trying to earn merit to salvation by works.

Rather, he's seeing his dedication to the gospel as a sign of the good work that God has begun in him. And by continuing in it, he sees it as a sign of God completing the work which he has begun.

[13 : 57] And those of you who were here last week will know that I'm referring to verse 6 there, where he talks about the good work that God begins, he will complete until the day of Jesus. And so with God's help, Paul is saying that he wants to see it through.

He wants to see it through to his deliverance or salvation. And that's also why he desires prayer from the Philippians and help from the Spirit of Christ.

Because these are two things that God uses to help Paul to complete, which God uses to complete the work in Paul. And which Paul needs as well to be part of that.

It helps Paul to remain focused no matter how hard it gets. So firstly, Paul hopes for his own deliverance. But then secondly, Paul is unable to carry on because he has a deep longing to see Christ glorified.

I'm going to read verse 20, but I want you to see the strength of Paul's language or hear it. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

[15 : 06] So here we have Paul's single-minded goal in life being to see Christ exalted in his life or in his body. It's quite comprehensive really, isn't it?

He says, now as always, and then he says, whether by life or by death. And the fact that he finds it difficult, I think, is seen in his prayer for courage, that he will have sufficient courage to see these things through.

Nevertheless, his goal is pretty clear, isn't it? Every single moment in his life is dedicated to exalting Christ, to bearing witness to Jesus in his life. And the best way he sees that happening, I think, is for him to keep preaching the gospel or preaching Christ.

Paul uses both those phrases interchangeably in this passage. You see, one day Paul knows that he will stand before Jesus. He knows that he will meet the one who's died and given himself for him.

And so he doesn't want to be ashamed of what he's done or how he's lived when that happens. Now, I have to say, this whole idea of shame and honor, that was pretty big in Paul's day.

[16 : 14] I mean, it's sort of quite big in Greek and Roman culture and sort of really motivated people how they lived in those days. It sort of doesn't really resonate with us today, given our individualistic culture.

But I suspect that those of us who come from Asian or Eastern backgrounds may understand a bit about what that means, particularly in the context of our family. So, for example, we may have had our parents say to us as children, you know, please don't bring shame to us as a family.

And they will say, study hard, right? I mean, that's what Asian parents always say. Study hard or you bring shame to the family or don't associate with these people because, you know, they're bad people and they bring shame. That's the idea of shame playing on our behavior.

nowadays, I think we see this idea of shame and honor being used with sporting codes and teams. So, you know, when the player who's had a big drunken brawl after the game, you know, he's hauled in front of the TV cameras and then, you know, he has to confess publicly how he's, I've let my team down, I've let my family down, I've let the whole of Australia down, whatever.

That's the idea of him bringing shame, isn't it, to the team or to the football code. Well, for Paul, he has only one concern.

[17 : 39] The one person he doesn't want to bring shame to was Jesus, his Lord and Savior. He was, after all, a slave of Christ Jesus. We found that out in verse 1 of the letter last week.

Which is why he makes that famous line in verse 21, which was in the promo even in the Entrust Women's Conference. For me to live is Christ, to die is gain. And it's this statement of his total dedication to Jesus that marks out his will to live for Christ alone.

Now, of the two, if we read further on in verse 23, dying was actually the more attractive option. Right? He says, I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better, better by far.

And yet, he knows his work for Jesus isn't done. And so he adds, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. And so we come to the third motivation for Paul as to why he continues with his dedication for the gospel.

And that is his labor for the faith of others. Paul knows that Christ has called him to fruitful labor, verse 22. And in particular, he's to labor for the progress of the Philippians' faith.

[18 : 54] So we see here that Paul isn't just concerned with his own salvation. He also is concerned for the salvation of the Philippians. He wants to see God's work in them come to its

