

Philippians 1:12-18

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[0 : 00] Well, as Kyle already mentioned, we are continuing today our new-ish sermon series in the book of Philippians.

! So I invite you to turn with me to Philippians chapter 1, and we will begin in verse 12. Paul writes, 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 goodwill.

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. But then, only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed. And in that, I rejoice.

[1 : 33] This is God's word. A few weeks ago, as we consider what he says here in verse 12, what has happened to me.

A few weeks ago, we concluded our roughly year-long sermon series, the book of Acts. Luke closed the narrative with Paul under house arrest in Rome.

And that's these things that have happened to him. And the final line says that his ministry, though he was imprisoned, his ministry was unhindered.

This book, the book of Philippians, this letter that he wrote, was part of that unhindered prison ministry. And today, in our third look at this letter, Paul finally speaks about that imprisonment. And I wonder, is this the letter that you would expect to receive from Paul if you were in that church in Philippi? Because now he's finally speaking about his imprisonment, which reminds me, actually.

[2 : 44] This January, the Lord did our congregation a great kindness. Let me explain. Many of you have met, many of you have heard from Randy Matthews.

Randy is a missionary that Shrewline supports. We don't, when you think of missionaries, often what you think of is someone who goes overseas and spends a long time in one spot.

His ministry is a little bit different. He goes to places where churches have difficulty accessing theological education and pastoral training. And he builds up congregations in place so that they can reach their communities.

So he spent lots of time in Asia and in Africa in places where it's difficult for pastors to get the training they need to serve their congregations and their communities well. In mid-January, Randy was serving pastors in Burkina Faso.

We sometimes take it for granted that he comes home every time. But just days, less than a week after his departure from Burkina Faso, the army staged a coup, deposed the president, suspended the constitution, dissolved the government, the National Assembly, and closed the country's borders.

[4 : 05] Did you know that was brewing? I didn't. But the Lord did. And in his great providence, as he wisely and sovereignly governs all things, he made sure Randy's itinerary was scheduled early enough to leave before that happened.

And he prevented, as we know, Randy's been delayed on several occasions on his return. He was not delayed past that boundary. And so we are grateful for Randy's safe return.

And we're praying for him again. His itinerary right now has him ministering to pastors in Chad this week and in Morocco next week. But what if, in the Lord's good and wise and sovereign providence, Randy hadn't made it out in time?

The Lord does work all things for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose. But that doesn't mean that today is always peaceful for those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

Just ask Paul. We were days away from having Randy trapped behind a closed border in the service of the gospel. And sitting here today, praying for him, then, would be a lot like the Philippian church, longing for Paul's safety as he sat imprisoned in Rome.

[5 : 33] They supported Paul in prayer and finances, a lot like we do with Randy. And their missionary was now in prison for the gospel. And so if Randy hadn't made it out, what would we be thinking today?

You know, we'd be asking, well, what are his conditions like? What are his prospects for release? What can we do? How can we pray? And then we get a letter, like the letter to the Philippians, from Randy.

But it doesn't begin with an update about his situation. It doesn't begin with, here's what's going on. Here's how you can pray for me. Here's how you can help me.

Here's how to write to your senator. No, instead, it begins. I love you. And I am confident, this is what we saw last week, right?

I am confident that God will finish the work he began in you. So I'm praying that your love will abound more and more in the knowledge and discernment so that you might walk in righteousness for your own joy and for the glory of God.

[6 : 43] Is that the letter you would write if you were in Paul's shoes? Randy's hypothetical shoes if he was behind a closed border. Is that the letter you would expect to receive from that person?

No, but that's the letter Paul wrote. And that's what we have been seeing. And not only that, but today, what we just read, when he finally gets around to mentioning his imprisonment, what does he say?

Well, my imprisonment, I want you to know that it's really rather a positive development. The guards get to hear the gospel now. Is that the letter you'd write?

When Paul does get to the topic of his imprisonment, he's still not asking about himself. His focus is on the gospel of Jesus Christ. This would be like hearing from a Ukrainian church this week.

We want you to know, brothers, that the Russian invasion has really served to advance the gospel. So the gospel has become known to the whole invading army. And other churches in Eastern Europe, having become confident in the Lord by our occupation, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

[8 : 09] That's how unusual this letter is. Is that the letter you would write? Is that the letter you would expect? How is it known that this is the letter they received from Paul?

What made him view his very negative circumstances positively? Now here's the thing. In reality, we all do this to some extent.

We are quite willing to tolerate bad circumstances if it gives us something we want more. All of us, right? Mothers of teenage boys say, How can you stand the smell of this room?

And without so many words, the reply is basically, I am fine with this smell as long as I don't have to spend any energy cleaning. Cadets, how can you possibly spend a year of your life walking around like robots?

You can do it so long as you buy into the goal, the mission of the academy, which I will not make you recite right now.

[9 : 25] My wife jokes that I would be content to live in a cardboard box as long as I had enough reading materials. She is not too far from the truth.

How could you take that low-paying job, right? I can do that happily, you know, someone would say, because it gives me more fulfillment than the, you know, the corporate world or whatever it is.

We have friends who intentionally moved into a high-crime neighborhood. They did it on purpose. They didn't, you know, they could afford a better place to live, but they decided to move into a high-crime neighborhood.

They did it because they had a greater priority, and that was modeling and sharing the love of Christ in a dark place. All of us do this. What is your as long as story?

What are you content to tolerate because you value something else higher? What is it? We all do it. What is your I'm okay so long as?

[10 : 30] Or I would be okay if. That's where Paul is in his imprisonment.

He's saying, I'm okay as long as. Well, verse 18. Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed.

And in that I rejoice. Success, for Paul, is measured by the advance of the gospel. So if he's in prison and the gospel advances, he senses in his heart success.

Contentment, friends, our happiness, friends, depends on the standards that we set in our hearts. On the positive side, right, if you love animals, you can happily take a low-paying job at the aquarium down I-95 because you find scrubbing penguins to be, you know, very satisfying, more satisfying than affording a fancy car.

But on the negative side, parents, if your standards for your kids is to eventually afford that fancy car, your influence might make them miserable, right, by pushing them into a career they hate or by shaming them for a career that you don't approve of.

[12:03] If you desire people's approval, you have turned all the world into your judge.

So you will never run out of judges. And you will never know happiness. We can create for ourselves standards of happiness that are unfillable.

that will leave us endlessly discontented. But not so with Paul. He is content. Even while he is unjustly imprisoned, he sees success.

Don't you want to have an unconquerable contentedness in your life? How did he have it? Because he staked his hope on a goal that didn't depend on him.

Instead, he staked his hope on a goal that the Lord promised to complete. Paul wants to see the gospel go forth.

[13:17] Guess what? He must labor for it, right? But the results are in God's hands. And we already know the outcome. Because Jesus said, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail.

And Paul has just said, I am sure of this. Verse 6, right? That he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. No wonder he can be content. Just as I could live in a box so long as there's enough reading material, Paul can live in prison so long as the gospel goes forth.

And while I might run out of books, the Lord himself makes good on Paul's ambition. So Paul will always know contentment.

several years ago, a team won the NBA finals. In the offseason, one of the most skilled players in the league signed with them.

People roasted him for bandwagoning. He couldn't win a title on his own. Peyton Manning said that the U.S. women's gymnastics team was so successful at that time that this player was considering joining them.

[14:34] Now, while it might bring shame to have to attach yourself to a juggernaut basketball team, there's wisdom in joining yourself to the mission of the gospel.

A mission that cannot fail. A mission so sure that if it's where your hope is, your hope cannot fail. Even when you lose your freedom.

Even when you lose your life. And speaking of freedom, who is free in that room where Paul is under house arrest?

Because the soldiers who are holding Paul captive, I mean, in this moment, they have freedom of movement.

And Paul does not. But he is free from sin and from death itself. Because he is, verse one, in Christ.

[15:37] who lives and reigns forevermore. They, not he, are in the pitiable circumstance.

He is free even while he is in prison. Which is why, then, he is freed to be content, verse 13.

He cares more about the gospel, the message of freedom coming to them more than he cares about his temporary chains. Because this day, in 2022, Paul has been enjoying Christ's reward for more than 1900 years now.

He does not worry about a few years in prison. That didn't even hinder his goals. Just think of Paul's priorities here.

Verse 13. His priorities of the gospel go to the guards more than that he win his freedom. He's already free. Verse 14. He desires that the church be bold.

[16:42] And we'll think about this some more because the logic, it doesn't make any human sense. He desires that the church be bold more than he desires his own ministry to be profitable in a worldly sense.

He would be proud of the images we've seen this week of Ukrainian Christians singing and praying publicly in the face of an advancing army. think of his priorities.

Verses 15 through 17. He talks about those preaching Christ to steal some of his reputation. and he desires Christ be preached more than he desires his own reputation.

And just like the, you know, with the guards, like who's actually free in this circumstance, Paul knows that his name can't be tarnished. It doesn't matter what others say of him or how great they rise in fame in this fledgling little Christian church.

Not because Paul is so great, but again, verse 1, he is in Christ. He is joined to the name above every name. It doesn't matter if others speak ill of him.

[17 : 56] He belongs to the one to whom every knee will bow. so that, of course, these are his priorities. Let the guards hear the news of an empty tomb.

Not that he walk free. They're the ones in bondage, not him. Let the church be bold. Not that he have opportunities. He has everything he needs. That in all things Christ be proclaimed.

Not that he build his own reputation. And friends, in all these things, can he fail? Can he fail? No, because it doesn't depend on him. It depends on the one who already conquered the grave, who already ascended to heaven, who rules and reigns this moment and every moment.

It is literally impossible for his hope to disappoint him. Because Christ has guaranteed it all. Oh, that we might live like that.

what are your ambitions, friends? What are your hopes? Can they disappoint you?

[19 : 09] This one can't. Do you have an unshakable hope? And friends, every Christian actually has an unshakable hope. the question here is more, is Christ your central hope?

Or have other goals, other pursuits, other ambitions taken center stage for you? We don't want to be unhelpfully over-spiritual and say, have no other pursuits, no other ambitions, no other pleasures in this world.

Have zero concerns other than the advance of the gospel. Take no joy in lesser things. Of course, you should care about other things. Feed your family. Do a good job at work.

And, of course, enjoy other things. The Bible is clear that the Lord has created all manner of things for our joy. Family, the natural world, the marriage bed, wine even, the scriptures say, because he loves us.

The question is not, do you have other ambitions and other joys? The question is, where is the center for your life? If something else has functionally become the center of your hope, you will never have the contentedness that Paul has in these verses.

[20 : 38] So, in your person, you won't have this. And vertically, with the Lord, you'll dishonor him by placing something lesser above he who is greatest.

And horizontally, to the world around you, from your closest family to strangers on the street, you won't live with the power of the joy of the Holy Spirit that creates the kind of attitude that can form this letter.

And so, friends, place your central hope where it cannot be shaken. if my ambition were to be, if my central ambition were to be that Christ would be glorified above all, well, we saw in Acts chapter 1, he has already ascended on high where he rules and reigns and is glorified above all.

It's already fixed and certain. how can we test ourselves? How do we know what are some indicators of caring centrally for Christ and his kingdom?

Here are some questions to ask. These are not the only ones. Here are some. How often do you pray for unbelievers in the advance of the gospel? How often do I pray for my church family?

[22 : 11] How generously do I support gospel ministry financially? How attentive are we to Randy's prayer reports?

Or do we just kind of stuff them in our Bible and keep walking? We try to preach in ways that are tightly bound to the gospel here. What I mean by that is we look at the scriptures and not only say what does scripture command, but we also ask how does our new birth change our desires towards that command?

How does the indwelling spirit, one of the blessings of the gospel, empower us for that obedience? How does the gospel free us from worldly ways of thinking to this new mindset in obedience towards scripture?

How does eternal life, one of the blessings of the gospel, change the time horizon in the way we make decisions, and so follow the scriptures? How often do you take hold of that gospel in my life

and obedience and advance the gospel in your own life?

these questions and questions like them might indicate the degree to which the gospel ministry is actually your concern.

[23 : 36] Christ and his kingdom is at center for you. Let us all examine our own hearts. Paul is free and content in a prison cell.

because Christ is at the center. I want that for you. I want that for me. And when the gospel is our central hope, the rest of this passage actually falls into place for us.

Because look, what does he say in verse 14? Most of the brothers having become confident in the Lord by, or sorry, I'm getting ahead of myself. Sorry, I'm just excited. I want you to know, brothers, verse 12, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

So it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. When the gospel is our central hope, well, then, suddenly, we will find ourselves like Paul, seeing every circumstance as an opportunity to share.

Walking through the streets of Philippi, an opportunity for the gospel. Being attacked by a mob in Jerusalem, an opportunity for the gospel. Right? He doesn't defend himself. He just starts preaching Christ when they're beating him, right?

[24 : 58] On trial before the Sanhedrin, an opportunity for the gospel. This was like the whole conclusion of the book of Acts is Paul just taking one opportunity after another not to defend himself, but to offer people Christ instead.

Imprisoned, Philippians chapter 1, by the Roman praetorium, an opportunity for the gospel. wherever you are, it is an opportunity for the gospel.

Right? The natural conversation in that room is, what are you in for? Well, let me tell you about Jesus. Now, throughout the last year, we've been focusing, emphasizing evangelism in our church family.

I won't recount all of that right now for you, but if you want, we put together a lot of those resources in one place on our website. Go to Shrine's website under the Proclaim, right?

Proclaim, build, serve. Under Proclaim, there's a page that says share the gospel. Helpful resources for you to be just like Paul. Naturally beginning gospel conversations.

[26 : 06] Multiple different ways to explain what the gospel is. Even apps that you can put on your phone to do it for you. There are lots of things that can help us be just like Paul.

And what is that gospel that Paul is proclaiming? I'm going to put it in a slightly unusual format right now because Paul is showing us some unusual things.

His imprisonment is the opportunity for someone else's freedom. We're going to see throughout this passage everything is a reversal. reversal. And so too is the gospel.

The gospel is a story of reversal. If you read Romans 5, I won't preach it now though I'm tempted. Paul explains that the gospel is God taking his enemies and making them not his prisoners but his children.

the gospel is a grand reversal. And so too is every element of this passage today.

[27 : 25] Let's take a look. Reversal number one Paul's imprisonment serves his mission. That's what we've been saying about verses 12 and 13.

Right? My imprisonment is rather a very good thing. It advances my chief aim Paul says. I like how one commentator put it. The apostle Paul did not merely say that the gospel had continued to make progress in spite of adversity.

Rather the adversity itself had turned out for the advancement of the gospel. I can't help but think that Paul sees himself in this moment a lot like Joseph in the book of Genesis.

If you're familiar with that story it is a great reversal because we belong to the God who reverses the curse. He was sold into slavery in a foreign land and from there taken down even further with false accusations and thrown in prison yet he was lifted up to become essentially functionally the prime minister of Egypt and save so many from famine.

When his brothers the ones who betrayed him and started him down this terrible path of slavery and imprisonment when Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead and realized now that Joseph had power over them they said it may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him so they sent a message to Joseph saying and we don't know if this is true they might just actually be completely fabricating this right your father gave this command before he died say to Joseph please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin because they did evil

to you and now please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father Joseph wept when they spoke to him his brothers also came and fell down before him and said behold we are your servants and I can't help but think that Paul thinks of himself in terms like this Joseph said to them do not fear for my and the place of God as for you you meant evil against me but God meant exact same word

[29 : 45] God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today so do not fear I will provide for you and your little ones unless he comforted them and spoke kindly to them God meant for Joseph to go into slavery and into prison and Joseph was not undone by it because his goals were not solely for himself of course he wanted out of course Paul was out of this prison but their central ambition their central aim was something else something that didn't depend on them something that depended on the one who cannot fail and one of those leads then to the next reversal because his imprisonment emboldens others verse 14 this is where I was getting ahead of myself most of the brothers having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment are much more bolder to speak the word without fear does that make any sense seriously does that make sense okay the great apostle the miracle worker guy the one who actually converted us he's in prison now is that emboldening for you does that make any sense no right cut off the head kill the body that makes sense strike the shepherd scatter the sheep that makes sense verse 14 has no earthly justification in the mid first century this is probably around the year 60 62 those are probably the boundaries of Paul's imprisonment in Rome there's no earthly reasons for Christians to have any confidence in like the church as an organization as an institution right

Christianity is not well established within the world it is not respected culturally speaking no one even knew if it was going to last past this first generation of believers it could just be you know this flash in a pan there was no long history of Christian mission and stability to encourage them there was no cultural cachet if they kept on their leader was gone and boldness the only explanation is that God stoked the fires of their hearts and in the kind of reversal that he loves he made them bold where they should have cowered and so Rome the great power couldn't fell the church from without imprisoning Paul only served his mission rather advanced the gospel by emboldening the church itself and in the final reversal of the passage neither could strife within the church it also couldn't help but advance

Paul's hope verse 15 some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry but others from goodwill 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 now Paul these are not like false teachers Paul would not celebrate that Christ is being preached he would not actually even admit that they were preaching Christ if they were not actually orthodox but they were not preaching for honorable ends even in the midst of this small little church that didn't have cultural influence in the world they saw Paul's absence as an opportunity for them to become big fish in a little pond and so probably what they're doing is taking on leadership roles in the church in order to gain standing among the church!

Now again there's not a ton of respect to gain in Christianity in the first century but our heart strengths do desire things like that sadly we'll leave that on but Paul says even this serves his joy because he can suffer the loss of his own reputation as long as Christ is preached again we've already said his name is already joined to the name above all names and so the God who picks the younger brother Jacob to continue his promises the God who uses a shamed and unloved woman Leah to bring into the world Judah the tribe of kings the God who uses a prisoner in Egypt Joseph to save the known world from famine God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong also puts

Paul in captivity and the captive offers liberty to his captors the church which should be cowering in fear he makes bold Christ receives renown from those who would preach the gospel for their own hands and I would love to invite anyone who has not come to this point where they belong to the God of reverses we've already said it is the message that Christ came died for sinners and in so doing makes them his own when they repent and believe may I offer you the opportunity to come and belong to him because the gospel is the story of reversal in a few moments we're going to sing such words thick with not irony but something close to it a beautiful irony we're going to sing come behold the wondrous mystery

[36 : 40] Christ the Lord upon the tree that is the cross in the stead of ruined sinners hangs the lamb in victory let's pray Lord thank you that there is an unshakable promise in you the God of

reversals Lord I ask that you would help each of us to see the glory of what you offer in the gospel and perhaps someone today repentantly for the first time and come to belong to so great God and for all of those today who have already trusted in your name Lord I ask that you would cause us to re-center our hopes and our ambitions unto that which cannot be shaken your great love and the promise that you will do great things for our good and for the glory of your name we ask amen we come now to the

Lord's supper which of course is a great reversal it is sometimes called the last supper because the enemy meant for it to be a funeral what happened instead as they were eating Jesus took bread and after blessing it broke it gave it to the disciples and said take eat this is my body and he took a cup when he had given thanks he gave it to them saying drink of it all of you for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins and here it is the enemy meant for this to inaugurate a funeral but Christ inaugurates something else entirely I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until until that day when

I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom with the enemy intended to be a funeral the Lord established a wedding banquet because drinking it new with us in his father's kingdom is what the scriptures call the wedding feast of the lamb this is the God whom we belong the one who goes to the tree not to be shamed to be victorious the one who takes a funeral and turns it into the greatest celebration friends center your lives on Christ and his promises he cannot fail you and so for all who belong to him let us now receive the promise that is embedded in this sign

I'll read it again because as they were eating Jesus took bread after blessing it broke it gave it to the disciples and said take eat this is my bread together and he took a cup when he had given thanks he gave it to them saying drink of it all of you for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins proclaim his death again oh our great king we stand before you in awe and thanksgiving and in joy help us to center our lives on that which matters most for ourselves for our church family and for the world around us who needs the freedom that Paul offered his captors Lord would you be all in all in our lives now and forever Amen