

The Gospel Advanced Through Paul's Imprisonment

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[0 : 00] Let's unite now in prayer. We're going to call upon the Lord in prayer. Let's pray together. O Lord, our gracious God, it is about you that we have been singing. As we have been singing, praises to your name for your greatness and for the way in which you are ascended up on high.

And we thank you that that has come to pass, particularly in the resurrection and exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we thank you, Lord, that while it has been the case that you have always been praised by your people down through the ages as a God who is high and lifted up and majestic, you have come particularly through your Son, Jesus Christ, to reveal the exalted nature of your being and the way in which, especially in him, you have come to bring your people to be joined with him so that they too will come to be raised to reign together with him.

We thank you tonight, Lord, for that prospect, for the confidence it brings to us as we consider these great issues pertaining to our God. We ask, Lord, that you would bless us here by your presence once again. We pray for the power of your Holy Spirit to enable us to see into your word things that will reflect more of your glory and give us an increased understanding of these things.

We thank you for all that we cannot understand, for the truths concerning you that are too great for us to comprehend fully in their extent. And we thank you, O Lord, tonight that we come to a God who is so immense and so great and so glorious, and yet who is prepared at all times to share with us those things that pertain to your salvation. You come alongside us and you have come to take our very nature to yourself. And you have come, Lord, to show to us your concern for our well-being in sending your own Son into the world to die the death of the cross. Lord, humble us, we pray, once again in your presence. While we come to you who is so majestic and so holy and so high and lifted up, yet we give thanks that we can approach you, that we can come and fall on our knees in your presence, and that we can come, Lord, to seek your help. We bless you for all that we already know concerning you, and we thank you that you have revealed to us all that is necessary for us to know for our salvation in your word. We thank you for these great features of your redemption that we find set out for us in your word of truth. And Lord, we pray that you would enable us once again tonight as we turn our mind to your word, that you would enable us to further our understanding of it, enable both in speaking and in hearing alike, that we may, Lord, hear your voice, and that we may know that the Lord again has met with us. Bless every gathering of your people tonight throughout the world. We know that there are many people, Lord, gathered as we are in various places in the world, in very different circumstances to ours, and some with very similar circumstances too. You have your people throughout the whole of the world. You have your people gathered. You have your people called by you. You have your people where they are unable to gather. We thank you, Lord, that in being in control of the government of the world, of the providence that affects each and every human life, that you alone are God, that you have purposed all of these things to take place so that you would be glorified ultimately through them. And Lord, while we cannot understand much of that also when we see some of the things that take place in our world, some of the disasters, some of the conflicts and so many other issues that cause us distress, will help us, we pray, to carry all of these things and our concerns over them into your presence. And enable us, we pray, Lord, to come as we pray to you to realize that you hear us, that your ear is ever open to the crying of your people, that you are willing that we should always come and burden our hearts to you in a way that we cannot with anyone else.

We pray for your blessing, Lord, and your church throughout the world. And we pray for the gospel to be advanced and to be used powerfully in the hand of your Holy Spirit. Lord, we pray for your kingdom to be advanced. We pray that you would bless every effort made to bring the gospel into

places in the world, whereas yet it is hardly known. And we do ask that all who carry your word as missionaries and as those who serve you in very difficult circumstances at times will know your blessing.

[5 : 09] And we pray that, Lord, as we find much in the world that would suggest to us that the gospel is being hampered, yet, Lord, we know from your word that sometimes it is in these very circumstances that God is most active. And you have proved yourself down through the generations to be a God who has surprised even his very people by the way in which you have come to show your great power and your wisdom even through the events of providence. We ask your blessing, Lord, to be tonight with all that we commend to you. Bless all who belong to us as a congregation of your people. Bless every home connected to us. Bless every individual in these homes or connected with them. We pray for your blessing, O Lord, so that we will come and know increasingly of the drawing power of your Spirit by bringing us to know and to enjoy more of that eternal life. And that even in times of trial and sorrow and difficulty, we may nevertheless by your grace be able to rejoice in the Lord our God.

Remember our young people. Be with them, we pray, and our children. Bless them, Lord, as they have some participation in the worship of your name at home or in church gatherings. We pray your blessing will follow what they hear of the gospel, what is taught to them in Sunday school and in homes, in their own homes, in youth fellowship and even in the creche. May it be pleasing to you, along with the Twinnies group, to bless all these gatherings that take place. And we thank you for the return of these meetings today. And pray that you would grant, Lord, that it may be possible for us to maintain them in these weeks ahead. Now, we ask that you would bless all who are grieving tonight over the death of loved ones, those who miss loved ones. And it may indeed have been many years, Lord, since they were taken out of this world. Yet the pain and the emptiness goes on and the sorrow in these hearts, we pray, that you would bless them and build up and bind up their hearts, we pray.

Fill them with your own comfort. Give them direction in their lives. Help them to trust in you, even when it's difficult to do so. Grant, O Lord, that we may never doubt your wisdom, that we may never doubt all that you do by way of the government of our lives. And we pray that your blessing will be with our people, the nation we belong to. And Lord, we know that we have been through so many difficulties over this past year and a half. And yet we find, Lord, that there seems to be little response by way of turning to God on the part of so many. We pray that you would use reflection even upon this pandemic to bring people to realize the most important issues in life.

But especially, Lord, we pray that you would bless the gospel, that you would bring people to realize their need of that salvation that is held out for us in your word of truth. We pray for our government and ask that you'd bless them, both here locally and also nationally. And we pray that you'd bless those who have these great responsibilities over us as a nation. And Lord, we ask that as we sometimes find ourselves so bewildered by decisions that are taken and find ourselves disagreeing with some of what is brought to be placed on the statute book of the nation. Lord, we ask nevertheless that you would help us to bear them before you as you call upon us to do in your word, to pray for those who are in authority. And we do so even tonight as we bring them before you. O Lord, give them wisdom, we pray.

Give them to be turned away from the foolishness of worldliness and from that which is of mere human device and invention. And granted, you would deliver us all, O Lord, from that which is of our own thinking, our own sinful thinking, our own selfish thinking. And give us, O Lord, that our thoughts may be after your truth and after the guidance of your spirit. And so, Lord, hear us now. Continue with us in this worship and bless to us this day and pardon our sin for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[9 : 41] We're going to read now from God's Word. And the first reading is from 2 Timothy, chapter 4 and verses 1 to 8. 2 Timothy, chapter 4 and verses 1 to 8. Then we'll turn to read in Philippians, continuing with our studies in Philippians chapter 1, and we'll read the passage we're going to look at this evening from chapter 1, verse 12 down to verse 18. So, first of all, in 2 Timothy, chapter 4, verses 1 to 8. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an

evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race,

I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing. And if we turn to Philippians and chapter 1, verses 12 to 18. Philippians 1 at 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 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 rivalry, 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.

We pray God will bless to us these readings of his own word. I'd like us to turn to the second reading there in Philippians, just to continue with our studies through the letter to the Philippians. And we're going to take this passage from verse 12 to verse 18 this evening. Paul had a twofold purpose in writing this letter to the Philippians.

We're taking in that he wrote from prison in Rome. That's the most acceptable position, I think, as to where his imprisonment was at this time, and that he was waiting the outcome of his trial in Rome, which was going to be before Caesar himself and that judiciary there. And the twofold purpose that he had in writing this to the Philippians was firstly to assure them of his well-being, to actually give some information about himself and his condition and what things were like where he was.

[13 : 33] And that was important to the apostle because this was a church, this church in Philippi, that loved him deeply, that respected him greatly, and were concerned for him, and were concerned to find out what his situation was and what better way than by a letter from Paul himself.

So it was firstly to give information to the church in Philippi about himself and about his circumstances. But secondly, Paul undoubtedly had in mind the purpose, secondly, to give some direction and teaching to them as to how to act under suffering, how to regard suffering for the Lord's sake, how to act under that, or how to react under that, or not react under that. But throughout the letter, you find him speaking about himself, like in this passage, of his circumstances in prison and something of what that imprisonment entails. But along with that, he actually calls upon them to use that by way of applying it to their own circumstances too. For example, he talks about not having rivalry, not thinking about others in any way other than better than themselves and so on in chapter 2. So he's really giving them an example by speaking of himself in the way he does as to how to conduct themselves in these difficult circumstances that they too are experiencing as Christians in the world. And of course, that becomes a very important point as you read through the letter in applying it to ourselves, whatever our difficulties and trials may be. Here is something in Paul's letter to the Philippians that we can take and apply directly to these circumstances and follow out his reasoning as to how we should think of God and of ourselves and of the church and of God's people during these situations. Now, what he's saying here about his imprisonment, as he mentions there in verse 13, it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard that my imprisonment is for Christ.

Now, if you think of the older authorized version, it's actually the word chains that you find used there. And that's literally the word in Greek that's used here by the apostle, that my chains are for Christ.

He is actually literally chained. That would be the practice at the time. Paul would be constantly chained to a Roman soldier, probably by the ankle. And while he had a measure of freedom, he could have some people coming to visit him. He was obviously free to write letters to have people to speak to that came to see him and so on. But it was certainly not an easy situation, being constantly chained day in, day out to a Roman soldier with all that that meant by way of discomfort and pain and probably cuts to his leg. But what he's doing is really telling the Philippians how to evaluate that sort of suffering.

You see in verses 28 to 30 there, he says, Don't be frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. And you see,

he's directing them there to his own circumstances, but directing them as to how they must deal with the circumstances that they themselves are in. And it's interesting there in verse 29, it has been granted to you. The word is literally gifted. And it's an amazing use of the word because what Paul is really saying is that suffering is in the way that God puts it into the experience of his people and uses it in the experience of his people. It's his gift to them. It's an aspect of his gifting to them, things which are actually to their benefit, which is an amazing thing itself as you see the use of that word there. Well, we'll come to that, God willing, whenever we reach near the end of the chapter. But here he is talking here in this passage, verses 12 to 18, and we'll take it under two main headings. First of all, he's talking about the gospel's advance in verses 12 and 13. 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, some of them would be Caesar's own bodyguards, and to all the rest, that my imprisonment is for Christ. He's really saying to them, this is actually what I want you to understand. What has happened to me has not hampered the gospel. It's not been something that's kept the gospel back.

[18:46] It's actually been the other way about. What has happened to me, I want you to know, brothers, that this has really served to advance the gospel. And the word really is really, the word really there is emphatic in the way the apostle uses it. He's saying to these Philippians, these Christians that he loves and that love him, I really want you to understand that this has really happened. The gospel has indeed been advanced by what has happened to me.

And that's happened, first of all, in the emperor's own household, Caesar's household, the imperial guard, right in the very depths of the administration of Caesar, the great emperor himself. In Rome, this is what's happening. The Lord is actively blessing the imprisonment of Paul so that even through the imperial guard and Caesar's household, it is known that his imprisonment is actually for Christ. What a remarkable thing to say. Now, you see, often the actions of the enemies of the gospel rebound on themselves, or actually, to put it another way, the actions of the enemies of the gospel sometimes actually serve to advance the gospel. Like, for example, of Acts chapter 12, where you find the persecution against the church there outlined by Luke, as he wrote the book of Acts.

And it was, of course, under Herod at the time, the Herod that was there in charge at the time. And you remember, of course, that he killed James and threw Peter into prison, thinking that that would actually stem the advance of this gospel, this teaching about Jesus, and all that was associated with it. And in any case, it came to the point where Herod actually took a very serious attack and illness and died. And the Lord's angel struck him down because he did not give God the glory and was eaten by worms and breathed his last very graphic details of the demise, the end of Herod. He had been just in Tyre and Sidon. They came to him and they just extolled him as if he were a god. He came out and sat on his throne. He made a great speech.

People were shouting, it's the voice of a god and not of a man. The angel of the Lord struck him down and he was eaten by worms. And then, you see, then you have this Luke just very matter-of-fact saying, but the word of the Lord increased and multiplied. Here's Herod who's trying to actually put the word of God under wraps and bringing it so that it's stifled by putting these people in prison, by killing James. There's Herod's purpose. There's Herod's intention. That's what he's trying to do.

That's his purpose. And yet here is Luke saying, well, Herod is dead. Herod collapsed and died. But the word of the Lord increased and multiplied. You know, sometimes I ask myself, what's happening in the likes of Afghanistan? What's happening in the likes of places in the world where there's great conflict? Is there anything more than conflict? Is there anything more than what you see on the surface? Is there anything more than what you see in the news bulletins?

[22:18] Well, maybe not. But very often it's the case that the gospel is actually being advanced, that people as Christians are emboldened, as we'll see in a minute, beyond what is normally the case through the persecutions and the difficulties that have come upon them. And instead of actually, instead of the gospel actually being thwarted or held back or stemmed, it's actually advanced.

And you know, when you're praying for the church in Afghanistan, when you're praying for the church in Iraq or in Syria or wherever else it is you're praying for, remember that very often God is at work in a way that surprises us when we hear about it. The very things that you might think in our human thinking, in the way that we ourselves tend to look at things, the very things that you might

think would actually stem the gospel and would actually be a barrier to the gospel, God actually uses them.

In order to advance the gospel. That's what he's saying here. That's what Paul is actually saying. If you were asked the question, how could we evangelize Caesar's bodyguards?

How could we actually reach into the imperial palace with the gospel? Or how could we encourage Christians in Rome so that they were actually made more bold or more confident or courageous in reaching out with the gospel throughout the city? The last thing you and I would probably think of was ask God to put his chief apostle in prison in Rome. But that's what he did. This was God's method of advancing the gospel even to the extent of the imperial guard in Caesar's household. He put Paul, his apostle, in prison in Rome. And now he's saying, brothers, I want you to know what has actually happened to me has served, really served, to advance the gospel. In verse 7, we've seen going through that, how in verse 7, if you cast your mind back, where he says, in my imprisonment, your partakers with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. And he is set here for the defense. I've been set there, he's saying, put here for the defense of the gospel in verse 7. In my imprisonment, I've been set here. What has happened to me is by God's appointment is what he means.

[24 : 57] And so, he's really saying something remarkable, that despite what you see or might think outward, God is actually advancing his kingdom, advancing his own cause, advancing the gospel by what's happened there. Paul is viewing his circumstances through that lens of God being in charge.

And that's a really liberating thought at all times. Whenever you come to actually take stock of your situation, whenever you come to ask, why is this happening now? I could do without this.

This is not really what I would regard as advancing the gospel. How come this is actually happening to me just now? Why am I more free? Why do I have suffering of this kind right now? I could do without this. I have so many other things that I could be doing. Look at it through the lens that Paul is using. The overall government of God, the way that God in His wisdom arranges things beyond our human expectations. And he's saying, it's known now throughout the whole of Caesar's household, throughout the whole imperial guard, that my imprisonment is for Christ.

You can just picture the same, can't you, when I don't know how long these soldiers would have to do in terms of shifts when they're chained to the apostle. Would they be doing eight hours, 12 hours? Doesn't really matter. But just imagine for a moment there's the soldier there coming to the end of his shift, and the one who comes to relieve him as he brings the chain that's attached to Paul's ankle and attaches it then to his replacement guard. He'll say something to him. You know, he says, listen to this guy. I've never heard anything like this. And for all that's happened to this man, all I've heard throughout my 12-hour shift here is about this Jesus. And this man is rejoicing in this Jesus. This is quite amazing. And this man goes back then, has his dinner, has his supper, whatever it is, and he tells his mates around the table then, he's just come from the prison, he's just come from Paul's cell, and he says, I want to tell you something about this man. This is quite extraordinary. See, Jesus is being made known throughout the imperial guard.

And even by pagan soldiers, the message of Christ Jesus being Paul's Lord, being in charge of Paul's life, and I can imagine Paul would have been speaking to them and speaking to those who came to visit him about Jesus and about his death on the cross, his resurrection, Paul would certainly not have left any of that out. Every opportunity would have presented Jesus to him. So, you see, he's saying, this is now what is being known throughout the whole imperial guard, that my imprisonment is for Christ. Christ has been made known in the imperial guard through the imprisonment of this faithful apostle. The focus has come to be on Jesus. But not only that, it's not just in the emperor's household that this is happening. He's saying also verse 14, most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

[28 : 35] He's saying, let me take you outside the imperial palace. Let me take you outside, he's saying to the Philippians, to what's happening in the city, to what's happening in regard to my fellow Christians and your fellow Christians there. Through my imprisonment, they are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Now, we're not told exactly the details of how that comes about, how that happened, that they were made more bold. What was it about Paul's imprisonment that really gave them the boldness? But however it is, it was that imprisonment and what Paul was under it and how Paul was conducting himself. Everything to do with that situation, he is saying, they have

become more confident in the Lord by my imprisonment. So, they are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Again, it's the word chains he's using. They are more confident in the Lord by my chains. You know, we bless the Lord tonight for our freedom. It's a precious, precious thing.

For the many aspects of that freedom that we have, the freedom we have in our circumstances, in our nation, in our locality. Freedom to come to church, freedom to preach the gospel, freedom to witness for Christ. And there are places in the world where that is not possible.

There are many places tonight where Christians are prevented from meeting with each other or meeting with others. Does that mean God is inactive? Does it mean that where there is persecution against Christians, the gospel is inevitably being stemmed and held back? No, of course it doesn't. And we pray that where persecution is in place in the world, that through that itself, God will advance His cause. God will still cause others to hear about Jesus, to hear about Christ, to come to know Christ, to come to know that these Christians, even in their suffering, are still worshiping the Lord and still true to Christ. So, there's the gospel's advance.

[30 : 44] He's saying, Now, he's talking here about two very different types of motives, two very different types of purpose on the part of those who are preaching the gospel. Some are doing it just to try and add to

Paul's difficulties, which is a terrible thing. Why would you do that? Just because they don't like Paul. They want to actually see Paul surpassed. They want people just to ignore him and to look at themselves instead. Paul's absence by imprisonment obviously left a gap in the church at the time, a gap in terms of serving the Lord openly. And here were two types of people who were really trying to fill that gap. There were those who were not at all happy with Paul and didn't appreciate at all who Paul was or what he was about. And so, they went about preaching the gospel as his rivals. They envied him. They wanted to make life difficult for him. They wanted to aggravate his sufferings. That's what he's saying, thinking to add to my afflictions. They weren't preaching the gospel sincerely, but in order to try and make things more difficult for me. They were preaching Christ with that motive, with that purpose, with that mindset. They were preaching to outdo Paul. We're not given details, but possibly something like the number of people that had been converted through them or the prestige that they may have in the church, whatever it was. It doesn't matter really.

They were doing this to humiliate him, to advance themselves, to make things as difficult as possible for him. You wouldn't expect that in a preacher of the gospel, would you? But that's what he's saying.

But the others, he says, are doing it out of love. Those who loved Paul and were loved by him. Knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. Knowing that I'm situated here for the defense of the gospel. So he was saying here, those that actually are doing it out of love, appreciate why I'm here and appreciate what's happening through me. And they're not wanting to make things more difficult for me. Indeed, they're wanting to encourage me is what he means.

[33 : 55] They are preaching out of goodwill. They have a sincere motive. Knowing that I'm put here for the defense of the gospel. Again, the words there mean put here, mean appointed by God here, placed by God here. That's what they know. Now, Paul knows that they love him and that he loves them, just as these Philippians do back in Philippi that he's writing to. And I can assure you that those who are preachers of the gospel very much appreciate the love of those that they preach to, those that are a congregation of people such as you are yourselves under our ministry. It's a wonderful thing to know of being loved, of being appreciated. We trust that that will be something that will never leave, either from my point of view or from yours. Because for the apostle, that was really hugely important, that he loved them and they loved him. Those preachers who were preaching sincerely, not out of rivalry, not out of false motives, but actually out of a sincere desire for the gospel and for Paul himself. Knowing he says that I'm here, I'm put here, placed here for the defense of the gospel. Now, the word defense there is also important. It's a word that, from which you get the subject we do in college or seminary, it's called apologetics. It's not just to do with defending the gospel and gospel truth and defending the faith, the Christian faith. It also includes how you actually present that faith. It has in it the idea of presenting it in a reasoned and cogent fashion, not just throwing it together any old way, but actually reasoning it through, thinking it through, presenting it in a way that really seeks to grip people's minds. This is actually something you find back in Acts chapter 24. The word is used there. Let me just find the text and read what it's

saying there. This is again Paul as he's actually preaching the gospel. And in chapter 24 and verse 25 of the book of Acts, he's there preaching to

Felix. Felix came and his wife, Drusilla. He sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as Paul reasoned about righteousness and self-control and coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, go away for the present. When I get an opportunity, I will summon you. There's an example of apologetics and an example of Paul presenting the gospel in a way that reasons with his hearer. He's actually presenting the truth to Felix because he's reasoning there about righteousness and self-control and coming judgment, and it gets to Felix's conscience. And that's the business of preaching the gospel. It's not just telling nice stories. It's not there just to present things factually as they happened in the way the Bible records them. It's actually to present an argument for Christ, an argument for God, an argument against worldliness, whatever it is. But it's done apologetically. We're trying to. We're hoping it's that anyway. And so that's what they were doing.

They were doing this out of love, knowing that he was set there by God for the defense, for the presentation of the gospel meaningfully, even to those soldiers in prison. So they had mixed motives, some out of rivalry, seeking to add to his affliction, some out of love, knowing that he was there for the defense of the gospel. So what is Paul's reaction?

Now here's the remarkable thing. You might expect him to say, well, I'm really happy that those people who love me and who are loved by me and who are sincerely preaching the gospel, I'm really happy that they are doing that, but I'm not at all happy with these other folk.

Well, what he's saying is, what then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I am rejoicing. Where is he? He's in prison. What are the circumstances? [38 : 27] He's chained to a prison guard day in, day out. He knows that there are people out there preaching the gospel, trying to actually add to his afflictions. But he's saying, as long as they're preaching Christ, I rejoice in that. Whatever their motive is in preaching Christ, as long as it's Christ that's proclaimed, I can rejoice in that. I can get over the fact that they're trying to add affliction to me in my circumstances, that they're trying to make things more difficult for me than ever before. I can accept that. I can put up with that. What I could not put up with, he might be saying, is if they were not preaching Christ. And you see, it's Christ that's being made known throughout Caesar's palace, through his household. Now, we have to be careful because it's not at all saying to us, he's not at all saying in this that he was indifferent or didn't really care about the content of preaching. That's not what he's saying. He's not saying he's indifferent to what these people were preaching. All you've got to do is read the letter to the Galatians, for example, to know that

Paul was absolutely, jealously protective of the content of the gospel and the content of gospel preaching. But what he's really saying is, it's not so much the how and the why of their preaching, how they're preaching or why they're preaching, it's what they're preaching or who they're preaching.

Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice, and I'll continue to rejoice, he's saying in the next verse, yes, and I will rejoice, because it is Christ that's preached. And when he's saying Christ is preached, he means Christ in his death, Christ in his resurrection, Christ in his person, who he is, what he has done, what it's about.

Sadly, there are many large church buildings tonight throughout our nation that are either fast emptying or have long since emptied. Why? Because Christ was not preached. Because the gospel was not presented in a biblical way. Many liberal churches throughout the world are fast hemorrhaging membership because it's not Christ that's being preached, because they're not true to the gospel. We're not elevating ourselves in saying this, pretending that we're actually far better than any others. That's not what we're about. But we want to jealously guard the gospel and the content of the gospel and the core of the gospel and the Christ of the gospel.

You haven't come here tonight to hear my views on climate change or on politics or on the environment or on the latest movements in the Premier League or the latest movements in the celebrity world.

[41 : 30] You've come here tonight because you're saying, I'm a needy sinner. Show me Christ. Isn't it? Show me Jesus. Show me Jesus. Tell me about Jesus. Tell me the old, old story. Bring me to the cross.

Take me to the open sepulcher so that I can really understand something more of what Christ has done for me. That's what is being preached. And Paul is rejoicing in that. And that's where we need

to rejoice.

If Christ is being preached. Whatever other things may accompany that. Even sad things like false motives. As long as it's the pure gospel and as long as it's Christ that's being preached, then Paul can rejoice in that and so also can we.

And so, friends, that's tonight. Paul's presentation of the gospel's advance, not despite his sufferings, but through his sufferings. Not despite the fact that he's in prison, but even because of the fact that he's in prison. And this has led to it being known throughout all of Caesar's household that his imprisonment, his chains are for Christ. Others have been emboldened to speak the gospel, to preach the gospel and speak about Jesus outside of and throughout the city itself.

And Paul continues to rejoice. That in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.

[43 : 17] Isn't that what you rejoice in as well? That this is a place that's associated with long, long years of the preaching of Christ.

Christ being presented. Christ being proclaimed. Christ being exalted. Christ being glorified. Christ being offered in the gospel to needy sinners like you and I.

May it never be anything less. Let's pray. Lord, our God, we give thanks tonight for the core substance of the gospel in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

We give thanks for the availability of life to us in him. And we give thanks tonight, O Lord, that you have once again reminded us of the importance of Jesus himself.

Jesus in his death and in his resurrection. In his triumph over sin. In his exaltation to glory. In the prospect of his return. Lord, our God, we pray your blessing.

[44 : 26] That we too may, whatever sufferings are entailed in our following you, that we may take heed of such passages in your word that remind us that you can do great things through the suffering of your people.

And that even through their confinement, you are able to blow apart the defenses of the world. And we do ask that you would continue to give us that perspective and that outlook even in our own day. Hear us now, we pray, and accept this our worship for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's conclude our worship this evening. We're singing from Psalm 138.

That's in the Sing Psalms Version, Psalm 138. And it's on page 179. From verse 4, down as far as verse 8.

O Lord, let all earth's kings give praise when from your mouth they hear your word. Let them extol the ways of God, for great's the glory of the Lord.

[45 : 31] Although the Lord God dwells on high, the lowly person he protects. Whereas the proud and haughty one he knows afar off and rejects. Although I walk a troubled path, your tender care preserves my life.

You raise your hand against my foes. Your right hand saves me from their strife. The Lord will certainly fulfill for me the purpose he commands. Your love endures forever, Lord.

Preserve the works of your own hands. These verses, O Lord, let all earth's kings give praise. Amen. O Lord, let all earth's kings give praise.

When from your mouth they hear your word. Let them extol the ways of God, for it's the glory of the Lord.

Although the Lord God dwells on high, the lowly person he professed.

[46 : 42] Whereas the crowns around the haughty one, he knows afar off and rejects.

He knows afar off and rejects. A boy, oh, God, Charlie, oh, God, your tender care preserves my life. Your raise to hand against my foes. Your right hand saves me from their strife.

The Lord will certainly fulfill On me the power of God, He commands, Your love endures forevermore.

Is there the works of Your own hands? Is there the works of Your own hands?