

Rejoice in the Advance of the Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] Let's take our Bibles and open them up again to the book of Philippians this morning. The book of Philippians, we're continuing, this is week two of our series in the book of Philippians and our passage this morning is going to be from chapter 1 verses 12 through 18.

So if you'd flip your Bibles open to chapter 1 verses 12 through 18, when you've found it, let's stand in honor of the reading of God's Word. I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard that into 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.

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I will rejoice. Let's pray.

[1 : 2 6] Father, Father, we pray that it would be our deepest desire and our truest joy that the gospel would be advanced, that Christ would be proclaimed, that your name would be magnified here in our lives, in our church, in our community, and to the ends of the earth.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. Amen. I'll start off by sharing a story that I read this week from 1660.

John Bunyan was arrested because he refused to stop preaching the gospel without approval from the Church of England. John Bunyan was a Baptist preacher.

He was well-known, well-loved. His imprisonment would have been a tough blow for his family, for his community, for his church family, those who worshiped the Lord alongside him. And I read through the court records this week from his trial, and I wanted to share them with you as a way of illustrating what's going on here in Philippians this morning.

So this will be a little bit longer of an introduction than normal, but I think it will be worth it. The judge, Judge Wingate, he says, Mr. Bunyan, you stand before this court accused of persistent and willful transgression of the Conventical Act, which prohibits all British subjects from absenting themselves from worship in the Church of England and from conducting worship services apart from our church.

[3 : 0 0] You come, presumably, with no legal training and yet without counsel, and I must warn you, sir, of the gravity of the charge, the harshness of the penalty in the event of your conviction, and the foolhardiness of acting as your own counsel in so serious a matter.

I hold in my hand the depositions of the witnesses against you. In each case, they have testified that, to their knowledge, you have never in your adult life attended services at the Church of that parish.

Each further testifies that he has observed you on numerous occasions conducting religious exercises in and near Bedford. You hear their issue.

You will preach the word when we tell you, where we tell you, how we tell you, to whom we tell you to preach it to, or you will not preach at all.

That's the issue. Bunyan's reply. The depositions speak the truth. I have never attended services in the Church of England, nor do I ever intend ever to do so.

[4 : 02] Secondly, it is no secret that I preach the word of God whenever, wherever, and to whomever he pleases to grant me opportunity to do so. I have no choice but to acknowledge my awareness of the law, which I am accused of transgressing.

Likewise, I have no choice but to confess my guilt in my transgression of it. As true as these things are, I must affirm that I neither regret breaking the law, nor repent of having broken it.

Further, I must warn you that I have no intention in the future of conforming to it. You can imagine, at this point, the judge's jaw just dropping and hitting the floor.

Who is this guy? Who does he think he is? As the judge would reply, the evidence that I hold in my hand, Mr. Bunyan, even apart from your own admission of guilt, is sufficient to convict you. And the court is within its rights to have you committed to prison for a considerably long time.

I do not wish to send you to prison, Mr. Bunyan. I am aware of the poverty of your family. And I believe you have a little daughter who, unfortunately, was born blind.

[5 : 05] Is this not so? It is, my Lord. Very well, the decision of the court is this. Inasmuch as the accused has confessed his guilt, we shall follow a merciful and compassionate course of action.

We shall release him on the condition that he swear solemnly to discontinue the convening of religious meetings, and that he affix his own signature to such an oath prior to quitting this courtroom.

That will be all, Mr. Bunyan. I hope not to see you here again. Maybe hear the next case. And as the judge expected Bunyan just to leap for joy at such a merciful declaration and to be thankful and to leave in silence, John Bunyan says, my Lord, if I may have just another moment of the court's time.

Judge Wingate says, yes, but you must be quick about it. We have other matters to attend to. What is it? John Bunyan replies, I cannot do what you ask of me, my Lord. I cannot place my signature upon any document in which I promise henceforth not to preach.

My calling to preach the gospel is from God, and he alone can make me discontinue what he has appointed me to do. As I have had no word from him to that effect, I must continue to preach, and I shall continue to preach.

[6 : 26] And again, the judge could not believe what he was hearing. And so, he says, you leave us no choice but to commit you to Bedford jail for a period of six years, which in reality would turn out to be 12 years.

If you manage to survive, I should think that your experience will correct your thinking. If you fail to survive, that will be unfortunate. In any event, I strongly suspect that we have heard the last we shall ever hear from Mr. John Bunyan.

Of course, he was wrong. Here we are this morning speaking the name of John Bunyan. While John Bunyan was there for 12 years, he took the time to write.

He wrote at least five books. Profitable Meditations was the first, then Christian Behavior. He wrote Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners. That was his autobiography. He wrote a book called The Holy City.

And then eventually, he wrote Pilgrim's Progress, which would go on to become one of the best-selling books of all time. Over 250 million copies sold of The Pilgrim's Progress.

[7 : 34] It's not an exaggeration for me to say this morning that more individuals have heard the gospel because of John Bunyan's imprisonment than they heard from his preaching, which got him thrown into prison in the first place.

Isn't it funny how God chooses to work? The gospel of Jesus Christ must be advanced. God is committed to advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

And sometimes, God uses weird, strange, surprising circumstances to do it. That's exactly what we see here this morning in the book of Philippians.

As we look here to our passage this morning, we see again Paul has found himself in prison. He gets a visitor. We saw this last week from Philippi. Epaphroditus comes checking in on him, wondering how he's doing.

He wants to bring word back to the church in Philippi. How is this gospel mission going? You're stuck in prison. What's going on? And Paul responds as if to say, somehow, the gospel is still advancing.

[8 : 47] This imprisonment has not stopped the progress of the gospel. In fact, in God's wise providence, every attempt to silence the gospel has only served to spread it further.

In fact, he says, let me just share with you three surprising ways God is advancing the gospel. This will be our outline this morning. Three surprising ways the gospel is advancing through my imprisonment.

First, he says, because of my imprisonment, I am still proclaiming the gospel. Because of my imprisonment, I, Paul, am proclaiming the gospel.

Look there to verse 12 with me. Paul says, 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.

Now, naturally, the Philippians would be concerned about Paul. Their partner in the gospel is in prison. They love him. He's their friend. He's their partner. They want to check in on his needs.

[9 : 51] They want to see how he's doing. And now, Paul, he's writing back. You would not believe how good this is. You would not believe how good this is.

I'm out there preaching the gospel. And now I get put into prison. And now I get to preach the gospel here, too. I can't help but imagine the Philippians as they receive this letter.

You know, the Philippian jailer who came to faith from Paul's preaching. He's like, yep, I've seen that happen before. I've been there before. I've seen it work. Paul says, the whole imperial guard and all the rest, they know that my imprisonment is for Christ.

Ask yourself, how do they know that? How do they know that? I've seen enough TV shows to kind of imagine how this might go down, right? I'm sure it's exactly the same in a Roman prison. And Paul is there.

Another prisoner kind of nudges up next to him. What are you in for? Murder? Paul says, no. Theft? Do you steal something? No. Insurrection?

[10 : 53] No. Not exactly. What are you in for? Well, I spoke about this man named Jesus. They didn't like it, and they wanted me to stop speaking about this man named Jesus, but I refused, and so now here I am in jail.

What do you think the next question is going to be? Who is Jesus? Tell me about this man Jesus. I mean, you're already here in jail. What's that going to, what do you have to lose?

And now, boom, that door is wide open to share the God. Can you imagine being stuck in a jail cell with the Apostle Paul asking him, who is Jesus? I mean, what else is he going to get to talk about?

This is an opportunity. Paul sees this as an opportunity, divinely provided opportunity, to share about Jesus. So he says, well, let me tell you about Jesus. Let me tell you about this man who is God.

Let me tell you about this man who is tempted and tried in every way as we are yet without sin. Let me tell you about Jesus who loves sinners like me.

[11 : 59] I'm the chief of sinners, man. You're in here for your crimes. I am the chief of sinners. But Christ has come, lived in my place, died on my behalf so that God's wrath would no longer be against me in my sin, but I would be seen and covered with the righteousness of God.

Let me tell you about this Jesus who rose from the grave so that I don't even have to fear death. If they kill me after, who cares? I live for this man, Jesus Christ.

Can I tell you more? Let me tell you about Jesus, how even you, you prisoner, rejected by society, hated by man, even you, if you put your faith in him, you will have the promise of eternal life forever with God.

Let me tell you about him. You see, Paul, he didn't see his bad circumstances as an obstacle to the gospel. He saw it as an opportunity to advance the gospel.

Paul's life was defined by this mission, wasn't it? He didn't really care too much about his own personal comfort, did he? I mean, this is clear all the way throughout the book of Philippians.

[13 : 05] As we read through, we'll see this over and over and over and over again next week, Lord willing. For me to live is Christ, to die is gain, he says in verse 21.

To live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. There was no other purpose to live for Paul except to labor to advance the gospel, to live for the gospel of Christ.

I press on, he says in chapter 3. I mean, he's in a jail cell, guys. I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

I'm not sitting around. My life is defined by a mission. It's to make the name of Christ known. I've learned the secret, he says in chapter 4, of being content in all circumstances, whether I'm in a king's palace or a Roman prison.

What's the secret? I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Paul's life is defined by Christ Jesus. He is in Christ. He's secure in him.

[14 : 05] He's safe in him. His life is for him. He has a one-track mind. And it can't be derailed by a little time in a Roman prison. There's a simple little poem that I just love.

I might have shared it before. It's written by a British missionary named C.T. Studd. Y'all, they had better names back then. C.T. Studd. Only one life will soon be passed.

Only what's done for Christ will last. Paul says, whether I'm out on the road or in the temple or in the market or in a prison cell, I will speak of Jesus.

This is the mission of my life. I wonder if that's the same for you. I wonder if this is how you view your circumstances.

Whatever they may be. Positive, negative. All of us come in here this morning out of a week where we have circumstances. Whatever those might be. Some good, some bad.

[15 : 16] I wonder if you view those circumstances of your life as something to run from, escape from. Or if you view them as providentially supplied opportunities to advance the gospel.

God uses surprising means to advance the gospel. It means that the world rejects. He uses weakness.

He uses suffering. He uses foolishness in the eyes of the world. I wonder what weakness of yours. God has given you weakness. I wonder what weakness he's given you for the advance of the gospel.

Paul is advancing the gospel. Not only this second. He says, because of my imprisonment, the brothers are proclaiming the gospel as well.

Look there at 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.

[16 : 15] Now, hold on just a minute. That doesn't make any sense, does it? You think about what he just said. He just got thrown into prison for preaching the gospel.

He is in a Roman prison awaiting a sentence of either life or death. He might die for this. And he says, well, because of this, all these other brothers, they are now more confident to preach the gospel.

Explain that to me. Here's a truth that the devil hates. The more you press the church, the more the gospel spreads.

You hear that? The more you press the church, the more the gospel spreads. This is why Tertullian, the early church father, second century church father, he said the blood of martyrs is seed for the church.

The devil hates this truth. He absolutely hates this truth. You cannot stop the spread of the gospel by throwing Christians into prison.

[17 : 25] You cannot stop the spread of the gospel by taking away their belongings. You cannot stop the spread of the gospel by cutting off their heads. The gospel spreads when the church is persecuted and pressed.

The devil tries to blow out that flame. It only kindles the fire. It catches it. It spreads bigger and stronger than before. I don't know if you've ever stepped on a pregnant spider. I've done that before.

You step on this big, hairy, ugly spider, and all of a sudden there's millions of spiders in your room now. Every time the devil tries to step out Christianity, boom, it spreads.

Bigger, stronger than ever before. We see this all through the scriptures, don't we? Cain kills Abel, Genesis chapter 4. Before the rest of the chapter is over, we have Seth and his son Enosh all the way down the line to Noah and the beginning of a whole new world.

The book of Exodus. How does the book of Exodus start? There's a new pharaoh in town. What does he say? The Israelites are too many. Let's deal shrewdly with them lest they multiply.

[18 : 35] And what happens? The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied. And the more they spread abroad. Jesus. You go to Jesus. And what do they say?

If we can just kill this man, this movement will be finished. If we can just get rid of him, all of his teachings, all of his disruptions, all of his movement, all of his followers, they'll fade away.

His movement will die with him. How did that work out? Here we sit 2,000 years later worshiping the risen Lord. The book of Acts. Stephen.

The first martyr of the church. They stoned him for preaching Christ. And Paul was right there, by the way. He held their cloaks, not yet converted, standing by watching it happen. Acts chapter 8 says, There arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem.

They were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. And here goes Saul. He's ravaging the church. He's dragging off men and women. He's sending them to prison for worshiping Christ.

[19 : 37] Surely that will silence the church, right? Acts chapter 8 verse 4. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

And they wanted to snuff out this movement. But all they did was spread it further. Here's the truth that the enemy hates. The mission of God cannot be stopped by the methods of man or the schemes of Satan.

When you press the church, the gospel spreads. When the gospel spreads, the church is built. And as a church is built, God is glorified. You cannot stop the advance of the gospel.

Can I just tell you here on this point? How encouraging it is to read the stories of Christian history.

I know I can be a nerd about some of this stuff sometimes. I get that. But if you ever find that your evangelism is struggling, if you're just struggling to share your faith, if you feel like you lack boldness or confidence to go share the gospel and to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ, pick up a Christian biography, a good book that shares some of the stories of church history.

[20 : 55] Read about Adoniram Judson, the missionary to the Burmese, who said, We cannot sit still and see the dear Burmans, flesh and blood like ourselves, and like ourselves, possessed of immortal souls that will shine forever in heaven or burn forever in hell.

We cannot see them go down to perdition without doing our very utmost to save them. And thanks be to God, our labors are not in vain. And now, because of his labors, over 4.5 million Christians are there in that area.

Read about Hudson Taylor, who spent 54 years in China, started the China Inland Mission, which led to over 20,000 Chinese conversions to Christ.

You can read about Amy Carmichael to India. Read about Jim and Elizabeth Elliot. Here in October, you can read about the reformers and the price that they paid to recover the truths of the gospel and pass them on to us.

If you want to be stirred up to be bold in your proclamation of the gospel, church, read about those who have done it. There's value in reading about the history of the church.

[22 : 05] And if you want to be challenged in your comfort and safety and love of self-preservation, read about those who have suffered.

I've given all for the sake of Christ. I would encourage all of you to find a copy of Fox's Book of Martyrs. Find a copy of Fox's Book of Martyrs.

Write that down. This should be required reading of every Christian. I'll say it again. Read it. Write it down. Go home. Find it. Read it. Fox's Book of Martyrs. Find a copy of these stories of the persecution of the church and read it and be encouraged and emboldened to live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ.

And Paul says, the church didn't stop talking about Jesus just because I'm here in prison. Quite the opposite. The brothers are even more bold to speak the name of Christ. But not only them. Third, Paul says, because of my imprisonment, rivals are preaching the name of Christ as well.

Look there to verse 15. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I'm here for the defense of the gospel, with form or proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

[23 : 25] So apparently there's two groups of people that have been emboldened to preach the gospel by Paul's imprisonment. Right? The one are a group of well-intentioned brothers who are genuinely encouraged by Paul's imprisonment, and so they go out of love, and they want to preach the gospel.

They're more bold now out of goodwill, he says, to preach Christ. But there's some, who he says, on the other hand, there's some who are preaching Christ, he says, selfishly.

Preaching Christ out of selfish ambition. Now, it's hard to know exactly what they're, I don't think they're preaching false teaching. Paul wouldn't celebrate that. I think that they are, as far as I can tell, actually preaching the gospel.

Their message is correct, but their motivation is sinful. You see it? The message is right, they're preaching Christ, but why are they doing it? They're preaching it for selfish ambition.

They're preaching it out of rivalry. They're preaching it in some way, they think that they're going to harm Paul by their preaching the gospel. I can only assume that these people are in some way jealous of Paul.

[24 : 30] Well, they see the gospel success, you see my quotation, success he's having, you see the influence he's having, he sees the support he's receiving from other churches, and they say, he's in prison, I want to get some of that for me.

I want to get some of that for me, and I'm going to use the name of Christ to do it. They think that this is going to hurt Paul's ministry, but look how he responds in verse 18. I don't care what they do to me.

I do not care what they do to me. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I will rejoice.

Paul is not bothered in the slightest by any personal slight or personal attacks against him. I know this might sound strange to American Christianity, and to the celebrity pastor mindset that we've adopted here, but Paul simply does not care about building his own personal brand, does he?

Paul doesn't care how many followers he has on social media, who all is listening to his podcast. He doesn't care whether he's invited to get, get invited to speak at conferences, whether people buy his books.

[25 : 48] He doesn't have a study Bible with his name plastered on the front of it. He does not care. He doesn't want people to know the name Paul. He wants people to know the name Jesus.

He doesn't care about building his own personal following. He says something similar in 1 Corinthians. I guess this was a common issue, it seems like. 1 Corinthians 3, Some say, I follow Paul.

Some say, I follow Apollos. How does Paul respond? What is Apollos? What is Paul? We are servants. We're not the point. He's the point.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants, nor he who waters is anything, but God who gives the growth.

Paul is out here, he hears that his enemies are out there preaching the name of Jesus, trying to build the church with ill intention to harm him, so that they can hurt Paul in some way.

[26 : 46] He says, Praise God, by all means, preach Christ. Please, by all means, build the church. I never would have thought God would use you to do it. But praise God.

I rejoice in the advance of the gospel. I mean, just, just think of how frustrated the enemy must be by all of this, right? Here's this guy, Paul, who God is using mightily to build the church and advance the gospel.

He says, I'll have this guy thrown in jail. That'll stop it, right? No. The whole imperial guard hears the gospel. Well, maybe that'll at least discourage the rest of the church, and they won't preach the gospel.

They'll be silent, right? Wrong again. And the brothers are encouraged. Well, then I'll send out these selfish teachers to tear Paul down, and it'll cause a division in the church.

It's going to be, going to be this big uproar, an issue. Paul's going to tell them to stop. And Paul says, so what? Paul doesn't care about Paul. Christ is proclaimed, and in that, I rejoice.

[27 : 50] You know, the enemy would use all three of these circumstances to slow the progress of the gospel here as well. You realize that?

To slow the advance of the gospel in our lives, in our church, in our community, and in the world, he would use suffering to stop the advance of the gospel.

In the hands of the enemy, he wants suffering to stop gospel progress. He would use discouragement to stop the advance of the gospel. He would use division in the church to stop the advance of the gospel.

What we need, church, is like Paul, to have a one-track mind. To care about nothing more than the glory of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ. The mission that we've been given, church, is not to stay as safe and as comfortable as we can on the way to glory.

It is to give our lives away for the advance of the gospel. Paul. So let me ask you a few questions here as we close, just to apply this to us this morning.

[29 : 00] For one, you can't even begin to go about this task of giving your life away for Christ until you realize that Christ has given his life away for you. And so, first question has to be, do you know him?

Do you know Christ? Have you believed the gospel message? Do you share Paul's conviction that Christ Jesus is worthy of your life? If so, take a look at your life right now and ask yourself question number two.

What circumstance of my life is God using to advance the gospel? What circumstance of my life is God using to advance the gospel?

Or what circumstance of my life could be leveraged for the gospel? Some of the ordinary, regular, mundane things that we do every day, we don't even realize that they are gospel opportunities right there in front of our face.

Some of the things that we complain about and pray that God would just take away, those are opportunities that God might use to advance the gospel. That horrible situation at work.

[30 : 08] That terrible boss that you just can't stand working for. That sickness that just won't seem to go away. That conflict with your neighbors. I want you to be able to say that, you know, this circumstance is not ideal.

No, but through it, it really has served to advance the gospel. And in that, I rejoice. Here's another question. Do we care more about me or the mission?

Do I care about my comfort or my neighbor's salvation? Do I care more about me or the mission?

This is a tough one, isn't it? Do we have a one-track mind to the point where we care less about our comfort than the glory of King Jesus? Do we care less about our reputation than the spread of the gospel?

And this requires a work of grace. It doesn't. This is not natural thinking. Nobody naturally thinks this way. It's natural to self-preserve. That's normal.

[31 : 08] We need God's grace to shape and to change our way of thinking. And part of that is to ask this question. Well, who around me needs to hear? Who around me needs to hear the gospel?

And am I prepared to tell them? And that's what it looks like to live with the advance of the gospel on your mind every day. Your neighbors, your co-workers, your family members, your friends, the mailman, the guy at the grocery store.

These random encounters may not be so random. They may be providentially appointed opportunities to advance the gospel. If you're looking at your non-believing neighbor and saying, I just wish God would send somebody to them.

I wish God would send a missionary to them to share the gospel with them. They're just so lost. God, would you save them and share the gospel with them some way? Would you just provide some way to get the gospel to them?

Have you considered that maybe he's sent somebody? And maybe it's you. Last question.

[32 : 12] Is our joy, is our joy contingent on our circumstances or is it rooted in Christ? I have never met such a happy prisoner.

This letter is filled with joy. 104 verses, 16 times that word joy or rejoice shows up. Why? Because his joy is not rooted in something that can be changed in an instant, like your circumstances, like your health, like your safety, like your freedom, like your comfort.

His joy is rooted in the unchanging, undefeatable truths of the gospel and the glory of Jesus Christ. Is that true of you? Yeah. Only one life will soon be passed.

Only what's done for Christ will last. Only one life, yes, only one, soon will its fleeting hours be done. Then in that day, my Lord to meet and stand before his judgment seat.

Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Only one life, a few brief years, each with its birth hopes and fears.

[33 : 28] Each with its days I must fulfill, living for self or in his will. Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last.

when this bright world would tempt me sore. When Satan would a victory score. When self would seek to have its way, then help me, Lord, with joy to say, only one life will soon be passed.

Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Father, we pray that this would be the motto of our lives.

Lord, would you fill us with gospel ambition and to not seek our own comfort and our own safety and our own security, Lord, but to seek first the kingdom of God.

Father, we pray that the gospel would be advanced and we know it will be and we pray that it would be advanced through us and in us. God, we ask, Lord, that we would see our friends and neighbors and family members come to faith in Jesus.

[34 : 34] Lord, would you fill our lips and our mouths with the hope of the gospel. Would you help us to view every circumstance, good and bad, as opportunities to advance the gospel. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.