

Joyful Proclamation — Philippians 1:12-18a¹

Five Points Community Church (12/4/16)

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- October 28, 1787, a 28-year-old Member of Parliament wrote in his diary, “God almighty has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners.” With those words, William Wilberforce captured his all-consuming life goals. Forty-six years later, three days before his death, Wilberforce received word that slavery had been abolished throughout the British empire. (Metaxas, *Amazing Grace*, 85, 274)
- Wilberforce endured much during those decades. His life was dedicated to accomplishing this task. It was the focus of his life.

Grateful for Gospel Advance (v.12)

- Such all-consuming dedication is evident in our passage as the Apostle Paul writes this support letter to a partnering church. He’s letting them know how he and the ministry fares.
- We’re getting the tone of his demeanor already in v.12 as he doesn’t make much of his imprisonment at all—just a vague reference “what has happened to me.”
- In this, we see where Paul’s priorities are. His comfort is nothing to him. The concern his supporting church ought to have is how the gospel is doing.
- Contrary to what one would expect from his situation, the gospel continues to advance. The apostle may be bound but the gospel continues unhindered.
- We see here is a display of Paul’s spiritual secret of contentment that he talks about at the end of chpt. 4. He can do all things—he can be content in all things, even in prison, that is—because Christ strengthens him.
- “So enough about me—see how the gospel is surging ahead!?!?”
- This is instructive for us:

¹ Commentaries consulted: Peter O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, Eerdmans: 1991; Homer Kent, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary; Philippians*, Zondervan: 1978; D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians*, Baker: 1996; David Chapman, *Philippians: Rejoicing and Thanksgiving*, Christian Focus: 2012.

- Perhaps your experience of suffering is intended for gospel advance, and the suffering can serve as a distraction to what God intends to accomplish. That doesn't make bearing under the suffering easier, necessarily, but looking to see what the Lord intends in the midst of it may give perspective.
- There is much to be said about a biblical view of suffering and all the reasons and purposes God may have for suffering. I am suggesting here just one—if Paul was consumed with his situation and hardship, he would not be so concerned about the advance of the gospel.
- Who knows what the Lord is doing in tragedy and pain? But perhaps your suffering is intended “to really serve the advance of the gospel.”

Sphere 1: Military Testimony (v.13)

- Paul has two spheres of gospel advance in view. The first sphere is among those interacting with Paul in his imprisonment. Look at v.13.
- We don't need to understand this verse to mean that all of these soldiers repented and believed in Jesus. Paul's point is that it is widely known that he is imprisoned because of his union with Christ, because he testifies to a crucified and risen Savior.
- It's not hard to imagine these soldiers stationed in Rome spreading that word. Paul wasn't a criminal like other prisoners. He was bound because he said that a guy their brothers-in-arms crucified rose from the dead. And I doubt that Paul came across like he had lost his mind—he was probably level-headed and logical.
- And he rejoices that the gospel *has become known*—there is knowledge of it—among this troop. Commentators say there would've been about 9,000 of them in Rome. Then “all the

rest” have come to hear something of this Christ as well—all those who had some connection to Paul’s case.

- If this were the sole outcome of Paul’s imprisonment, this would be something indeed to praise God for. Look at how the gospel advances!
- These soldiers likely had the power to mistreat Paul and even if kill him if so ordered. Yet the Apostle boldly tells them of Jesus.
- There is an implicit confidence here that Paul knows Jesus can even save coarse, pagan soldiers. Ultimately, he gives no thought to what they may do to him because he will make Christ known.
- What about the coarse, hard-hearted person in your life? Is Jesus mighty enough to save them? What keeps you from making the gospel known to that person?
 - As I was reflecting on this, I wondered if I too often have a functional unbelief in the power of Christ to save sinners, that the gospel actually won’t advance outside of kids raised in the church.
 - If we see or hear blatant sin—a racist comment, an inappropriate remark, an unethical financial transfer—and we don’t say anything, is it because I have a functional unbelief that that non-Christian won’t actually hear my gospel witness and repent?
 - Following me? Of course, we would never state that formally. But *functionally*, is that how we operate? May it not be so. May we be so consumed by the beauty of Jesus dying and rising again to save sinners that we know that none are beyond the saving power of Christ.

Sphere 2: Bold, Fearless Preachers (v.14-17)

- That leads us into the second sphere of gospel advance—Christians in Rome were being emboldened to fearlessly proclaim Christ, though from different motives.

- *Fearless, Loving Proclamation (v.14, 16)*
 - The more commendable group fearlessly preaches Christ from good will (v.15) and love for Paul (v.16). They've seen his example and follow suit.
 - It is this group that has a settled confidence in the sovereignty of God. They know that Paul has been put in prison under the direction of the Almighty. This whole apparent tragedy of the apostle's imprisonment was foreordained by the Sovereign Lord.
 - They know that Paul is there to make a defense, to be an apologist, for the gospel.
 - If God has Paul in prison to testify to Christ, then I surely ought to testify to Christ in my freedom.
- *Fearless, Ambitious Proclamation (v.14-15, 17-18)*
 - But the other group fearlessly proclaims Christ from a motive of rivalry, envy, selfishness, insincerity, and with an eye to increase Paul's affliction.
 - This is a cutting description. For instance, one commentator noted that this word translated "envy" is not just desiring what someone else has. It's just wanting that person to not have it.
 - Yet Paul's critique isn't that they don't believe the gospel or are false teachers. Paul says they proclaim *Christ*. It isn't just the message of the gospel they preach as peddlers of the Word, but they preach the *person* of Jesus. If they were false teachers, he would call them out for it.
 - Yet their motive for preaching the gospel is personal gain. Perhaps they were starting to grow a big Roman congregation before the hotshot Paul showed up. People flocked to the Apostle, and their pride took a hit. Now that Paul is in prison, they are back in the

limelight. Perhaps they even made backhanded comments about Paul and how he was rotting away in jail while they carry on the Lord's work.

- We ought to read Paul's description of these people and check our own hearts. What *are* our motives for sharing the gospel or serving in the church? We can do and say the right things but yearning for people to think much of us. We can start to brood over why I'm not being asked to teach that class or serve in that position or hold that office or lead that ministry. Whose kingdom are you really advancing?

Joyful Proclamation (v.18a)

- Regardless, of the motive of those making Christ known, Paul's simple delight is that the gospel goes forward despite what one may expect from such a challenging situation.
 - You can imagine Wilberforce having a similar response. If other leaders or politicians took up the cause of abolition, even with an eye to afflict Wilberforce by showing how more effective they are, who cares?! The great cause is being advanced!
- Paul's conclusion that he will rejoice screams in defiance of what the voices of the world are whispering to us. Paul's response points to a worldview issue.
 - The world is saying your circumstances control your response. You don't *deserve* this hardship you're experiencing. You should care about what all those people think about you—what they say, what they retweet, what they comment is what shapes your identity. So be angry. Hold a grudge. Be self-conscious.
- But Paul answers with a resounding, "No. I. Will. Rejoice." Jesus is my greatest treasure and my heart soars when more and more people not only come to *know* him but *love* him and have their lives *conformed* into his image.

- Last week Pastor JJ said, “You only love God as much as your knowledge of him shapes how you live.” That’s what Paul yearns for the Philippians and anyone he can talk with.
- And if it isn’t him who is doing the talking, if it isn’t him who is commending Christ, so be it! His joy is in the gospel advancing.
 - O, may that be the controlling passion of our lives. May we pour ourselves out in our parenting that our children might know, love and be conformed to Christ. May we pour ourselves out in proclaiming Jesus that our neighbors and coworkers might know, love and be conformed to Christ.
 - It can be so much easier pursue the joy of the nations because we can send missionaries, money, and pray. We can neglect the eternal joy of our neighbors because it requires us to open our mouths. It requires us to open our lives.
 - Regardless of our circumstances, may we rejoice in and give ourselves to the proclamation and advancement of the gospel.