

Philippians 1:12-18 – “Advancing the Gospel in Difficult Circumstances” enough illustrations?

Get on the bus:

- I count getting to open God’s Word before God’s people as an amazing privilege and evidence that God truly uses Jars of Clay **“to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”**
- **We have a wonderful text in front of us today, with some recurring themes that we will see throughout this book, particularly the first chapter... so our Father must want these to sink in –** and in particular today that *in the midst of difficult circumstances and suffering we must rejoice and see these things as opportunities for the gospel!*
- **And I say all of this knowing that we have people in here that are facing very difficult things,** this isn’t fluffy your best life now stuff, I say these things knowing that there is hardship in here, *cancer, people with estranged family relationships, lost jobs...*
- **And no matter who you are in this room today, from the oldest believer, to a non-christian,** all of us will face harsh circumstances because we live in a broken world, but Paul directs us in this first chapter what our response to hardship could and should be and why!

Pray

Opening Illustration – Jim Eliot many of you know, was a young graduate of Wheaton College in the late 40s who was passionate about Christ and committed to seeing the Auca Indians, a violent South American tribe come to treasure and know Christ.

- *Eliot went down to engage this people along with other friends and knowing that this group was dangerous they took a gun –* He was asked once if they become violent will you use your gun and he said I will not, I am ready to meet my maker they are not ready to meet theirs!
- *And as Time magazine at the time detailed they did become violent and 5 young men lost their lives for the sake of the gospel!* What was most important to them? **The advance of the gospel... even in the face of opposition and difficult circumstances...**

Transition to the text: *We see the same with Paul here in this text; his greatest concern is the advance of the gospel in the face of great hostility and horrible circumstances.*

- **Imagine this scene:** Try to put yourself in the shoes of our brothers and sisters in Philippi. **The man who planted your church has now been arrested and will face Caesar.** *And no shock that they are scared, they are shaken, their champion is in jail*
- **It’d be sort of like if Tony and I coming up when we are in Ukraine and we get arrested** and you haven’t heard from us, you are unsure, maybe shaken... *and then in your inbox an email appears from our email address!*
- **That is sort of what is going on here in this letter and I imagine you would be eager to click on that email and see what it said –** *and this is not some monthly bible installment, this is a war plan! And so it is now for us and the Lord has preserved this so that in 2014 at IDC we can hear it!*
- *And Paul here will let them know, you are shaken, you are concerned but you shouldn’t be Christ is still King and Caesar is not and what is happening to me is making that known!*

Main Point: *Put the advance of the gospel as your highest ambition and then see circumstances and opposition in light of that ambition*

(V. 12-14) **I. Rejoice in difficult circumstances because they are opportunities for the advance of the gospel**

“I want you to know brothers” – Paul’s loving tone to this church is noticeable – He loves them – **They are family to him and that is what church is!**

- **Is that sinking in for you at IDC? We are family...** that’s one of the reasons we covenant together and renew that today – this is a high calling – *we are the family of God, closer than biological blood!*

- We will be brothers and sisters a Billion years from now (so we better start liking each other), and so in the church we give a glimpse of the future as we point the world to that, **which is why unity is of such an issue in the NT!**

Says to his family “That what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel” – And now Paul wants to put his circumstances in perspective for his brothers and sisters. *And he is saying to them quite to the contrary of what you think, things are not as they seem.*

- What I am suffering hasn’t harmed the gospel, nor should it shake you but it is actually working to make the gospel known... no matter how bad things have been for me and they have been bad, **they are actually serving to advance the gospel, so Rejoice!** The Kingdom is marching on!
- **This is to encourage the Philippians because they too will face suffering** and his joy and mission focus in spite of horrible things going on around him is *an encouragement to them to likewise in all circumstances, yes even horrible ones, Rejoice!*

Paul often in the epistles points out how dreadful circumstances – circumstances like almost none of us in this room have faced – *are being used for the fame of Christ!*

- Quote 2 Corinthians 6... and read 11 – **Paul is clear, whether good or bad it has worked out for the advancement** – *literally the blazing of a trail for this message that is turning the world upside down!*
 - o Paul saw difficult circumstances as new opportunities for the gospel, do we? Or is it more of an opportunity for us to complain and doubt God?
 - o **Paul is not preoccupied with his circumstances;** he’s more concerned about Christ and His Kingdom not his predicament!

In V. 13 Paul tells the Philippians specifically why it has served the advance of the gospel

“So that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest” – Because of his chains the gospel is becoming known among Caesar’s soldier – *The Imperial Guard is likely a special guard that protected Caesar and his interests*

- **And why is gospel advancing?** Likely what is happening here is that different guards would take turns watching after Paul, likely being chained to him... *and now Paul has a captive audience and he takes the providential opportunity to speak!*
 - o **Illustration** – Find it interesting that **two pastors I highly respect** (Matt Chandler and Tony Merida) had chance encounters like this as well, well chance sports encounters (*Chandler gets his football locker put next to a guy who comes up to him and says “hey man I need to tell you about Jesus when do you want to do that?” ... 2nd baseman*) – **so what’s my point?** *Well obviously sports are great*
 - o **My point is men like Paul see providential circumstances as opportunities to speak – and here Paul turns a terrible, humiliating experience into a means of speaking about the King!**

“That my imprisonment is for Christ” – **Why is this having such an effect among the guards which likely would have numbered in the thousands** – because these guards are getting to see Paul’s commitment to Christ is what led to these chains!

- **Paul here is showing off the surpassing treasure that Christ is to him** – *he wasn’t in jail for any great crime or horrible deed, no he simply was committed to this Jewish carpenter, so committed he was willing to be beaten and jailed for him!*
- **Paul is the kind of Christian who can say you want to see if I really believe this stuff?** Look at my back... look at my chains. And in that people get to see he really believes this GOSPEL IS enough to suffer for it!

Paul actually is rejoicing that at great expense to himself others get to hear the gospel – even these men who would have likely mocked him, spit on him, humiliate him, in the most dehumanizing conditions where he likely couldn't go to the bathroom in privacy, he rejoices cause these men get to hear!

- **And this would have been contagious to them** – *they don't see a complainer, they see a man day after day singing, praying* (for them – “thank you for these chains because this man gets to hear”) **and his joy would have shown off the beauty of the gospel!**
- **He was not like the normal hardened criminal instead he was a man who would spend his time talking about a Jewish King** from the Eastern parts of the Empire who was crucified, buried, risen from the dead, the true King who would one day judge even Caesar himself!
- **For Paul he wasn't chained by his chains/circumstances, he seized them for the glory of Christ** – and he preached a sermon! **Instead he rejoices in them, and yet we cant tip if we feel wronged!**

In the midst of all this, Paul preaches a sermon, but its not to be confused what I am doing right now – **we are all with our lives and lips 24 hours a day preaching a sermon**

- **The question is, in the midst of good or bad circumstances what kind of sermon are we preaching?** The glories of Christ? Or a false gospel sermon of whining and complaining that lets the people around us know we don't really think God is in control or good to us!
- **I mean imagine a prayer like this if a nurse overheard it** – “*Thank you father for this cancer because what is happening to me is serving so that all the nurses on this floor know my joy in Christ in the midst of this suffering!*” **That shows Jesus off!**

Implications for us:

- **See our circumstances as opportunities** – *Paul here rejoices because his horrible circumstances make it possible for the gospel to go the most powerful city in the world and to spread throughout its military might and to “all the rest”* (which not sure if that means rest of soldiers, Caesar's house, or Rome, but either way it is blazing a trail).
- **See our circumstances as part of the bigger purposes of God** – Roman soldiers would have been unlikely to frequent the places Paul would teach, and yet because of his circumstances thousands of them now get to hear. **And now the might of Rome is handcuffed to God's most persuasive evangelist! God has allowed His most strategic piece to get arrested so that the gospel would go forward!**
 - o **So let's not dwell on our circumstances but trust in the Sovereignty of God and the advance of the gospel** – even possibly among those that are harming us – **He will use our tough circumstances** – so view your tough job, your cancer, your... in light of its use for the furtherance of the message!
 - **These are the kinds of truths that are extremely practical...** *I am not telling you today about your best life now, it is coming later, but it just may be that another will one day have their best life cause you didn't in this one!*

We need to realize that often the advance of the gospel is accompanied with great suffering and we wont always have the whole picture of what God is doing, may just have a small glimpse of it – the question is when suffering hits, or government persecution, do we become more or less gospel oriented? If we knew we would take a beating for gathering together today when we walk out those doors, how many of us would actually be here?

Again you will continue to hear about these themes in the following weeks from Tony who will likely say it better than I am, just with less hair But we should take this as a sign that God is preparing us and He is wanting to drill this deep in our hearts!

One note – I am speaking here about real sufferings and how they can be used for gospel advance, not rough circumstances that come on because of our stupidity – **I ate this whole box of Krispy Kreme** and

now I feel awful, but we all have our cross to Bear... **or I stubbed my toe**, I am suffering for Jesus! *No, you just cant walk and chew gum at the same time!*

- **When hard times come our way, is it because of our boldness in Christ or because of our folly?** I am not talking about folly, or trivial things like when you break a nail! **I am talking Real hardship!**

1 Peter 4:12-16: *12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.*

(READ VERSE 14) Another reason Paul rejoices in imprisonment is that it has embolden the brothers to speak!

- ***These brothers are now embolden as they observe Paul's boldness in the face of danger and opposition and they become courageous and speak*** – Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:13: *“we also believe, and so we also speak”*
- **And this is only way gospel will advance, we have to open our mouths** Romans 10 is clear about this – when Paul suffered, he spoke, ***and maybe one of the reasons we don't suffer is because we don't speak!***

Why were they and why should we be embolden? ***Because Christ is our most precious and valuable treasure... more precious than anything the world can give us, or death can take away from us...*** and if we understand the gospel, we get this, what does it matter what happens us?

- **And our attitudes in our rough circumstances could spur others on, if Paul can be like that in prison, and Donna can be like that with cancer, I can be bold in my circumstances – Paul got this, whether he lived, died, suffered, was appreciated or not, Christ was the deal not his circumstances and he realized that if the worst thing happened to him – death, it only meant he got more of his treasure!**
 - o **This should spur us all on because we are all headed for a grave and all that means is more of what we want most! Christ!**

This happened with Eliot, there was something of a revival on Wheaton's campus toward international missions after hearing of the fate of Eliot and his 4 companions!

(QUICKLY THROUGH THIS SECTION V. 15 – 18) II. Rejoice in the advance of the gospel even if some have impure motives in their proclamation

(Read 15 – 17) – So what is going on here? Basically you have two groups in those that have been emboldened to preach 1) those that love Paul and preach with right motives and 2) and those that are envious of Paul and seeking to harm him and preach out of wrong or impure motives

The 2nd Group and we are not clear exactly who they are preach out of envy, rivalry, selfish ambition, not sincerely but seeking to afflict Paul

- ***It seems that some might think Paul has harmed the cause of Christ by getting arrested***
- **It is possible they thought they were better leaders for the movement than Paul and wanted to displace his prominence** – and believe they can magnify their ministry and put Paul down by lifting themselves up
- **Regardless they are seeking to hurt Paul by preaching showing that their motives are whack** – they preach out of selfish ambition these envious evangelists as Tony calls them!

The other brothers preached out of love knowing that Paul had been appointed by Christ for this task of seeing the gospel advance among the gentiles – so much so that it has gone now to the most powerful city in the Empire because of his chains!

- **Consider what he says of Timothy in chapter 2 as compared to the envious evangelists:** *“For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. [21] For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. [22] But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.”*

(READ V. 18) – “What then?” – what should I do with all of this? Rejoice – *That even in poor motives the gospel goes forward, that is what he is saying, in prison, in good intent, evil intent, harsh circumstances the gospel is the deal and its on the move!*

- **What's clear is that both groups had correct doctrine and proclaimed Christ** – they just viewed Paul differently – **but the gospel has not been compromised – they have right gospel, just wrong motives**
- **It is clear that the bad group didn't have the warm fuzzies for Paul** – but they are not the Judiazers preaching circumcision, they are not heretics
 - o **He calls that group dogs/evil doers in chapter 3 – And that's not a cute pet name in case you are wondering!** *Oh aren't you guys cute as a puppy, know in those days dogs ate people, just ask Jezebel about how cute they were...* they were gross animals then, sort of like cats today

Paul is not here excusing heresy – So we need to be very careful here, often I hear people defending preachers who don't preach the gospel with this verse and it is a misapplication – *just because a man has pastor in front of his name and has a bible on the podium doesn't mean he's preaching the gospel and doesn't mean he is not compromising the gospel!*

- **Paul never tolerates the gospel being compromised, ask the Galatians** – We need to be discerning, be very weary of a gospel that promotes your happiness above God's glory! OR promotes works above grace!

Also, Paul is not excusing these motives or condoning their attitudes, he will use the same words in chapter 2 telling them to do nothing out of selfish ambition but to consider others better than yourselves!

- *He is just stressing the wrong motives of men cannot be what dwell on, and we are not in charge of them, we rejoice that the gospel advances!*
- **He is saying that the message is more important than the medium or the messenger**
 - o **Paul is a shining example to us – He is in chains, fellow brothers seeking to hurt him, and in the midst of all of that crud, he says I rejoice because the gospel marches on!**
 - o **And is he not here an example for us in how to relate to fellow believers who might seek to do us harm?** *(Why not rather suffer wrong, why not rather be defrauded)*
 - o **Here in this passage Paul is not prizing his own interests but the gospel...** *it is more important to him that the gospel go forward than he be respected!*

Implication for us in this room – there is danger here, particularly for those considering going into Ministry:

- *Why do you desire to go into ministry? Desire for Status? Being up in front of people? What are your motives?*
- *Are you a person that constantly looks around and compares yourself with others?*
- **Can you celebrate the advance of the gospel observed through another's ministry that doesn't agree with you on ever apostrophe of doctrine? We have to be careful that we don't make our pet doctrines equal to the gospel!**
- *The danger in ministry is that are always going to be those temptations to not rejoice in another's ministry but to be envious and a rival!*

But there is also grace here brothers – God uses jars of clay, imperfect people to carry his treasure – I mean when I read Paul’s statement in 18 honestly I don’t really like it. But then as I stand here now I am thankful that he uses sinners with poor preaching for His glory!

- **This doesn’t mean that we celebrate pretense, and certainly not error – *but that we should rejoice that God uses men like us who are still sinners and can often have mixed motives and he uses us anyways.***
- *And so we should check our motives for sure, but then get up and preach with confidence because we don’t do the saving anyways!*

What matters most for Paul is the advance of the gospel and circumstances nor impure motives deter the gospel being his highest ambition – what matters most to him is Christ is preached!

- **What matters most to us?** Wealth, health, comfort, status, reputation, future spouse, family... *if a genie came to you tomorrow and granted one wish, what would it be? Honestly!*
- *Its not that all of those things are bad but when they become our highest ambition we will never be untouchable like Paul, because once they fall apart, we fall apart!*
- **Make the gospel your highest ambition! See Christ as your highest treasure!**

This is what drove the early church and marked them – Paul was not the only one marked by this!

- In Acts Peter and John are beaten and they left the council rejoicing it says *cause they were counted worthy to suffer for the name!*
- **In Acts 4 it records this statement,** “29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness”
- **And in Acts 2, Peter just about 43 days after he has denied even knowing Jesus gets up at Pentecost to speak words that he knows can get him arrested** and words that can even do and will do in the fullness of time what he feared just 43 days before, get him crucified, and he stands up boldly and speaks!

Conclusion – What changed for the apostles? And why should we be bold?

- **Why should we not fear loss, humiliation, cancer, death?** *Well in first century there was another man surrounded by Roman Soldiers, arrested, beaten, mocked, imprisoned, stripped, taken outside the camp, shamed, crucified, executed as a criminal* while his brothers fled from him and his mother watched him writhe in agony and he was abandoned by God accursed for us even though he was perfect and had done nothing wrong... and he laid lifeless in a borrowed tomb!
- **What changed for the apostles, and why should we not fear? Because if we are in Christ the best and worst things that can happen to us have already happened...** we have already been Crucified, we have already been to hell, we have already been judged, we have already been buried, we have already been raised... and we are already seated at the father’s Right hand...
 - o **So why fear the devil’s accusations? Why fear ostracism? Why fear pain? Why Fear Cancer? If in Christ, We have a King who raises Cancer riddled bodies to perfect ones... why fear being in a Muslim context where we may have Muslim extremists** shouting that they will cut our head off if we do not say there is no God but Allah and Muhhamed is his prophet? **Because we serve a King who can put heads back on!**
 - o **Easter is not something we celebrate once a year, it is our whole life! What changed for the apostles to make them bold as lions just 43 days later? Resurrection! Nothing can touch us!**
 - o **If we die we get more of our greatest treasure, Christ! IF we suffer we share in it with him counted worthy by our great King...**

Appeal:

Some in this room the gospel should embolden, others it should terrify because it means you are outside of Christ and you are aligned against Him and your suffering is in vein!

- **Unbeliever** – *This creator of the universe suffered on your behalf hour after hour on a Cross as God poured out His judgment on sin on Him the one who had done no wrong, so that if you will turn to Christ that will be counted as your judgment! And His resurrection will be counted as yours! He suffered so you would not ultimately have to if you will be found in Him!*
 - o **But you must want him to be your highest treasure and you must submit your self to His kingship** – *Unbeliever our appeal to you today is to treasure Christ like Paul treasured Christ and to fall down before Him and cry out for Mercy!*

Believer – *Let's be embolden by the gospel and let's see our circumstances rightly, let the gospel of a King who suffered on our behalf grip us so that we can go and do likewise because He is our greatest treasure*

- *We don't have to see the whole picture we trust in the sovereignty and goodness of our God and we value Him as our highest treasure and we see all circumstances, even opposition, as chances for Gospel advance!*
 - o **Only then when we can truly say I need Jesus + nothing will losing the things the world offers and suffering not touch us – and we may come off a little strange but that's ok, so did Paul I am sure!**

How can we be fearless? *Well we must see what the Apostles saw – They saw all the enemies line up against Jesus to stop Him, kill Him and end His movement and all it did was serve for the advance of the gospel!*

- *And just know this is warfare, Paul will later point out that our fearlessness is a sign of war against the powers signaling to them their own destruction*

Brothers and sisters there may come a day when in a gathering like this soldiers bust in here and haul us into the center of the city to be beaten in front of cheering masses – *are we prepared and are we preparing our Imago Dei Children in such a way for them to say, “That's Ok, the Gospel Marches on” because Jesus isn't dead anymore!*

- **And so I pray the Lord will grant us the strength to say:** *my cancer has served... my joy in the midst of financial hardship has served... the loss of a child has served... for the advance of the gospel... and that even when we fail there is grace cause we are in Christ Jesus!*

Eliot: *Shortly after Eliot's death, his wife at the risk of our life would go back to South America to that same people group that brutally murdered her husband – LET THAT SINK IN! And because of her witness there are now many Christians among that once violent people group!*

- **Eliot's life is saying to us beyond the grave...** *don't worry, the things that have happened to me have served for the Advance of the gospel! May it be so with us!*