



GOSPEL
partnership

DEVOTIONALS 2

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18

¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will rejoice,

DAY 1

PHILIPPIANS 1:12

"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel,"

Paul is rather coy about 'what happened to him' here in Philippians. In 2 Corinthians he takes the liberty to list that out a bit more, but here he is intentionally vague. Why might he hold back on sharing specifics? It could be that the Jesus followers in Philippi are aware of what has happened to him. Or perhaps they aren't and he doesn't want to worry them any further, seeing as Epaphroditus' story of getting to Paul would worry them enough. While there may be some truth to those I think that what is front and center to Paul in this moment is not human circumstances, but rather the providence of God.

To help us understand, let's remind ourselves through the Westminster Shorter Catechism what we mean by that:

Question What are God's works of providence?

Answer God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.

According to the WSC God, in his wisdom, is working out the stories of His people through their actions IE circumstances. The Heidelberg Catechism helps us by saying that through this power God both "upholds heaven and earth AND all creatures" and that He "so governs... all things" and they "come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand" (Lord's day 10, Question 27 of Heidelberg Catechism). What a picture. Perhaps it's this very thought that led Augustus Toplady to pen the wonderful lyrics of *Rock of Ages*.

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling."

Like Paul, Augustus understood that when we cling to Jesus, our circumstances, or "what has happened to us," takes a back seat. It's Jesus that matters. It's Jesus that matters to our lives, our hope, our circumstances, and those around us. Today we rest in the beauty of God's providence in our lives. That with his fatherly hand placed us exactly where we are supposed to be today. May you cling to Jesus today, this week and forever more.

PRAYER

Father, we acknowledge that our circumstances can be less than ideal sometimes. Yet you promise to never leave or forsake your children. We take comfort in the simple yet beautiful truth that you are at work in our lives to bring glory to your name. May we lift high the name of Jesus even when we are low. Give us that strength, through the gospel, in Christ's name. Amen.

DAY 2

PHILIPPIANS 1:12, 13

¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

I remember in my youth that I wanted to be a heroic missionary and go into the most difficult country to serve God. While certainly people are called to do mission work in difficult places I was caught up in a fantasy while ignoring the mission field around me. There are two points I want to draw from this passage.

First, that God used Paul's circumstances, no matter how unglamorous and difficult, to advance the gospel. In an attempt to limit Paul's ability to share the good news, his imprisonment itself becomes the means in which Christ is known. He appears powerless and cut off but God works through his suffering. However, Paul is not a special case; God intends that all of us should be working to advance the gospel through the circumstances that we are in. Even in the midst of our mundane and difficult lives, God is at work.

Second, even when we cannot see the mission field that we are in, God knows and will work through us in ways that we don't perceive. As Paul reminds us in Ephesians:

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us... Ephesians 3:20

Did Paul know that his imprisonment would lead to the imperial guard hearing the good news? It's unlikely that he did, but God used his circumstances in the midst of Paul's faithfulness.

Our call here is to be aware of the mission field that is around us and to live out the gospel in the circumstances that we are in. Out of that the gospel will be advanced in ways that we don't expect.

PRAYER

Lord of all, hear our prayer. Give us wisdom to see the opportunities you have given us to serve you. Strengthen our hearts that we may be faithful to you and to your work. Open the eyes of those around us to the good news. Amen.

DAY 3

PHILIPPIANS 1:14

¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

The game is basketball. The score is tied with less than 30 seconds left in the game. Your team has the ball and will look to their all-star, their go-to scorer, the one who always gets buckets in the clutch. Except, wait, she injured her leg back in the second half and is out of action. Who will step up?

In many ways this mirrors the situation that the early church found themselves in--facing the secularized, pluralized society that was Roman culture. It sure felt like time was winding down. But the church had Paul. Church planter. Fiery leader. The one who had endured sham trials, beatings, earthquakes. Surely Paul would come through. Except he is in chains. Sidelined. Incapable of carrying the ball. Who will step up?

Whether it is basketball, choir, life at home, or the first century church, when the “stars” go down others need to step up, and so it happens here. Paul is in prison but the brothers and sisters (brothers is a generalized word here) are emboldened to speak up. From the market, to the local Areopagus and lecture halls, pubs, bathhouses, and guild meetings, ordinary Christians speak up because they realize that nothing can stop the spread of the Gospel. Or in the words of the text, they have “confidence” in the Lord to complete the work despite the circumstances. Such is the confidence available to each of us in our places today. We may not have the theological training of others. We may not consider ourselves to have the personality or chutzpah to carry the ball forward, but God uses ordinary people, emboldened in him! Paul speaks of this elsewhere in terms of God’s purposes triumphing in spite of weakness. This is one of the fundamental principles of God’s work in this world. He does not work in ways that we expect him to work. Nowhere is this more evident than in the cross. *“But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”* 1 Corinthians 1:23–25.

PRAYER

Father, embolden your people to realize that your mission is never sidelined. Whatever circumstances we may find ourselves in, may we remember that you give strength to the weak. Thank you that you use ordinary people like us to bring extraordinary grace to your world. We give you thanks through Jesus. Amen.

DAY 4

PHILIPPIANS 1:15-17

¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

We are all mixed bags of motivation. We make decisions in our lives from pure and impure motives. A motive is a reason for doing something, especially one that is hidden or not obvious. Most of the ways we make decisions are hidden, they are in our minds and hearts. We choose to downplay life circumstances to keep a public persona, or we overstate our importance at work to appear crucial in the business world, we help a five-year old who just fell off the ground because we want to be seen as that kind of person, you know the kind that will help children. Unless we stop and reflect, or just outright state why we chose to do these things, the thrust behind the decision is hidden. None of these things are wrong per se, none of them are sinful, or cause direct harm to others through malicious intent. Yet they could be categorized as selfish ambition, somewhat like Paul's statement about the rival gospel teachers he has encountered.

We don't know who these teachers are exactly, but I don't think that's the point. We also don't know what they were doing to Paul. Again, I don't think that's the point. What we know is that their motivation for preaching the gospel was impure. It was damaging Paul and his reputation. So Paul kept his distance, he named what he was seeing and feeling but he carried on because the gospel was being preached. When I come across passages like this the temptation is to look around me and question others' motivations. But what about mine? What areas of my life am I acting out of impure motives? Do I need to think about my decision making process, and whom I might be hurting along the way? How do I even know my motivations?

The scriptures call us to examine our lives (1 Cor 11) and the Lord provides many ways for us to do just that. Close friends and family can help us see how we are living and the choices we are making. Counseling or a mentor have ways of pulling back the layers to help us understand motives. The Spirit will prick our conscience and we need to pay attention in those moments, perhaps there is something to learn and repent of. Ultimately we trust in Jesus, rest in his grace and mercy. Through Jesus we are equipped to love and good deeds.

PRAYER

Father in heaven, help me see the way in which I live, the way in which I make decisions, the way in which I treat other people. Open my eyes through your means of grace to see my motivations, and purify them so that they may reflect a heart that is rooted in Christ and overflowing with his love, mercy and grace. I pray that my motivations would be an overflow of this belief coming about through the work of the Spirit. Give me the strength today to see this, in Jesus name, Amen.

DAY 5

PHILIPPIANS 1:18

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

One of the things that impresses us the most about Paul is the purity of his motives that we see here. That purity comes from one place, his belief in and relationship with Christ. When you read over this passage and discover how he has put his ego, his sense of self-preservation, his pride to the side, you have to wonder how he does it.

He does it because his whole life is “in Christ.” His faith is not a fulfillment of a kind of religious requirement like joining a church because that is what good citizens do. His faith is not just the religious slice of a compartmentalized life. His faith in Christ is all of his life, his thinking, his acting, his beliefs, his behavior. These are all oriented to and controlled by his being “in Christ.” That dynamic is so much the case that the pettiness, selfishness and pridefulness we normally expect just isn’t there. Paul’s life was so consumed and dominated (in a good way) by Christ that there wasn’t much room for these “normal” sinful attitudes and actions to operate.

And look what he is able to accomplish because of believing and living in this way. He doesn’t go off on people that are not doing things exactly the same way as he does. He doesn’t get aggravated and defensive when faced with opposition. He doesn’t make major issues out of lesser problems. He has a mature practical way of dealing with people. He calmly and forcefully states the truth because that truth is primarily Christ.

My father was pastor, but by most measures not a very successful one. He was asked to leave one church, split another and was voted out after just one year in another. One of his biggest problems was that he didn’t know how to deal with people that disagreed with him. Largely because of his own insecurities, he did the exact opposite of what Paul did when he faced opposition. He got defensive. He lashed out at people, more than once from the pulpit.

By far the best antidote for dealing with those kinds of issues is being centered in Christ. The more we love him, the more security we have in His love. The more we learn the mind of Christ from scripture with the active help of the Holy Spirit, the more we are prepared to deal with all of life, especially the experiences and events that tend to tear us apart inside and bring out all our weaknesses.

PRAYER

Words from the prayer known as St. Patrick's Breastplate

*Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.*