

Gospel Advance

Philippians 1:12-26

Introduction

- I remember hearing the testimony of Jennifer McManus, a self-described wife, mom, foster parent, and “really bad cook.” Not famous, just an ordinary Christian. In 2011 she was diagnosed with a malignant melanoma tumor in 2011. She remembered the doctor’s voice trembling as he called to say the tumor had spread. She went through surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, and more. Cancer was everpresent in her thoughts. She was sick and weak. Every new doctor felt like she was inching toward death. She described the paradox of being afraid of death but not afraid of dying. She said, “I’m scared of missing out on life. I want to see my kids grow up. I want to grow old with my husband. And I want to see so many more people come to the Lord. *But* I trust that God’s plan is perfect. Cancer has made death more real and made the gospel more real because I know where I’m going when I die. But so many people who I love, don’t. I find hope in the promise of a life lived forever. I’m joyful because of the gospel and the story God is telling through my life. I’m excited that I get to point people to Jesus. I’m excited that, at the end of the day. Whether I live or die. God wins.” Where does an attitude like that come from?

Paul is sitting in a Roman **prison**. The outcome of his trial could result in his **death**. His friends in Philippi are discouraged, disheartened, and confused. All the confidence in God and his word had dissipated in Philippi. So Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit writes this letter. In this section, we’ll see that we can joyfully participate in God’s plan to advance the gospel despite any obstacle or difficulty we face.

- The first step in being together for the gospel is treasuring the God of the gospel.

Scripture

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, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain

and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.¹

1. The Unstoppable Advance of the Gospel (vv. 12-18a)

Advance: There is nothing that can stop the advance of the gospel. Church, do not be dismayed, do not fear: God will finish what he started (1:6). God will build his church (Matt 16:18). Not my preferences or opinions or desires but the gospel! **What are we advancing?**

- What "cause" are we trumpeting? **I've watched many people trumpet good and bad causes that are not gospel causes.** The church is not a platform to promote your pet project, it is a platform to advance the kingdom of God by proclaiming and displaying the good news of Jesus Christ.
- What are you known for? (e.g., ACC basketball, kids, etc.; "A crossfitter walked into a room. How do I know? They told everyone within two minutes;" "Please tell me how you spend \$300 a month to do calisthenics in a warehouse").

a. Despite Suffering (vv. 12-14)

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.

What Are They Afraid Of?: The fear in Paul's imprisonment was that the mission was over. *Instead*, God used that obstacle as an opportunity. **Every obstacle is an opportunity.** How will you use your obstacle to *advance the gospel*?

- As the great middle-earth wizard Gandalf says, "there is always more going on than we can see"). **Paul has sanctified vision** to be able to say like Joseph, "what you meant for evil, God used for good." Or in the midst of suffering, **all things work for the good**" (Rom 8:28).
- When I live a gospel-focused life, **I have a vision bigger than my circumstances and a goal greater than my comfort.**

¹ ¹² Γινώσκειν δὲ ὑμᾶς βούλομαι, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι τὰ κατ' ἐμὲ μᾶλλον εἰς προκοπὴν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἐλήλυθεν, ¹³ ὥστε τοὺς δεσμούς μου φανεροὺς ἐν Χριστῷ γενέσθαι ἐν ὄλῳ τῷ πραιτωρίῳ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς πάσιν, ¹⁴ αἱ τοὺς πλείονας τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἐν κυρίῳ πεποιθότας τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου περισσοτέρως τολμᾶν ἀφόβως τὸν λόγον λαλεῖν. ¹⁵ Τινὲς μὲν καὶ διὰ φθόνον καὶ ἔριν, τινὲς δὲ καὶ δι' εὐδοκίαν τὸν Χριστὸν καταγγέλλουσιν. ¹⁶ οἱ μὲν ἐξ ἀγάπης, εἰδότες ὅτι εἰς ἀπολογίαὶν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου κεῖμαι, ¹⁷ οἱ δὲ ἐξ ἐριθείας τὸν Χριστὸν καταγγέλλουσιν, οὐχ ἀγνώως, οἰόμενοι θλίψιν ἐγείρειν τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου. ¹⁸ τί γάρ; πλὴν ὅτι παντὶ τρόπῳ, εἴτε προφάσει εἴτε ἀληθείᾳ, Χριστὸς καταγγέλλεται, καὶ ἐν τούτῳ χαίρω. ἀλλὰ καὶ χαρήσομαι, ¹⁹ οἶδα γὰρ ὅτι τοῦτό μοι ἀποβήσεται εἰς σωτηρίαν διὰ τῆς ὑμῶν δεήσεως καὶ ἐπιχορηγίας τοῦ πνεύματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. ²⁰ κατὰ τὴν ἀποκαταδοκίαν καὶ ἐλπίδα μου, ὅτι ἐν οὐδενὶ ἀίσχυνθήσομαι ἀλλ' ἐν πάσῃ παρρησίᾳ ὡς πάντοτε καὶ νῦν μεγαλυνθήσεται Χριστὸς ἐν τῷ σώματί μου, εἴτε διὰ ζωῆς εἴτε διὰ θανάτου. ²¹ ἐμοὶ γὰρ τὸ ζῆν Χριστὸς καὶ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος. ²² εἰ δὲ τὸ ζῆν ἐν σαρκί, τοῦτό μοι καρπὸς ἔργου, καὶ τί αἰρήσομαι οὐ γνωρίζω. ²³ συνέχομαι δὲ ἐκ τῶν δύο, τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχων εἰς τὸ ἀναλῦσαι καὶ σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι, πολλῶν [γὰρ] μᾶλλον κρεῖσσον. ²⁴ τὸ δὲ ἐπιμένειν [ἐν] τῇ σαρκὶ ἀναγκαιότερον δι' ὑμᾶς. ²⁵ καὶ τοῦτο πεποιθῶς οἶδα ὅτι μενῶ καὶ παραμένῶ πᾶσιν ὑμῖν εἰς τὴν ὑμῶν προκοπὴν καὶ χαρὰν τῆς πίστεως, ²⁶ ἵνα τὸ καύχημα ὑμῶν περισσεύῃ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐν ἐμοὶ διὰ τῆς ἐμῆς παρουσίας πάλιν πρὸς ὑμᾶς.

Expect Suffering: Paul knew suffering was normal and expected. Misplaced expectations can be a killer (e.g., marriage; Amazon next day; internet on a plane). Who told you that following Jesus would be suffering free? **A paradox of the gospel is that life gets harder and more joyful at the same time!** Jesus was not the Savior I thought I wanted, but he proved to be the Savior I needed. And he proved to be more than I could imagine myself.

- The point of Revelation is not how to *escape from* suffering but how to *persevere through* it. *Not every inconvenience is persecution for Christ.
- The Bible promises that "anyone who would live a *godly life will be persecuted*." If you have not felt shame, embarrassment, ostracization, shunning, alienation, or persecution for the gospel – is it possible that others don't know you're a Christian? **We shouldn't seek persecution but we should expect it.**

God Uses Suffering:

- (1) **Suffering gets the attention of the watching world.** Our society loves a train wreck (COPS, Real Housewives, reality TV, rubbernecker, medical diagnosis). When suffering hits, people start to watch. Will you use that platform for the gospel? Your suffering is an opportunity for gospel advance.
- (2) **Suffering clarifies our hope.** Do you want the *blessings* of God or do you want *God himself*? Our worst fears can't touch God's faithfulness. You know God is all you need because God is all you have. His suffering has given him A new perspective. He's able to see clearly God's faithfulness in the midst of suffering. Rather than torpedoing his faith, his suffering removes distractions and reminds him that he is living to please God, not people. **Suffering forces us to be honest with ourselves.**

Paul's Suffering: The longer he is in prison, the more known Paul's message becomes. Paul's imprisonment brought the gospel to the Roman guards (e.g., *captive audience*). And no suffering or inconvenience matters as long as the gospel goes forth. He is *willing to pay the price*.

- God has ordained that the gospel will go forward not just in spite of but **through** our suffering. "If dependence on God is your goal, then weakness is to your advantage" (Greear).
- Very few things happen without suffering:
 - Degrees are not earned without sacrifice.
 - Fitness goals are not met without pain.
 - Wars are not won without casualties.
 - Your salvation was purchased by the suffering and death of the Son of God!
Servant is not above his master!

b. Despite Sinful Motives (vv. 15-18a)

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.

Different Motives: Both groups preach Christ: (1) out of jealousy, rivalry, selfishness; (2) out of love (for Paul and the gospel of Christ). **Which group are you?** You know it is possible to do good things from wrong motives (and that is sin).

- These are false motives, not false preachers (e.g., Phil 3).
- "Message is more important than the messenger" (O'Brien)
 - What was the false motive? Some saw Paul's imprisonment as an embarrassment and a sign of his *lack* of calling and divine favor. Wanted to discredit him. In actuality, the opposition to his ministry and the reality of his imprisonment was a reminder of the genuineness of his calling. Suffering afflicts the obedient follower.

Source of Joy: His **joy** is in the unstoppable progress of the gospel, not his personal pain or maligned reputation. There are times when your personal well-being, reputation, and feelings may be hurt but *as long* as the gospel is going out, then it is ok.

- Church planting question: Am I only happy if the gospel comes to my city through me? Or am I happy if revival comes through another church, ministry, or pastor?
- Am I here to advance the gospel or my own reputation? Am I building the kingdom of God or my own little kingdom?
- Am I seeking God's glory or mine?

2. The Unstoppable Joy of the Gospel (vv. 18b-26)

- We "get" grit-your-teeth endurance, but that's not what Paul's life is marked by. His imprisonment, his opposition, and he repeatedly proclaims his **joy**. It's one thing to obey God, but do you **enjoy him**?
- **A joyless church is a disobedient church.**

a. Because Christ Is Exalted (vv. 18b-20)

Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

God Uses the Prayers of Others: *Sidenote* Paul is encouraged practically by two things, the prayers of the saints and the help of the Spirit. **Don't ever underestimate your prayers. Prayer is not our last resort but our first option. We don't pray because we can't do anything else. We pray *before* we do anything else.**

Pauline Psalm: "In nothing will I be ashamed... but with all boldness... Christ will be glorified."

- Be ashamed is a very Psalter word (100x+ LXX). Exalted/glorified is even more prominent in LXX (Paul's language is rich with Job and Psalms).
- He will not be put to shame because his fate is not reliant on public opinion (which will lead ultimately to his death) but has to do with his standing before God.
 - Do you know how freeing it is to not have to live for public opinion?

God-Centered: As long as God is glorified, the current situation is of no consequence.

16x in 3 short paragraphs (vv. 1-26) Christ or Jesus Christ is mentioned. **The constant focus is Christ, not Paul.** The goal is God's glory, not Paul's deliverance.

- "to the glory and praise of God" (v. 11)
- "Christ will be exalted" (v. 20)
- [one day] "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (2:10-11).
 - The question shouldn't be, is this easy, did I get what I want, etc. but *was God glorified and the gospel proclaimed?*

Weapon of Joy: I will rejoice. Our joy is a "defiant nevertheless" that tells Satan and our circumstances that they cannot touch our God. This is why my brothers and sisters in abject poverty in West Africa are not less joyful, because joy is in God, not in what we possess.

- If Bankruptcy steals your joy then it was in money or God. Relationship? Person or God. Election? Politician or God. Disease? Health.

b. Because There is No Threat In Life or Death (vv. 21-24)

²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

Keep the End in Mind: The *immediate* result of our affliction is nothing in comparison to the *final* result. Regardless of the temporal outcome, Paul will be delivered (e.g., eternal perspective).² Ultimate deliverance is at the "last day." I should be more concerned with my vindication when I stand before God than my deliverance out of suffering here and now.

- I think a lot of people who have it really easy in this life are going to be really surprised when eternity comes.

"[Our joy is] in our hope, not [our] circumstances" (Chandler). Our heavenly hope allows us to live with freedom in this world. We can be free from fear. "Life or death": his hope in God is so strong that he speaks of the most polar opposites (life/death) as if they are no big deal.

² Reference to Job 13:16 (1:19, "that this my will turn out salvation/deliverance").

Living for Christ: Whether we live or die, it is for Christ. In actuality, once we have died to ourselves, we have life in Christ. Meaning, until we have died to ourselves we can't truly live for Christ.

- How could you say you'd die for Christ if you won't even live for him? You won't give up your money for Jesus? You won't give up your reputation? You won't give up your time? You won't give up your politics? You won't give up your relationship? You won't give up your sin? But you'll give up your life? You can miss me with that.
 - "To live is _____." What would people say you live for? Is it Christ?

Jim Elliot: In 1956, 5 American missionaries were killed in Ecuador trying to evangelize the violent and unreached Huarorani people group. Their story is beautifully retold by Jim Elliot's wife (Elisabeth) in the book, *Through Gates of Splendor*.

- "Lord, make my way prosperous not that I achieve high station, but that my life is an exhibit to the value of knowing God."
- "I seek not a long life, but a full one, like you Lord Jesus."
- Elliot knew what he was living for. Knowing he might be going to his death, he wrote his parents a letter before leaving for South America. Part of it reads: "I do not wonder that you were saddened at the word of my going to South America. This is nothing else than what the Lord Jesus warned us of when He told the disciples that they must become so infatuated with the kingdom and following Him that all other allegiances must become as though they were not. And he never excluded the family tie. In fact, those loves which we regard as closest, He told us must become as hate in comparison with our desires to uphold His cause. Grieve not, then, if your sons seem to desert you, but rejoice, rather, seeing the will of God done gladly. Remember how the Psalmist described children? He said that they were as a heritage from the Lord, and that every man should be happy who had his quiver full of them. And what is a quiver full of but arrows? And what are arrows for but to shoot? So, with the strong arms of prayer, draw the bowstring back and let the arrows fly—all of them, straight at the Enemy's hosts. 'Give of your sons to bear the message glorious / Give of their wealth to speed them on their way / Pour out your soul for them in prayer victorious / And all you spend Jesus will repay.'"
- "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."
- In him is life and life everlasting. There is no life outside of Christ. No relationship, no drug, no accomplishment, no amount of money can give what only Christ can give.

Final Joy: "My satisfaction in God alone runs so deep that no pleasure can compete with it (e.g., life) and no pain can shake it (e.g., death)" (Piper). It doesn't matter which way the circumstances go: life or death. God gets the glory either way.

- Without Christ, life has no meaning ("everything is a loss to the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus" Phil 3:8) and death has no purpose. But with Christ, "even if you die, you will live" (John 11:25).
- Not a risk or even sacrifice, it is a joy (e.g., planting in Philly; "how could you live there? raise 4! kids there"; don't pity us; front row seat to God working; no greater place than in God's will; wouldn't trade the person God is making me for a more comfortable life).

c. Because God Has a Purpose (vv. 25-26)

²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

Live on Purpose: In God's economy, there are no interruptions or accidents. If you are his and you are here (not in heaven), then you have a purpose. "You exist to proclaim and display the gospel of Jesus Christ."

- God has a purpose for your life, where you are, what you're going through, where you've been, etc.
- If you have a purpose, then live on purpose (not on accident).
- "An unwavering commitment to the advancement of the gospel requires me to move from acknowledgment to action" (Vaughan). What does it actually mean to live my life on purpose for the advance of the gospel?

Conclusion

Suffering for Jesus: It is obvious that Paul's suffering focused him. It gave him an eternal perspective and renewed his perseverance to live for Christ. The stakes had changed. Suffering was not an obstacle to the will of God but an opportunity for the glory of God.

- "To live is **Christ**, to die is gain."
 - What are you living for?³

³ Discussion Qs: (1) Why does suffering make it hard for you to trust Christ? (2) If you honestly evaluated your life, who or what would you say you're living for? (3) What would you do to serve Christ if you weren't afraid? How does the gospel free you to live that way? (4) How would your life look different if your primary purpose was to proclaim and display the gospel to all people in all places? What steps can you take to make that a reality now?