

Paul's Testimony from Prison

Philippians 1:12-18a

Online Sermon:

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“Life is a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (James 4:14). The more sicknesses we endure and funerals we attend the more we tend to think about the legacy we will leave behind when we die. This is a daunting task for whom amongst us truly remembers any more than one or



two generations of our ancestors who roomed the earth (Ecclesiastes 1:9-11)? This does not mean leaving a legacy is impossible but merely that it will not be found by gazing at a world that is not our

home (Hebrews 13:14-16). For our legacy to be eternal it can only be found in being a witness to the way, truth, and life as future citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20)! While we as Christ's ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20), purchased at the price of His very life (1 Corinthians 6:20), know that our legacy can only be found in planting seeds of righteousness in the lives

of the lost; rarely does this ignite enough passion in our hearts to spread the Good News! While our silence concerning heavenly matters is sometimes due to a lack of empathy for the lost it is often fear that keeps us from telling the world the reasons why we revere Christ as Lord (1 Peter 3:15). It is not that we in North America fear being physically harmed for speaking the truth, albeit that sometimes does happen, but the fear that tends to grip our hearts and silence our witnessing tongues often comes from the likelihood of being ostracized by a world who hates being told there is but one way, truth, and life (John 14:6)!

In writing to the Philippians who had become timid during persecution Apostle Paul boldly stated that his passion for himself and them his Gospel partner was to preach the Good News without fear but with the assurance that their witness would have both immediate, ripple, and eternal consequences that would far outweigh the inevitable persecution they would have to endure.

As you read this sermon, please ask yourself are you living to honor and glorify yourself or the Lord, and if it is the later then always be ready to give the reasons why you have hope in your Savior, and King!

The “Silver” Lining of Being Persecuted for Jesus

After opening his letter to Philippi with thanksgiving and prayer,¹ like other ancient writers of his time Paul stated the common phrase “I want you to know” indicating that he was about to give the church an update on his personal situation.² While Paul could have talked about the “dark threads of his recent years” of “bodily pains, misrepresentations and deceitfulness, unprovoked insults and shame,³ the miscarriage of justice, the shipwreck on the way to Rome or the chains and prison that he was in;”⁴ he does not “give the Philippians a detailed account of any of these events.”⁵ By turning away from his pain and to practice his own words, “whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy think about such things (4:8);”⁶ and



with great resolute and joy springing up from the fountain of living waters within his heart, Paul boldly stated that his suffering and persecution actually served to advance the Gospel message! Paul was not embracing the Greek philosophical belief of his day that “neither prison nor death mattered”⁷ but was profoundly stating the truth that true life is found only in Christ Jesus (1:21).⁸

While the Philippians wanted to know how Paul was doing so that they might further provide aid to help reduce his suffering,⁹ Paul wanted his “partner” (1:5) to know that while he was in chains, the word of God certainly was not being restricted (2 Timothy 2:9)!¹⁰

Though Christ was fulfilling His promise to Paul of suffering for His name’s sake (Acts 9:16), the good work that was started on

¹ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [Philippians](#), The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 4.

² Daniel M. Gurtner, “[Philippians](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 575.

³ J. A. Motyer, [The Message of Philippians](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 64.

⁴ J. A. Motyer, [The Message of Philippians](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 65.

⁵ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 66.

⁶ Clinton E. Arnold, [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon](#), vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 351.

⁷ Craig S. Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Php 1:12–26.

⁸ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 67.

⁹ Frank Thielman, [Philippians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 59.

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, [Philippians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 40.

the road to Damascus would continue through the fiery passion of an apostle who refused to stop doing what mattered to him most,¹¹ proclaiming that belief, not in the emperor, but in the atoning sacrifice of God’s one and only Son was the only way to be born again and become a citizen of heaven! From prison Paul rejoiced for Christ had chosen him to bring this Good News to very heart of the Roman empire!

Reflection

We have all heard the saying “it is not what happens to you but how you respond to life’s experiences that defines your character.” Like Apostle Paul when trials, tribulations, suffering, and persecution enters your life are you able to “step back” and see how faithfully relying on God during such trying times can advance the Gospel message? Are not the words of truth lived more important than just the ones spoken?

¹¹ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 67.

¹² Homer A. Kent Jr., [“Philippians,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 110.

¹³ Clinton E. Arnold, [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon](#), vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 352.

The Immediate Affects of Being a Genuine Witness

When Paul spoke the words before Festus, “I appeal to Caesar” his request was granted immediately (Acts 25:12). During the first century such a request would result in imprisonment and being entrusted to the care of the Praetorian Guard.”¹² This was the emperor’s elite bodyguards “consisting of twelve cohorts, possible of 1,000 soldiers each.”¹³ They received double pay, good pensions¹⁴ and as a group became so powerful that emperors had to “court their favor”¹⁵ and upon



accession had to “bestow on them a liberal donation.”¹⁶ Certainly, part of their power came from the fact that no army was allowed in Italy except them. Their task was

not only to protect the emperor¹⁷ but also his prisoners as well by being shackled to them so that they could not escape while

¹⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 48.

¹⁵ A.T. Robertson, [Word Pictures in the New Testament](#) (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Php 1:13.

¹⁶ Marvin Richardson Vincent, [Word Studies in the New Testament](#), vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1887), 420.

¹⁷ Craig S. Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Php 1:13.

waiting for their court appearances. This must have been an extremely uncomfortable situation for Paul for he had not only lost his freedom but likely would have had to get permission from his guard every time he wanted to move about to eat, drink, use the washroom and so on!¹⁸ Ironically, those chains provided Paul with a “captive audience” whom he was more than willing to tell and show them how “God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Cor. 5:19).¹⁹

Everyone who came into touch with Apostle Paul²⁰ soon realized that he was not the typical “political activist, murderer, or lawbreaker”²¹ they often were assigned too but a genuine Christian who despite facing likely death was fully in love with and devoted to the Lord, Jesus Christ!

How often would those guards have heard about Christ through Paul’s prayers and the conversations he had with his visitors!²² While his imprisonment would make most of us truly miserable,²³ Paul felt overwhelming joy because it was through

¹⁸ J. A. Motyer, [The Message of Philippians](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 66.

¹⁹ Frank Thielman, [Philippians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 59.

²⁰ F. F. Bruce, [Philippians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 40.

the witness of his chains that the very heart of Rome was being evangelized!

Reflection

When we meet, especially after the church service, as a people of God do we mostly talk about sports, the weather, our careers, our children or do we spend most of our time together passionately talking about how God is not only working in and through our lives but also is making us lights unto the world? When is the last time you bowed and prayed in public or boldly told a non-Christian the reasons you have hope in the Lord, Jesus Christ?

The Ripple Affects of Being a Genuine Witness

Like a stone hitting the still water of a lake Paul’s witness had rippling affects from Rome all the way to the church in Philippi! While Paul commended the believers for their partnership with him in sharing the Gospel message (1:5), considering the opposition from within the church and persecution by those who loved worshipping the emperor and

²¹ Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 29.

²² R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 48.

²³ Frank Thielman, [Philippians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 59.

many Roman gods, the Philippians apparently had become timid and hesitant in speaking²⁴ the “Christ-centered word”²⁵ that there is but one God whom all will one day bow their knees (2:10)!



When the Philippians heard Paul had not become depressed in prison²⁶ but overwhelmed with joy, due to his chains advancing the Gospel witness, they chose not to “go underground” as some might think to avoid possible rejection and persecution²⁷ but instead were “inspired to greater faithfulness”²⁸ and courage to set their fears aside and shine like stars by firmly holding onto and proclaiming the word of life (2:15-16). This clearly illustrates to us the power of Paul’s leadership²⁹ for his courage, boldness and unwavering witness of the Gospel message was truly contagious and inspiring!

Sadly, persecution tends to be “just what the doctor ordered for fearful Christians”³⁰ for often it is the “chained” that inspire the “unchained”³¹ to reach beyond what is humanly possible to plant seeds of righteousness that have eternal consequences.

“Nothing could have given Paul greater delight”³² than to see his witness in chains and more importantly the Lord’s coming along side of his partner in sharing the Gospel message had

²⁴ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 70.

²⁵ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 70–71.

²⁶ Homer A. Kent Jr., [“Philippians,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 111.

²⁷ Homer A. Kent Jr., [“Philippians,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 110.

²⁸ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 54.

²⁹ Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 29.

³⁰ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 49.

³¹ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 69.

³² F. F. Bruce, [Philippians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 42.

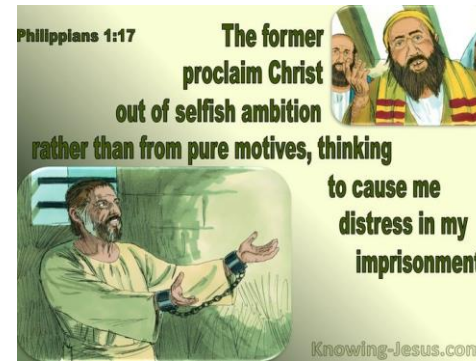
resulted in not the minority but majority³³ of them fearlessly proclaiming the source of their citizenship in heaven, Christ!

Reflection

Let me tell you a story. Imagine waiting at a crosswalk for the light to change. It is a cold winter day, the wind is blowing, and the snow is falling so quickly that it is very hard to see any more than a few feet. You are standing in a crowd of people all freezing and patiently waiting for the walk sign to light up indicating it is safe to enter the cross walk. Out of the corner of your eye you notice a small boy has jolted out into the oncoming traffic who are unlikely able to either see or stop in time to keep from hitting him. In a split second you must decide to either jump out in front of traffic and risk your life to hopefully save the boy or stay safely at the side of the road! What would you do in this situation, especially if the boy was your son? Since most of us would not hesitate to save our children from physical harm then why do we hesitate or outright avoid telling the lost the Gospel message when we know beyond a doubt, they are facing eternal, spiritual death in the flames of hell? Is not one convert worth our time and does not declaring the Gospel give us a sense of joy when we tell

them about every spiritual blessing, we have in Christ Jesus our Lord?

Checking Your Motivation for Witnessing



It is at this point in the letter that Paul mentions there were two groups of preachers proclaiming the Gospel message that had radically different motives.³⁴ While Paul does not

specifically mention the first group by name³⁵ most commentators believe he was referring to the “Jerusalem-based Jewish Christians who insisted absolutely that Gentiles who turned to Christ must adopt Jewish religious practices, in effect, to become Jewish proselytes.”³⁶ Paul had “immense, unique apostolic endowments” and his witness could be heard all over Asia minor and now into Europe!³⁷ This group was filled

³³ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 69.

³⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 49.

³⁵ Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 31.

³⁶ Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 30.

³⁷ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 50.

with so much envy and rivalry that they were not satisfied with just “orchestrating public unrest” which led to Paul’s appeal to Caesar and subsequent stay in prison,³⁸ they likely told the believers that his “imprisonment was shameful and an embarrassment to the Gospel.”³⁹ While this group were not heretics or apostates, for Paul does not say to them “let them be under God’s curse” like he did the Galatians (1:8-9),⁴⁰ Paul criticized their motives which were obviously a deep seated desire to “greedily grasp for public office” by tearing down Paul’s theology concerning “the free grace of God for salvation for Jews and Gentiles”⁴¹ through their “insistence on observing the ceremonial law!”⁴² This brings us to the second group, his partner in Philippi (1:5) who preach the Gospel message out of “goodwill” and “love” (1:15-16). Unlike the first group they understood Paul was in prison by the sovereign will of God to bring the Gospel message to the heart of Rome.⁴³ They overcame the temptation to tear down Paul to make themselves look good by “caring more for Jesus’ glory than that of their own!”⁴⁴ Their only motivation to preach the Gospel was

out of “love for Paul and for Christ’s sake”⁴⁵ which Paul was confident they would continue to do until the day of His return (1:6). To this group Paul joyfully says he longs for them “with the affection of Christ Jesus (1:8).

Reflection

“Consider a story from the fourth century on the sin of envy. Some inexperienced demons were finding it difficult to afflict a godly hermit. They lured him with various temptations, but the man kept denying their allurements. The demons reported their problem to Satan. The evil one told them that they had been far *too hard* on the man. He suggested a more effective strategy: “Send him a message that *his brother has just been made bishop of Antioch*. Bring him *good news*.” The demons used the Devil’s scheme, reporting “the wonderful news” to the pious hermit. On hearing this message, the godly hermit fell into deep, wicked jealousy (Kent and Barbara Hughes, *Liberating Ministry*, 100).”⁴⁶

³⁸ Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 31.

³⁹ Clinton E. Arnold, [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon](#), vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 352.

⁴⁰ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 50.

⁴¹ Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 30–31.

⁴² H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [Philippians](#), The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 5.

⁴³ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 56.

⁴⁴ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 57.

⁴⁵ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [Philippians](#), The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 4.

⁴⁶ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 57.

Are you telling the world the reasons why you have hope in the Lord? If you are serving in a church body, are you doing so to glorify Christ or are you trying to build your reputation through your good deeds? If God anointed someone in the church to do miracles would you be jealous of them or would you be rejoicing in the Lord?

The Goal of Witnessing

Paul finished this section of his letter by stating that what truly matters is not the motives of those spreading the Good News but the fact that Christ is preached!⁴⁷



The message for Paul was far more important than the motives of the messengers.⁴⁸

Though some were preaching with the

motive of tearing down Paul to advance their own reputations this in no way stopped Paul from rejoicing for the word of God can overcome all hinderances⁴⁹ including the speakers impure motives. If this were not true, then our best of preachers and evangelists would be ineffective and disqualified from spreading the Gospel message! As it is God uses the “weakness of human instruments”⁵⁰ to “shame the strong” (1 Corinthians 1:27). Paul is not saying that it is ok to proclaim the Gospel with impure intentions, for this kind of sin must be confessed to be forgiven lest it taint one’s witness, but merely that the supremacy of sharing the word must be foremost in our hearts!⁵¹ Like Paul when others are jealous of the blessings God sends our way⁵² we are to pray but not try to force a spiritual change in their hearts that only the Holy Spirit can make happen. Imagine how unified the church would be if all its members stopped being concerned about their “apparent” positions of power⁵³ but instead kept their eyes fixed on the pioneer and perfecter of their faith (Hebrews 12:2)!

⁴⁷ A.T. Robertson, [Word Pictures in the New Testament](#) (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Php 1:18.

⁴⁸ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 59.

⁴⁹ Daniel M. Gurtner, “Philippians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 576.

⁵⁰ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 59.

⁵¹ Homer A. Kent Jr., “Philippians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 112.

⁵² I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, [A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Philippians](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 27.

⁵³ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 76.

So, may we join Apostle Paul and have a singled minded vision in our lives to proclaim the Good News not just in our actions but in our words and deeds as well and may we rejoice as we see both the immediate and ripple effects of planting seeds of righteousness into the lives of those God sends our way! Ave all, may we rejoice that Christ is preached!