

Philippians 1:12-14

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[0 : 00] I don't know whether you remember when you used to get letters, occasionally I get letters from people that have taken the time to write and not send me a text or an email. It's a wonderful thing isn't it, to have a handwritten letter. In fact I have one today, from somebody at the lunchtime talks who are not here today.

And when you get a letter, you always want to get to the news, don't you, the newsy bit. If it's from somebody who's a friend. But if you get a letter from somebody who's a friend in prison, well, you're very interested to find out what's happening, aren't you?

And we've reached that stage in the letter, that's the part we're looking at this afternoon. And this part of the letter is full of great insights into how Paul is coping in the clink.

But it isn't just Paul being a friend to them, that isn't what it is. It isn't just him keeping them up to date on what's going on in Selvalloch H. In some ways Paul is saying, not I want you to know how I am coping, but I want you to know how the gospel is coping.

It's far more important, this phrase, I want you to know, than I thought. I want you to know. So the title could be found in verse 12. I want you to know, and I think the subject of what we've just read, is really how to suffer for the gospel.

[1 : 16] How to suffer for the gospel. The worthwhile cost of being in real gospel partnership. All about the son of a himself is actually a lead up to the end of the chapter, where he's going to tell them, verse 29, actually you're in the fight with me.

You are engaged in the same conflict. You also suffer for his sake. And verse 30, you are engaged in the same conflict.

It is not a morbid letter of discouragement. It is wonderfully, wonderfully realistic. And he doesn't want the Philippians to back out when the going gets tough. He doesn't want them to think that when suffering comes, when troubles come, they must be on the wrong track.

So verses 12 to 14, he wants to tell them the gospel is advanced. The gospel is advanced. Now look at these verses with me. It says in verse 12, that in spite of the gospel, instead of the preacher, in spite of the gospel being in prison, verse 12, the gospel is advancing.

So in verse 13, the gospel has become known. And verse 14, people having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment.

[2 : 39] Everyone has become much more bold. Have you seen those three things? The gospel that is in prison, but the gospel is advancing. The gospel has become known, and everyone has become much more bold.

And although it looks on the surface, doesn't it? If you looked at the apostle, as if everything is getting tied up, everything is in retreat. In fact, the gospel is advancing. The messenger might be chained up, but you can't chain up the message.

The emperor's personal bodyguards are being reached, aren't they? Paul is chained to them. And what he's doing, well, all he's doing is talking. There are people like that, aren't there?

That just won't shut up about the gospel. We know people like that. And you can imagine Paul, day and night, at every changeover, he says to the new guards, the guard says, what are you in for? And Paul says, well, would you like to hear my story? And off, we're off at the races. And God gives to Paul a captive audience, if you can excuse the pun. Remember, Paul is suffering for the gospel.

[3 : 44] And it would become evident to the guards that this man was not a lunatic. He was not a terrorist. And that it wasn't his subversive behaviour that had put him in prison. It was this person that had got him there and into trouble.

And the question that the guard would have been asking was, who on earth is this Jesus? That Paul keeps going on about. And another effect of the prison was that the other Christians, verse 14,

were encouraged by the spread of the gospel.

They were much more bold because of his example. So think for a moment how the church in Philippi felt when they read this letter. There would be one family, wouldn't there, sitting in the church in Philippi on that Sunday morning.

There would be one family whose faces would break out into a smile when this part of the letter was read out, wouldn't they? Think back to Act 16. Because the Philippian jailers' family, they knew all about how God works in prisons.

And here again, years later, Paul is back in prison but he's still a witness. The hero of the faith is in chains. And his courage has encouraged, put courage into them.

[5 : 00] What was their fear? Well, what is ours? To be locked up for preaching the gospel. So here is the apostle. Living their fear.

And he's not fazed by it. The gospel is in chains. But the gospel is advancing. And so you look through church history and that is the pattern that you see. When the people of God suffer. Ordinarily the gospel of God advances. When the Chinese communists came to power in the 1950s. And all the Christian missionaries, along with every form of foreign influence, was kicked out.

Many people disfared. They were deeply concerned. What is going to happen to the Chinese church? But we look back, don't we, 60, 70 years later. And we can say in many ways it was the best thing possible.

They had to, didn't they? The authentically Chinese people make their own stand. And they suffered persecution. And their leaders were locked up and killed.

[5 : 57] But the church there has exploded. And in this vast day, suffering and growth go together. And it tells you now that the gospel path is a dangerous one.

It's a costly path. It costs the suffering of Christ. For you to have a gospel. And it'll cost the spreading.

It'll cause suffering to see the gospel spread again. And the apostle wants these Philippian Christians to be aware of that. They were, weren't they, gospel partners. They were involved in the work of the gospel.

And it says when suffering comes, don't worry. Because the gospel will still be advanced. Being a Christian is costly. Be realistic. You will have to side with awkward people.

Unrespectable people. Difficult people. And I'm sure the Philippians would have been tempted to think about something like this. Well of course, we're all in favour of the gospel, aren't we?

[6 : 58] But do you really have to back Paul like this? It's a temptation, isn't it? Our friends, the mockers maybe, in our culture, they don't want us to give up on the gospel.

We're quite entitled to believe what we want to believe. But surely you're not like those evangelicals. You're not a fundamentalist. You're not a born-againer, are you?

But Christian partnership means we will stand by them. The gospel is advanced. Now from verses 15 to 18, the gospel is advanced. Secondly, Christ is proclaimed. There are two different groups in this passage.

And they are acting from completely different motives. One is acting from rivalry. One is acting from love. And they are both preaching Christ. So look at verse 16.

One group is acting out of love. It is triggered by an understanding that Paul is in prison for the defence of the gospel. And it was clear that he was there for the defence of the gospel.

[7 : 57] And that it's going to evoke a love from the Christians. Love for him that forgives his brashness. They might say, well it might not be my method, but it is my gospel, so I'll back it.

Have you ever been in that situation? Where you're made to feel some kind of part of a sect? Or they criticise one of your own? And how am I going to respond, isn't it?

When some unwise Christian, and there are lots of them out there, get into trouble, and cause an issue, how are we going to respond?

Well you should respond, like every good rugby player responds. If you're going to have a go at him, you're having a go at me. Now I might not put it like that. I might not put it the way he puts it. I might not agree with the way that he said it. But he's talking of my Christ. But in verse 17 there is the other group, and they are proclaiming Christ, well out of partisanship really, out of a party spirit.

[8 : 59] They're envious of Paul's reputation, they don't want to be upstaged by him. Maybe they were the stars before Paul came along. They were big fish in a small pond. And now they are

proclaiming Christ, but with wrong motives.

And before we get on our 21st century high horse, you and I need to remember, that jealousy, self-centeredness, the desire for position, and influence, still rear their ugly heads, in the Christian church.

Or in fact, they keep their heads just below the surface. Don't they? But I want us to notice, it is clear here, that it is not heresy, that Paul is talking about.

So verse 17, you just look there, the content of the gospel is fine. Their message is accurate, but their motives are wrong.

And it's important that we grasp this. They did not in verse 17, have a defective message. It isn't error that Paul is talking about. Let me just show you that. Flick back to a few pages, just to Galatians chapter 1 verse 18, where Paul talks about people with a defective message.

[10:12] Galatians chapter 1 verse 8, it's on page 1169. And Paul is very clear, he says, even if we, that's me, the apostolic band, even if we, Galatians chapter 1 verse 8, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

Let him be eternally condemned. You change the message. You muck about with the gospel. Let him be eternally condemned. But these preachers have got the right message, but the wrong motives.

We often do the other extreme, don't we? We say, oh, listen, I've met him, I've heard him, and he is a really, he is a lovely man.

He is a really lovely guy. He's a lovely, but he's kind to his neighbours, I've got friends who are in his church, and he's marvellous. Now, of course, I wish he was clear on the gospel. I wish he preached the cross, I wish he preached that message, but he really is, if you knew him, you'd think he was a lovely guy.

That's what we do. But that's not what's happening here. Christ was proclaimed, the proper life-changing gospel. The man in which the gospel is proclaimed includes rivalry, insincerity, and spite.

[11:27] I don't think there could be a more clear way, or effective way of saying, it is the gospel, not the preacher that saves. Do you see that? That's a false point here.

You can have a bitter, envious preacher, but the gospel remains the gospel, and it will still convert people. And the apostle has understood that lesson. And he is anxious that the Philippians will do so as well.

He prays, as we saw last week. What did he pray for last week? Remember I asked you to pray for. What did he pray for, Jeanette? You said to pray for one person that understands the same and the same and the same.

Yeah, that's right, isn't it? So love and the same. Very good. Top of the mark. Top of the class, alright? That's what Paul says, that we should pray for one another. And the apostle has understood that lesson.

And so, what does the apostle want from the Philippians? He prays for them that they will have love and discernment. So imagine how easy it would have been for Paul to become bitter.

[12:26] They are cashing in on him, aren't they? They were no doubt frustrating from people from coming to see him. Big deal, says Paul. The big issue is that in every way Christ is proclaimed.

It's an extraordinary response. So do you see how that prayer for love and discernment have gone together? Paul's love is not this shoppy love that pretends that nothing is going on.

There's no doubt Paul was meant to notice it and he did notice it. It's not just the assuming that he saw that they had bad motives. Paul has got a big heart.

Christ is proclaimed and it takes a very, very big heart to write verse 18, doesn't it? So I get very fed up with saying Paul is an egotistical, sexist bigot.

Well, look at verse 18. He's not always defending himself. Remember Philippians 1 verse 18. He actually defends himself when Christ or the gospel is under attack.

[13:32] Here he realises, he realises that the crowds will hear the preaching of the gospel, good preaching. And so he rejoices even though he is being sniped at while it happens. He's a big man with a big heart.

To watch someone else succeed when you are experiencing failure and hardship it's very difficult. For the minister whose church is really struggling while the other half a mile down the road flourishes it's not easy.

For the woman's vital study whose group is not going great but the other group is going really, really well. Or the house group, their house group is struggling but all the other house groups are going great.

It's very difficult, I think, sometimes to rejoice. But we rejoice that Christ is proclaimed. A gospel partnership is costly, it may involve suffering and it may well involve rejoicing in a rival success. Thirdly, Christ will be honoured verses 19 to 26. So suffering, we know it, don't we, sorts out the men from the boys and prison is a big test. And it was for Paul.

[14:42] And it shows where his heart is. When things are out of control, it really does show what we believe. And things here are outside of Paul's control.

He isn't free to make his own decisions. He couldn't go as he pleased. Is he frustrated? Is he jealous? No, Christ is proclaimed. Self-pity?

No, verse 20. See what he says? I am determined. I am determined that Christ will be honoured. I'm determined. He wants Christ to be made large.

He wants Christ to be seen in him. Christ will be honoured in my body. Look with me at the end of verse 19. It says, What has happened to me?

For I know that through your prayers on the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance. Another way of putting it is this will turn out for my salvation. It doesn't come out clearly in the ESV but that is a quote.

[15:42] This will turn out for my deliverance. It's a quote from Job chapter 13. Why don't you come to Job 13? So, if you find the book of Psalms in the middle of the Bible and then turn back about 100 pages.

Job chapter 13 is on page 508. Job 13. What will happen to me will turn out for my deliverance. And it is a quote from chapter 13 and verse 16.

Again, the ESV is not particularly helpful here. It says on page 509 Job 13 verse 16 this will be my salvation.

This will turn out for my deliverance. And I won't insult your intelligence but verse 16 of Job verse 16 of Job 13 comes straight after verse 15.

Though he slay me I will hope in him. Though he slay me yet will I trust him. And so when you come to Philippians chapter 1 Paul has got that in mind doesn't he?

[16:53] Whether he will be released or not. Whether he'll have his head chopped off or not. Paul is confident that his stand for Christ will be vindicated.

Paul is trusting. So now as always Paul says in life or in death that Christ will be magnified. That is his desire. And he's considering the possibility of life and death.

Isn't verse 21 of Philippians chapter 1 a remarkable quote? For me to live is Christ and die is gain. And it's the sentence of a man who's applied the message to himself.

It's the truth that he was living by. I wonder if you want to fill in the blanks. Look at verse 21. For me to live is dot dot dot what? Your position.

Your reputation. Your wife. Your family. Your job. What? And to die is dot dot dot gain. Apply it to yourself.

[17:57] And if we can say the first isn't it? If we can say the first part of verse 21 for me to live is Christ then we can definitely say the second. To die is gain. To die is gain.

And so let me just play with that a little bit. The only way dying can only be gain if living is for Christ. Paul can look death in the eye and it can give him joy.

It can be gain only because in the present Christ means everything to him. And that idea is the key isn't it? For a costly Christian life. If this is true if to die is gain what we're ready is to suffer.

If it's not true well we'll back out won't we and we'll keep our heads down. Look at verse 22 if it's life in the flesh. If I'm to live in the flesh that will mean fruitful labour for me. For goodness sake he's in prison isn't he?

It's not naive talk. Verse 23 I'm hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ because that's better but to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

[19:08] Do you see that for Paul the needs of the church were more important than the needs of his health? We live in an age where most Christians in the UK feel the needs of their hobbies are more important than the needs of the church.

And if we were in certain parts of the world for sludge sign the lesson would be very obvious to us wouldn't it? If we were in Iraq or we were in Nigeria or Syria. And it would be so encouraging that

the gospel is advanced.

Christ is proclaimed and Christ will be honoured. And if you were one of those in prison and you had to face those who ducked the hardship and were proclaiming Christ out of rivalry well how you would need that paragraph about having a big heart.

I think Philippians one is actually quite difficult for us because we're comfortable. And I don't know about you I don't even want to think of death let alone dwell on it. But it will come to all of us.

And what will it mean for you? Will it mean gain? It is possible to build all your life and have wonderful experience and extraordinary success and death will come and it will mean loss.

[20 : 20] But there is a way to live with Christ to be in a relationship with him so that living becomes knowing him more and more and more. And then will come death and it will mean no loss but gain.

Let's pray. Let's pray.