

The Gospel Cannot Be Chained | Philippians

1:12-30

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[0:00] I'm preparing Christ out of selfish ambition, 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 honoured in my body, whether by life or by death.

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me, yet which I shall choose, I cannot stand.

I'm hard-pressed between the two. My design is to be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in flesh, it's more necessary in your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample pause to flurry in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again.

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you, or in absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

I know frightened in anything by your opponents, this is a clear sign to them of their destruction, of your salvation, and that from the Lord. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

[2:00] Let's just pray. Thank you, Father, for your word. Thank you for the reading of it. Thank you that it's a way, it's a thing that we can learn much from you, much from you and of you, and we long to hear directly from you this morning, and I pray you may use my words to honor and glorify you, and that people may leave, equipped and ready to do everything you call them to do.

In Jesus' name, amen. Right, so, good morning. Thank you. I always want to say this can be a response there. So, today, we are continuing our verse-by-verse journey through Paul's death to the Philippians.

Last time we were in Philippians, Andy King kicked us off with the series with a fantastic message on ordinary joy, and if you missed it, I'd encourage you to catch up on our YouTube or on our podcast if it's there.

And so, in that opening section, Andy showed us four main things. Real peace flows from understanding God's unearned grace.

Real partnership is grounded in faithful prayer. Real salvation both justifies us and continually transforms us, and real love is rooted in truth, integrity, and accountability.

[3:25] How much would we all want real love, real peace, real salvation, and real love? Yet, what Andy showed us is that that's the ordinary, joy-filled love of the follower of Jesus Christ.

Now, as we turn to the second half of chapter one, Paul shifts his focus to his immediate circumstances.

where he is sitting in a Roman prison cell, awaiting trial for Caesar. He writes this section to set the record straight, straight about his well-being, and to reveal that while his body may be bound in chains, the gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be chained.

King Jesus is on the throne, and the Roman emperor is not, and nothing can stop his kingdom from advancing. But before we consider Paul's predicament, I'd like to start by considering our current experience, something which some people might also consider to be equally difficult to escape from.

This sun. It's been a hot one so far, hasn't it? Well, some of us love the sun, while others of us had dreaded even going to us on it for the last month, a couple of nights.

[4:58] But whichever side you're on, we all want the exact same thing when we walk through the door after being out on the heat. A cold glass of theatre.

Yeah? Wow. We're only serving cold drinks at the moment, which is actually not that bad of a thing. Sorry for coffee loggers amongst us, but still, there's plenty of water at the back if you do need one. But when I ran 11 kilometres last Saturday at midday, it took me, like, when I got it, it took me at least like three quants of water before I found normal again.

But none of us had ever experienced the firms quite like Italian endurance runner Mauro Prosperi. Have you heard of this, Don? Well, if you haven't, you will do now.

So, in 1994, Prosperi was competing in a 155-mile ultramarathon across the Sahara Desert.

[6:00] Now, but, tragically, a massive eight-hour sandstorm came and disoriented. and it made him drift 180 miles off course into the Algerian wasteland.

By day two, in temperatures soaring above 38 degrees C, his fresh water was completely gone. And you thought I was crazy for running 11K and 27 degrees.

So, what happened to him? Well, astonishingly, he survived. He endured nine and a half days in the desert before being rescued by twirog nomads.

But to stay alive, he had to resort to horrific extremes, drinking his own urine, sucking moisture from desert plants, and eating raw bats and lizards.

All that just to stay hydrated until he found a tiny little puddle in an oasis where he kind of like stayed until being found. But by the time they found him, he'd lost 40 pounds.

[7:14] I thought you young people were talking about weight, not money, me. Well, what if I told you that, spiritually speaking, God sees every person who hasn't been rescued by Jesus in that exact same condition?

Scripture tells us plainly that whoever does not have the Son of God does not have love. Without Christ, we are wandering a spiritual wasteland, dying of thirst, desperately trying to sustain ourselves on whatever the world offers.

But compared to the grace of God, the world substitutes, money, success, self-reliance, are just bitter desert plants.

They can never actually satisfy a soul. But Jesus looks at a parched world and said in John 4, verse 14, whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.

The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Notice that word, whoever.

[8:34] It applies to anyone, anywhere, and at any time. So the first question then is, do you believe that today?

I'm not asking if you've been saved, although if you haven't, then please come and see me after the service. I'm asking, do you truly believe that the people around us in Southampton are spiritually wasting away in desperate need of a drink from the well that never runs a draft?

today, as we turn to Philippians 1, we're going to look at the Apostle Paul, a man chained in a Roman bosom.

You understood that even in chains, he was just a simple vessel, holding the very order of love for a dying world. So we look now at Philippians 1, starting in verse 12.

Well, I want you to know brothers, that what's happened to me is researched the vast of our sport, so it became known throughout the Holy Imperial Guard and the rest of my imprisonment to Christ.

[9:47] What do penicillin, Mark's Wade ovens, and Post-It knife all have in common? Don't know?

They were all born out of what looked like an unexpected setback or failed plan. Or humanity saw as a mistake ends up yielding something transformational.

As we step into our text today, the Apostle Paul is sitting in a Roman prison cell and humanly speaking, the mission had hit a brick wall.

He was rejected by his own people, the Jews, locked up by the Roman state, and sons. But Paul looks at his chains through the exact same lengths as Joseph in Genesis 50 when he said to his brothers, as to you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive.

God. If an unexpected situation can produce penicillin to save physical lives, how much more can a sovereign God use a prison cell to bring eternal life to the lost?

[11:09] Paul says in verse 12 that what happens here has really served to advance the gospel. The word Paul used for advance was originally used for a pioneer army, clearing a path through

heavy timber so the main troops could march on through.

The Roman authorities thought they had locked the gospel in a dark room, but Paul says no, these chains just cut a brand new highway for the word of God.

It advanced so far that the gospel became known throughout the entire imperial guard. These were the elite soldiers of Rome, and Paul was chained to them in shift rotation, 24 hours a day.

Rome thought Paul was their prisoner, but in reality, these elite guards were chained to a man whose heart burned for Jesus. The imperial elites were trapped in a room with the apostle Paul, forcing them to hear him prone, dictate letters, and share Christ.

Paul didn't just have a prison cell, he had a captive audience. This proves that Paul's imprisonment wasn't a tragic accident, it was a strategic deployment, it was for Christ.

[12:37] This brings us to the first main point of our message. the gospel cannot be chained because God transforms evil for good.

Look at verse 14. Notice what Paul doesn't play in there. He doesn't say that the entire Roman guard came to faith overnight in a massive revival.

though later in chapter 4 he hints that members of Caesar's household did believe. What he highlights instead is that everyone around him knew why he was in chains.

It was for Christ. And look at the ripple effect. Seeing Paul's steadfast endurance caused the local believers to grow bold. God's love logically seeing their leader lops in a Roman dungeon should have made them the church want to go into hiding.

But spiritual courage works in reverse. Gospel conviction in the face of hardship breeds gospel boldness in others. Ask yourself how often do we share our daily attempts at sharing our faith with one another?

[14:03] Too often we stay silent because we think we failed unless that person immediately repents and believes on the spot.

If they don't give their life to Christ there and then we think well what's the point talking about that? But in a culture that often views Christian faith as irrational or outdated simply having the courage to speak up for Jesus is inspiring.

When you tell a fellow believer I offered to pray for my colleague this week or I brought up Jesus with my neighbour that seed of boldness encourages someone else to take a step of faith.

Faith isn't a suspension of our intellect or a blind leap into the dark. True biblical faith is what empowers us to step into the unknowing because we trust the God who is already there.

When we see other Christians standing firm in our culture it reminds us of the God that has already gone before us. That the gospel is still true that God is still sovereign and his word is still powerful.

[15:21] Turning our faith from something we simply know to something we act on. Leaning us to a second point. The gospel cannot be changed because God encourages us through the faith of others.

that's why reading Christian biographies or learning about the men and women that God has used throughout history is so valuable.

Their stories fuel our faith. I've recently been reading John Lennox's autobiography. Being a mathematician myself I appreciate how his mind works.

But what inspired me the most as I read Drew his story and still am is as he looks back over his life he can trace God's hand quietly equipping him for ministry every step of the way.

Hearing how God used his faithfulness in hostile academic environments strengthens my own result. Are you struggling to step out and fake today?

[16:34] Are you hesitant to offer the water of life to those around you? When was the last time you filled your mind with the faithfulness of God in the lives of his servants past and present?

If you want your gospel courage to grow God, surround yourself with people and stories that remind you of who God is and how he works through those who faithfully share the message that only we can share.

Moving on to verse 15. And in these next two sections, Paul sets up two fascinating comparisons. persons. In verses 15 to 18, he compares the two motives for preaching Christ.

And in verse 19 to 26, he will compare two outcomes of his imprisonment. Let's first look at those two motives found in verse 15 to 17.

Love versus self-promotion. While Paul was under house arrest, a leadership void opened up.

[17:51] And astonishingly, some believers saw Paul's chains, and they thought it was an opportunity for personal advancement. They thought, oh, Paul is locked up.

His reputation is shot. Now is my time to shine. Build my own platforms and show everyone that I am the superior leader. They were trying to add emotional affliction to his physical chains while recognising the imprisonment against him.

How often do we see this tendency in the modern church? We live in a culture obsessed with Christian celebrity, always looking for the next dynamic leader to put our hoses in, or quick to tear down leaders when they fall shoes.

But look at Paul's reaction in verse 18. This is a standing. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or a truth, Christ is become, and in that I rejoice.

Paul doesn't send a cease and desist letter. He doesn't defend his own personal platform. Why? Because Paul didn't care about his own brand.

[19:19] He cared about the gospel. Make no say, Paul never tolerated false doctrine. When people preached the false gospel, he confronted it head-on.

when people preached the true gospel out of bad motives, Paul said, let them preach. Why?

Because Paul knew that the power isn't in the preacher, the power is in the word of God. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

The dirty, self-serving motive of the messenger cannot stop the pure, life-giving water of the gospel from quenching a thirsty soul.

God can take a flawed vessel and still use the truth they speak to breathe eternal life. Point 3, the gospel cannot be changed because God gives the growth.

[20:40] When Ami kicked off this series, he spoke about the deep ordinary joy of the Christian love. True Christian joy isn't passive stoicism or settling settling for mediocrity.

Worldly contentment says, well, my situation is terrible, but I guess I just got to accept it. But biblical joy is grounded in faith in the God who always keeps his promises.

Christian joy is demonstrated in an active faith. It is a wholehearted response to the God who holds our lives in his hands.

As someone once famously said, what the world cannot give, the world cannot take abandon. That is why Paul can sit in a Roman cell and declare at the end of verse 18, yes, and I will rejoice.

He knows that through their prayers and the work of the Holy Spirit, his trial will turn out for his ultimate deliverance. Notice Paul's logic here. He looks at his impending trial before Caesar and realises he's in a win-win situation.

[22:02] If Rome finds him innocent, he gets released to keep preaching the gospel. If Rome finds him guilty and executes him, he goes straight into the presence of King Jesus.

love animals. Is that for me? Sorry. Rome thought they held Paul's life in his hands, in their hands, right?

But how do you threaten a man when killing him just gives him what he wants the most? that leads Paul to summarise his entire philosophy in verse 21 as a simple yet powerful break.

In the original Greek, it couldn't be simpler. There are no extra words. For to me, to live Christ, to die again.

As a mathematician, I love the absolute precision of this line. You can look at verse 21 as the ultimate equation of last.

[23:26] We are in school. I'm a math teacher. Get over it. Right. So, think of those two blank spaces, or variables if you're mathematically minded like me.

If to live is X, X, then to die is Y. Whatever you put in the first blank or variable automatically dictates what goes into the second blank.

For example, if for you, to live is money and wealth, then to die is loss. You leave every single penny bar.

life is life. you, to live is career and status, then to die is loss. Your title and resume become instantly irrelevant.

If for you, to live is fame and approval, then to die is loss. Your platform vanishes and the world eventually forgets your name. If for you, to live is even family and relationships, as good as those are, to die is loss because death physically separates you from those you love.

[24:46] See the pattern? For every earthly variable, death acts as a thief. It subtracts, empties, and destroys whatever you live for.

If the world gave it to you, death will take it away. But now, look what happens when you plug Christ into the occasion.

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Why is this the only equation where death results in a net profit?

Because in this luck, if Christ is your treasure, you enjoy it, but through a veil, through faith, through trials, through physical distance.

But when death comes to the Christian, it doesn't subtract Christ from you, it subtracts the distance between you and Christ. Death strips away the veil, the suffering, and the weakness, granting you uninterrupted, face-to-face access to the one your soul loves most.

[26:00] death. Yet, despite his design to be with Christ, Paul looks at the Philippian believers in verse 24 to 26.

It says, for your sake, it is more necessary that I'll die. Paul was so dead to himself that he was willing to delay heaven if it meant helping others grow in their faith.

Whether in life or death, for the Christian, God always gets the glory. Fourthly, the gospel cannot be changed because God always gets the glory.

Paul rounds off this message, or this passage, in verse 27 to 30 with an urgent personal charge to the church. Beginning, only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

In the original language, when Paul says manner of life, he uses a word rooted in citizenship, *politytēstē*. Say it again, I've got it right there, start.

[27:23] *Politytēstē*. You're proud of me? No. Yeah. Now, Philippi was a Roman colony, and its people were proud of their Roman status.

But Paul reminds them, your primary citizenship is in heaven. Conduct yourselves like citizens of the gospel. And he uses that word *axios*, a word describing balance on the scale.

He isn't saying you can earn your salvation. None of us are intrinsically worthy of God's grapes.

Rather, he's saying, let the weight of your daily life match the weight of the gospel you proclaim.

Don't let the hypocritical lifestyle undermine the beauty of the message. Stand side by side in unity, undeterred by opposition.

And then, Paul gives us the news we all secretly came here to hear about today. Verse 29.

[28:37] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake. Ironically, when, or, you know, justifiably, when he says the word granted, who actually uses a word rooted in grace, he says that suffering for Jesus isn't a tragic mistake or a sign of God's absence.

It's a grace gift bestowed upon the believer. If you follow Jesus for any late or time, you know that the Christian call isn't ease and self-indulgence.

Jesus never promised a sofa, he promised a cross. In this world, he says, you will have tribulation, but take heart, I will overcome the world.

Think back to where we started today. Remember Mauro Posteri, lost in the Saharan desert, dying of fear, driven to horrific extremes just to stay alive.

That is the spiritual state of every person in our city who does not know Jesus Christ as their personal savior. They are dying of thirst in a spiritual wasteland.

[30:12] world. But Jesus stands in our world and offers living water, a wellspring that never runs dry. And how does God choose to deliver that life-saving water to a dying world?

He doesn't use brawn, he uses us. In 2nd Corinthians chapter 4, Paul calls us jars of clay, fragile, cheap, urbanware pots, holding an infinite, priceless treasure.

When you come through the door after a 11k run and a scorching summer death, dying of thirst, you don't care about the car, you don't care if the mug is chipped, like if it's faded or plain, you care about the water inside it.

Church, we are just clay jars. We get cracked, we get tired, we face affliction and we suffer. But when a clay jar gets cracked for the sake of Christ, it doesn't ruin the vessel, it allows the living water inside to spill out even more clearly to those around us.

As Paul writes in 2nd Corinthians, continuing from that first step, says, for this light momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

[31:51] May we be a church that doesn't pour the water, may our lives be so aligned with the gospel and our courage so firm in the face of trial, that thirsty world tastes the living water of Jesus through our broken faithful lives.

So round off, we're just, let's consider 2nd Timothy, 2nd Timothy chapter 2. It says, remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal, but the word of God is not bound.

Paul wrote these words from another dark prison cell, later, many years later, right before his execution. And history, God's story about his creation, has proven him right death, at every single century since.

The Roman emperors tried to crush the early church, and the empire crumbled, and the church filled the earth. Medieval authorities tried to burn Tyndall's Bibles, and the printed word flooded Europe in a way of revival.

Totalitarian regimes in the 20th century closed church doors and banned the scriptures, and behind closed doors in places like China, the church multiplied from millions into tens of millions.

[33:34] The word of God is not bound. Empires fall, dictators die, persecutors turn to dust, but King Jesus reigns and his church advances, which brings us here to us today.

many of us have felt the weight of walking with Christ in a world that opposes him. You felt discouraged, misunderstood, or mocked at work, in your family, or among friends, all for taking a stand for the gospel.

But take heart. We stand in a long, unbroken line of ordinary, fragile, clay jars who have discovered that when your light is Christ, death is gain, and no chain can hold the truth that you carry.

In his autobiography referenced earlier, the mathematician and Christian apologist John Lennox wrote about why he was initially hesitant to tell his life story.

To quote, this is a book that for many years I refused to write. Autobiography means writing about oneself and is therefore fraught with many obvious dangers.

[35:09] Nevertheless, I have decided to write this account. Since I would have no story worth telling were it not for the person who shakes my lung and made it what it is, indeed, the one ultimately responsible for my existence, and that is Jesus Christ, Son of God.

My story is, after all, that other sinner. I am still imperfect, although forgiven by the grace of God. Is there anything true in Christianity at all?

Someone like me, who calls him Lord, may expect him to be involved in my lung, however insignificant it may be in the grand scheme of things. I trust that my story is evidence for that. Church family, as the worship team comes up now, and as we leave today, may our prayer be simple.

Lord, break our bread, fill our fragile, cracked lives with living water, and make our ordinary stories evidence that you are who you say you are, and that your gospel cannot be changed.

[36:31] Let's pray. Thank you.