

I Rejoice That Christ is Proclaimed
Philippians 1:12-20
January 22, 2023
Rev. Dave Dorst
CenterPoint Church

Read Philippians 1:12-20

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”
(Hebrews 4:12)

Introduction

Letters from missionaries help let their supporters know what’s happening in their lives and ministries. I get a number of updates, let me share some of them with you:

-Some of you know **Jim and Karen** from when he was a pastor in this area. They are now missionaries in West Africa where he is the regional director for Muslim missions. They have recently transitioned from one church plant to another, they have helped start an RUF college ministry, and they help run the Timothy House, which is a 2-year church planting training program that just graduated its first class of church planters. Their daughter is getting married in June and they are very encouraged in every area of their ministry, though they could use more Teaching Elders to train local pastors.

-**Scott Dillon** has moved his family and ministry from Peru to Panama, where they are adjusting to the different lifestyle and economy. Their church, Comunidad de Cristo (Christ’s Community), is growing with a constant stream of new visitors, and they’re looking for larger space to rent. They are one of only a handful of Reformed Protestant churches in a country that has over 4.5 million people, so they are hoping that the years ahead will see church plants and a Presbyterian denomination in Panama. The Dillons are homeschooling their kids and hoping to get visas for their adopted children to come to the States, which may take another year.

-**Satoshi and Cally** are a missionary couple ministering to Muslims and refugees in Western France and some border towns in Italy. They had a long missionary stay in eastern Canada before relocating to Europe where they are training and doing all they can to meet and aid refugees there. Their two daughters are studying at American medical schools; they ask for prayers for their work and their family.

-Reformed University Fellowship at Delaware State is doing well. **Daryl Wattlely**, who was here last week with his family, reports that he feels that God has put the “Fellowship” piece back into his Reformed University Fellowship group. Their worship services, small groups, and social outings have all gone well, and recently they had their first fall conference in 3 years.

It’s good to get updates on ministry from our missionaries and parachurch leaders because we pray for them and financially support them, but rarely get to see in person how things are going. It’s easier than ever today to get updates through social media, texts, Zoom calls, websites, and emails. Back in the Apostle Paul’s day, though, for a church to be updated on how a missionary, evangelist, or church planter was doing, he needed to send a letter or a trusted messenger or both. As we will see in chapter 3, Paul sent a man named Epaphroditus back to the Philippians with this letter in tow to update the congregation on how things were going with him. They may have heard all kinds of rumors and been distressed that Paul had been arrested, so it was important for him to give them a report of how things were going. And his words in these verses make it clear that with everything happening in his life, he still saw the gospel continuing to advance. The Lord was still working not only despite his confinement, but amazingly, because of it. Paul also reported that God was working

through other believers who loved him, and even through some who resented him. As we read through and study these verses, we will see that if we are living for Jesus Christ and His kingdom and glory, we can rejoice no matter what happens. Difficult circumstances, difficult people, and even staring death in the face can be sources of joy and eager expectation.

Paul told the Philippians how he was doing, but his focus was not on his physical condition, but on the condition of his mission. In the first three verses he informed them that

I. My Imprisonment Advances the Gospel (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.

One commentary I read titled this section, “Prison is great, wish you were here.”¹ I don’t know if Paul would go that far, but he certainly found a way to make the most of his trials, of his chains. He had not been imprisoned for any wrongdoing, but for his faith. According to verse 13, the guards and everyone who was around him came to understand that his imprisonment was for his commitment to Christ. In our minds, we think, “of course, Paul was imprisoned for godly reasons. He was a martyr, he was persecuted for righteousness.” But that was probably not crystal clear to the believers in other towns and other countries. People often draw their own conclusions about what has happened. It would have been easy for the Philippians and others to think that Paul had broken the law, or had left the faith, or that God was punishing him for something he had done. Until people saw or heard from him, there was probably a lot of confusion.

Lo and behold, though, instead of this confinement hurting Paul’s ministry, he felt that it had actually advanced the gospel. He was used to having to seek out people to tell about Jesus, whether it was in the synagogue or in the marketplace or at someone’s house. Now, he had unbelievers literally chained to him. He was their captive, but they were his “captive audience.” Imperial Guards were rotated every few hours to be chained to this “dangerous” criminal whose only crime was sharing the message and love of a crucified Savior that had changed his life. These guards were probably used to people hating to be chained to them, full of anger and resentment. Imagine how different it must have been when their prisoner was full of joy, taking an interest in them and sharing with them how they could be forgiven of their sins and gain eternal life. Paul will mention later in this letter that there were saints in Caesar’s household. His faithfulness in the midst of his trials saw not only guards but family members of the Emperor come to faith in Christ.

Obviously, those who had imprisoned Paul assumed that it would have a deterring effect on other believers and make them too afraid to share their faith. That is the hope of every government that cracks down on a religion. But verse 14 says that the opposite happened – they grew in boldness and confidence. This is a little different than when Jesus was arrested and his apostles ran away in fear! This is a lot more like what happened after Jim Elliot, Nate Saint and their mission team were killed by the Auca tribe in Ecuador in 1956. (If you don’t know that story, look for the book or movie titled *Through Gates of Splendor*.) This team of missionaries being killed by a native tribe in Africa was a big deal at the time, it was covered in *Life* magazine. But rather than Christians back home being intimidated to go on foreign missions because of that tragedy, there was a surge in Christian college students heading to the mission field. Not to mention that Jim Eliot’s widow, Elisabeth, and Nate Saint’s sister, Rachel, ended up going to the very tribe that killed their husband

¹ Dennis E. Johnson, *Philippians* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), p. 53.

and brother, and lived among them, eventually seeing them come to faith in Christ.² Paul's boldness and God's work through this persecution emboldened the other believers into action.

Those believers that were fearlessly preaching the word were split into two groups – friends and rivals - as Paul explains in the next few verses that even

II. My Rivals Advance the Gospel (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.

Reports had clearly reached Paul that while there were some people preaching Christ out of good, godly motives, there were others who were preaching Him from questionable motives. They were taking advantage of Paul being in prison and trying to elevate themselves and run his reputation down. These were not false teachers or wolves in sheep's clothing or unbelievers trying to wreck the church. If they had been preaching a different gospel, like the Judaizers in Galatians, Paul would have strongly rebuked them. They were Christians who loved Jesus but resented Paul. They were jealous of all that he had accomplished and wanted to make names for themselves. 1 Corinthians talks about "rival factions" in that church – people who followed Apollos, others who followed Cephas, others who followed Paul; there's probably some variation of that here. But if they thought that they could show Paul up while he was in prison and make him feel bad that they were winning spiritual glory while he was rotting away, they forgot that he already considered himself a slave of Jesus and wanted all glory to go to the Lord.

At the end of the day, Paul says essentially, "So what? I'm not going to let it afflict me, I choose to rejoice." I don't think that he is saying that it's OK for believers who are engaging in evangelism to be selfish and nasty, but I think he is realistic that we're all a jumble of mixed motives and that good can come from anyone sharing the gospel. Paul chose to ignore the fact that they wanted to make him look bad as long as they were making Jesus look good. As Steven Lawson put it, "what really matters is not that he is exonerated, but that the name of Christ is exalted."³ Of course, he would prefer people proclaim Christ out of love and see him as a legitimate church planter and preacher of the gospel. It's much healthier for everyone involved and produces greater harmony in the Christian community when people preach Christ from good will, love, and truth. But the reality was that not everyone was doing that, and there was nothing Paul could do about it except pray and cheer that people were being saved. He was willing to be wronged and slandered because it wasn't all about him.

Have you heard that word "splant"? It's a merger of the words "split" and "plant." It's when someone splits an existing church that wasn't necessarily looking to plant a new church, and takes a portion of the membership and starts a new church. I'm not saying that's a great thing to do; if it's not done for good theological reasons, then it's very divisive. But at the point that the "splant" is up and running, the old church needs to decide how it's going to act. They can resent and badmouth the new church as full of dissenters and schismatics; and there's probably a good bit of truth there. Or they can take the high road and just say, "Well, at least we have a new church that preaches Jesus." Which would Paul choose? "*Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.*" Churches rarely act like that in my experience because we focus too much on our kingdoms and not enough on His.

² <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1901-2000/jim-elliott-no-fool-11634862.html>

³ Steven J. Lawson, *Philippians For You* (The Good Book Company, 2017), p. 55.

This should also remind us that anyone who preaches the true gospel and believes that Jesus is the way to salvation is our partner and fellow laborer. It doesn't matter if they do baptism a different way, if they don't hold to all our points of theology, if they speak in tongues and make prophecies that make us uncomfortable, if they have big light shows and their music is more like a concert than a dignified, orderly worship. We should rejoice that they win people to Christ and disciple them in God's ways. Our church and denomination, even our greater group of Reformed churches can't reach everyone, so let's cheer on those who advance the cause of Christ, even if they disagree with us in many areas. Now, obviously Paul rebuked people when he felt they were preaching a different gospel, and we should identify when churches or believers have crossed that line and changed the gospel to be something other than faith in Christ alone through grace alone. When they have abandoned the Scriptures as the infallible rule of faith and practice, they are not our co-laborers.

When we cheer on other believers as partners in the gospel, there is no room for envy and rivalry. I love making friends of other pastors and supporting other churches in our Presbytery, so that we can accomplish things together like planting churches in target areas like Milford and Bethany Beach. But even outside of our denomination, we can find partners in ministry. LifeHouse Church has their offices right next door, and it would be easy for us to look at them and be envious and resentful that they have way more people and more staff; and it would be easy for them to look at us and be envious and resentful that we have our own building. And they're Baptist, we're Presbyterian, it would be easy for us to gently poison people against each other's churches, so that we can get some of their people. But we're not going to do that, we're going to speak well of each other, pray for each other, and help each other. They let us use their front office for our nursery, we've given them permission to use our sanctuary for meetings, and I've hung out with their pastor while we both coached campers at the FCA camp last summer.

Paul's final piece of good news in this section is that

III. My Death Will Advance the Gospel (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.

What do you have "eager expectation" about in your life? Maybe you're looking forward to an upcoming vacation, a graduation, making the varsity team, getting married, having a baby, starting a new job or retiring. Those are all good things to look forward to, but, as Steven Curtis Chapman sang, "there's more to this life." Paul uses a Greek word in verse 20 that some commentators think he made up, *apokaradokia* (it does sound a little made up), to express "eager expectation" or "keen anticipation" or "intense hope."⁴ Literally, it can mean to "stretch the neck forward." The only other place that he used this word is in Romans 8:19: "*For the creation waits with **eager longing** for the revealing of the sons of God.*"

What does Paul eagerly anticipate here? That whether he lived or died, that he would bring honor to Jesus. That he would not falter in the face of death and be ashamed, but that he would face it with confidence and courage. He is not just resigned to his fate, he is "stretching his neck," eagerly looking forward to what's coming. Here's where the rubber meets the road. Paul knew that it would only take one word from the Emperor to end his life. Does he say that "as long as I'm still alive, I'll do all I can to glorify Jesus"? No, he says more than that, whether I live or die, Christ will be

⁴ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 78.

honored. Whether he gets sprung from his current imprisonment because of the prayers of the saints and the Spirit's help, or his life ends the next day, he would be delivered. If he was physically delivered, great. If he was killed, he would be spiritually delivered into glory. We'll talk about this a lot more next week, as Paul dives deep into the implications of which is better: living or dying?

Can we expect to be delivered no matter what comes in this life? Can we face death with full courage? Yes, we absolutely can because we have an advocate, a mediator, a Savior who conquered death on our behalf. Jesus allowed Himself to be arrested even though He had never committed a single sin or a crime; His imprisonment was more unjust than Paul's was. Then He allowed Himself to be sentenced to death and hung on a Roman cross, the worst injustice ever committed. And He did it to save the worst kind of people; people who were by nature His enemies, people who are full of envy, rivalry, deceit, and impurity. People like you and me. He did it to represent us before God the Father, to pay the penalty for their sins in His own body when He died. When we are saved in Jesus, His death makes our deliverance not only possible, but sure and certain. You want Paul's joy in the face of death? You need the hope of saving faith through Jesus inside of you.

Conclusion

If Paul could minister from house arrest in a foreign country, then we have to believe that serving Jesus can happen anywhere and under any circumstances for us. If you're sitting in math class or on a bus trip with your friends or teammates, you can be a witness for Jesus. If you're at a job where you're forbidden to "proselytize," even there you can serve and model Jesus. If you're single, you can serve Jesus. If you're pregnant, you can serve Jesus.⁵ If you're facing a stay in the hospital or surgery, you can either be angry and irritated that you have to go through that; or you can take the attitude that there must be some doctor or nurse or fellow patient who needs to see a Christian endure trials with joy. Where we see restrictions, we need to see open doors that God gives us. Paul could have thought of his time under arrest as being sidelined from ministry; "when I get out, then I'll get back to ministry." But no, he found the ministry hidden there.

As I was thinking about this idea, I thought, "Well, probably very few of us have ever been on house arrest, so I can't use that." And then I remembered that, actually, the whole world was on "house arrest" three years ago, locked down during the pandemic scare. People used that time to get some much-needed rest, to learn how to work remotely, to catch up on old hobbies or start new ones. But those who had Paul's perspective, who have kingdom eyes, found ways to use that time to reach out to help others, to minister in Jesus' name, to strengthen their families or the loved ones they were locked down with. We can't rewind the clock, but we can look for ways to redeem our trials and limitations.

Let me give you one example from my dad's life: I'd invite him to come up and tell it himself, but as I mentioned last week, he's retired from preaching now and I don't want to stress him out. I've heard him tell this story several times, so I think I can tell it. When he was a youth pastor back in the 70s, he would take kids to camps and retreats. The way that he related to the kids and thought was the best strategy to gain credibility in their eyes was to play (and dominate in) basketball, tennis, and all the other games and sports that he was good at. (*And the apple doesn't fall far from the tree!*) But one summer he was coming off of back surgery and couldn't do anything more than sit by the pool during free time. And he thought it was going to be such a waste, that he would let the kids down and not get to be in the middle of everything. But lo and behold, as he sat by the pool, kids would come by and sit down and start to talk to him. He said that he started counting and had nearly fifty

⁵ Doug Serven & Bobby Griffith, *Philippians: Birth of Joy* (Oklahoma City: White Blackbird Books, 2017), p. 20.

significant conversations that week, with six teenagers coming to faith in Christ. What he thought would be a limitation, turned out to be used for the advancement of the gospel.

Where in your life do you feel like God can't use you because you have restrictions and problems? Paul had his chains - what are the chains in your life that you think hinder you from being faithful to God, but may actually represent an opportunity? You'll have to look beyond your circumstances and see how God is using your setbacks or personal attacks for His glory. You may have to lay down your resentment of not being able to pursue all of your own personal goals and dreams. You'll have to take the high road and not worry about what others think of you or how they are hurting your reputation. And you'll definitely have to look death square in the face and say, "If I die, so be it. May God be glorified, no matter what."

"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Benediction

2 Corinthians 4:5-6 - *"For what we proclaim is not ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*