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## YOU CAN'T STOP THE GOSPEL (Philippians 1:12-18)

*"Gospel" is one of those words often said or read, but many would struggle to define. What is the gospel? It's crucial to understand it since it is the message of God to people. The gospel (good news) is that God is almighty and above everything, rightly claiming supreme glory as the one true God. He created everything (including humans) to display that glory, but the perfect relationship the first people had with him was marred by sin. Since God is holy, sin had to be punished, so God directed his wrath on the cross on his own son, Jesus, to satisfy his judgement. With Jesus' resurrection, God put his stamp of approval on Christ's sacrifice. Now, through faith in Christ, people can be reconciled to God and his resurrection power can work his purposes in their lives. In the end, God is central and remains the one who should receive all glory due him.*

*Take a look around. The human race is broken. There is pain and loneliness. There is hate and division. There is hopelessness and despair. There is oppression and greed. There are a million other pathologies.*

*The world around us is full of bad news. But there is also desire built into the hearts of people. For healing and togetherness. For love and unity. For hope and joy. For freedom and satisfaction.*

*The good news, the central message of the Christian faith, is that God made a way for people in this world to receive all those desires through him and for him to receive the glory for himself. It's called the gospel. In this short letter to the Philippians, Paul uses the word "gospel" nine times. A favorite word of Paul's, he wrote it 52 times in all of his letters. It occurs 77 times in the whole New Testament. It's easy to see that the very Greek word (euaggelion) gives us our word "evangelical".*

### GOSPEL > PRISON

*Philippians 1:12, 13 – I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that **my imprisonment is for Christ.***

Paul wanted his readers to know that the gospel, the message just stated in the previous column, is greater than any restriction man can impose.

He wasn't in a dank prison cell, but Paul was being held under house arrest, watched at all times by a Roman guard. This went on for two years, so while Paul ate, wrote, met with friends, taught – multiple guards were hearing the gospel message. His arrest advanced the gospel rather than hindered it. According to this verse, the whole imperial guard (and more people than that) knew Paul's purpose was to minister for Christ in Rome, even as a prisoner.

The gospel was the main message Paul passionately shared. He wrote about why this was so crucial in his letters to the Romans and Corinthians:

*Romans 1:16, 17 – For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed, from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."***

*1 Corinthians 15:3, 4 – For I delivered to you **as of first importance** what I also received: that **Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.***

Paul was convinced, and had seen himself, that this powerful gospel message could not be held back. If God wanted it to be heard, nothing, not even prison, would prevent hearts from being radically changed.

## **THE GOSPEL > PHOBIAS**

*Philippians 1:14 – And most of **the brothers**, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, **are much more bold to speak the word without fear.***

The gospel is greater than our fears. As Paul set a bold example for other believers, they began to emulate his confident witness. They, too, could see that God's message could not be held back when faithful messengers proclaimed it.

The truth is that the most effective spreading of the gospel has taken place during times of difficulty and persecution for Christians. It's a shame that in a place of religious freedom like 21<sup>st</sup>-century America the message of the cross isn't shared by most who claim to be followers of Christ. For many, fear is a factor. Not the fear of prison like first-century Christians faced, but fear of rejection or embarrassment.

On the other hand, we can be excited today about the encouraging reception of the gospel in a country like China. While the government obviously is no friend to religious liberty, we know from reliable reports that there are millions of Christians who are worshiping God even with the constant threat of persecution. The gospel is doing just fine there because the solid acceptance of the gospel message is not dependent on the form of government or laws regarding religion.

Whatever the reason for fear of sharing the gospel, the power of the message cannot be held back because God uses the infectious confidence of others to embolden the fearful to speak the word without fear.

## **THE GOSPEL > PRETENSE**

*Philippians 1:15-18 – Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that **in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.***

The gospel is greater than pretense, veneers, and posturing. In Paul's day, apparently there were

those competing with him in ministry. They used his imprisonment as an opportunity to cause him grief as they freely preached out of motivations of strife and competition.

Paul didn't care, as long as the message of the cross was taught. He knew that hearts could still be reached and the arm of God was not shortened by the petty intentions of small and factious men.

If one studies Paul's life and ministry, the one thing that truly fires him up is the gospel. In Acts 13:6-12, he actually struck a political aide blind for trying to impede the gospel from reaching his boss, the governor in Paphos, Cyprus. Paul's passion for the sharing of the gospel marked everything he did. If these pretentious preachers were twisting the message, he would have objected, but they were not. If they had been teaching a false gospel, Paul would have called them out like he did when he wrote to the Galatians:

*Galatians 1:11 – For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is **not man's gospel.***

So Paul, his movements restricted by governmental leaders, writes here that he rejoiced. He knew the gospel couldn't never be shackled. Praetorian guards and others in Caesar's household would come to Christ. Spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ would gain their own courage to boldly spread God's loving plan. And the gospel was reaching crowds, even if the preachers were trying to hurt him. He rejoiced in this truth God promised about the gospel:

*Isaiah 55:11 – So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but **it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.***

### **BIBLE STUDY**

Legislators and Staff (During Session)

Thursdays, 8:00 a.m.

Room 153 House Office Building