

Series: The Fellowship of the Gospel	Reference: <i>Philippians 1:12-26</i>	Title: Vantage Point	Date: 10.04.2020
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Let's explore this statement in the life of Paul today: "The glory of Christ ought to be the end of our life, the grace of Christ the principle of our life, and the word of Christ the rule of it. The Christian life is derived from Christ & directed to Him. He is the principle, rule & end of it."			

*"The glory of Christ ought to be the end of our life, the grace of Christ the principle of our life, and the word of Christ the rule of it. The Christian life is derived from Christ & directed to Him. He is the principle, rule & end of it."*¹ In short, Christ is king.

One of the greatest obstacles to a bold courageous Jesus-proclaiming faith is self-interest, as opposed to Christ-interest. It's the *vantage point* by which we look at life which makes all the difference - from which perspective do we view life & circumstance? If from the vantage point of self-interest, then anything difficult seems unfair, wrong, or as useless suffering. If my vantage point is to look at life as the constant churning out of opportunity to proclaim Jesus to others, anything's welcomed, or makes sense - even when it doesn't seem to, because in Jesus there's purpose & hope. The Christian vantage point is always looking at the world by way of the glory, supremacy & sufficiency of Christ - which is why the Christian can accommodate suffering & persecution well.

My friend, Keith, reminded me of this on our backpacking trip when he said, "*Our problem is that we say we want Jesus as King, but we do not want to submit to His rule, and especially not to suffer for His namesake.*" We've been looking at Philippians, written by the Apostle Paul. **Remember what the Lord said to Ananias concerning Paul in Act 9, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles & their kings & to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."** (Ac 9:15-16) He didn't say, "I will show him just how much I can satisfy his dreams & desires," but rather, "*how much he must suffer for my name.*"

As James 4:2-3 says, *You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel & fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.* Paul was the opposite, he pursued the desires of God over & above his own at all costs. The desires of God in a difficult situation always supersede your need for relief!

Paul suffered much, led along countless dusty hot roads, rejected, verbally attacked, shipwrecked, stoned, beaten, imprisoned & more. Through it all, he kept a vibrant bold courageous faith fueled by Christ-Interest! I'd venture to guess you'd think Paul a bit of a zealot in the modern definition of the word. You may not like him, he may be too much. He may offend your friends at dinner, making you uncomfortable as he shares

¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2322.

Jesus with others with whom you've long neglected to share. No one left a conversation with Paul without hearing & seeing the Gospel displayed.

After we came off trail this weekend, Keith & I had dinner at a restaurant in Glenwood Springs, Co. At first I was embarrassed because Keith was asking the waitress about her tattoos which I thought too personal. I soon realized he was opening the door for me to share the gospel with her via my tattoos. It was opportunity to look at what could've been just a dinner between friends after a long hike, as an opportunity to share Jesus with a woman who otherwise may never have heard of Him. And we did share with her.

It's true, we want a King, but don't want to necessarily give our lives to His purposes, nor suffer for His namesake. We don't want Jesus to interrupt dinner, or risk our position at work, or come between longterm friendships. We want to be saved, but the cloak of responsibility as disciples weighs heavily on our shoulders. We don't want to be the conduit of salvation for others - it's not PC. **But Acts 14:22 says, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God..."** And Paul models this for us in all ways as he's both willing to suffer & share the good news of Jesus.

Paul models a courage in faith to us more than most as he speaks to the Philippians from a Roman prison. A prison prophesied for him well before this in Acts 21:10-14 where it says, "...a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands & feet with it & said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt & will hand him over to the Gentiles.'" ¹²When we heard this, we & the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping & breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up & said, "The Lord's will be done."

Even before his imprisonment from which he now writes to the Philippians, he exhibited a great courage & devotion to the Glory of Christ. The prophecy was correct, but the conclusion they drew from it wasn't - it's always our thought that God wouldn't call us to suffer...but is that at all a biblical notion? Nothing fazed Paul, or knocked him off task, he walked headlong into suffering, and you must ask yourself why, or how he did this? So, let's find out as he continues this letter to his friends in Philippi in 1:12-26...Now I want you to know, brothers & sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. ¹³As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard & to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴And because of my chains, most of the brothers & sisters have become confident in the Lord & dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

Paul's vantage point is to clearly see life & whatever it brings as opportunity to advance the Gospel - willing to go through any hardship for the sake of it. Backpacking is a spiritual metaphor for me. Hiking up 13k foot mountains isn't easy, sometimes it's just one foot in front of the other - but you can't see the heights or get a sense of accomplishment if you're not ready to be out of breath, sweat & carry your weight up the

mountain. It's always worth it. *This time it reminded me when Paul said in Heb 12:1–2, ...throw off everything that hinders & the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer & perfecter of faith.* To backpack well, you pare down, take only the essentials & it's the same with the Christian life. Take only that which is needed to sustain you, get rid of the sin which entangles & strive towards the prize of Christ's glory!

As Paul climbs this metaphorical mountain of faith, two different people are affected... all of the non-believers Paul's surrounded by, and who may've never had the chance to hear the Gospel if it weren't for Paul's incarceration! Secondly, all those more timid believers who'd be emboldened by Paul's example to them, who may be saying, "If Paul can do this, why can't I?" Becoming confident in the Lord to proclaim the Gospel without fear! Movements take leaders, Paul's an exceptional one. The first person to run headlong off the line into the ranks of the enemy is the one to inspire courage in his brothers & sisters. That's what Paul did.

But notice, everyone on either side of the fence are keenly aware of the injustice perpetrated upon Paul here. He's not in prison for anything he's done wrong, but only for his allegiance to Jesus, that's it.

In the book, *The Insanity of God*, Nik Ripkin tells the true story of Dmitri in Russia locked up with 1500 hardened criminals for years, tortured & beaten repeatedly all for the crime of being a Christian. To get out, all he had to do was sign a false confession & deny Christ in it. From the first day in prison to his last he stood every morning & sung the same worship song to Jesus, while 1500 prisoners jeered, yelled & ridiculed. Every time he found a scrap of paper, he'd scribble Bible verses & stories he could remember on it, then stick it to a post in his tiny cell as an offering to Christ. When a guard saw it, he'd first read what was written, then take it down & beat Dmitri.

This went on for years, until in an effort to break Dmitri, the guards told him that his wife had been murdered & his kids taken by the State. Dmitri was devastated, after years of torture this was his breaking point, he asked the guards to bring the document for him to sign. They prepared it for the next morning. Dmitri spent that night in anguish that he'd even consider signing a denial of Christ his Lord.

But hours away in their home, Dmitri's wife, kids & other Christian friends were actually fine & sensed his despair. They gathered to pray for his strength. Miraculously the Holy Spirit allowed Dimitri to audibly hear their prayers while he was in his cell. The next morning as the jailers showed up, Dimitri said, "I'm not signing a thing, you lied to me, I know my wife & kids are fine & praying for me, God allowed me to hear their prayers last night." They were incensed. The next day, Dimitri found a full sheet of paper with a pencil laying beside it in the yard. He said he knew it may be foolish but he went back to his cell & wrote every hymn & bible verse he could remember on it & stuck it to the wall. That was it, the guards decided to execute him. As they led him to the prison yard to be executed, all 1500 prisoners stood up in their cells & sang the worship song Dmitri had sung for years every morning. At that the jailers let go in terror & asked, "Who are you?"

He answered, "I am a child of God & Jesus is his name!" They returned him to his cell, and not long after released him.

Nik met with a lot of Christians in Russia who'd suffered for Christ & stood well under persecution. He sat in a room one day with a number of them. Each had been in jail for some lengthy period of time for their faith. He listened to all their stories, and then asked, "Why have these stories not been written down - it's like Scripture come to life!" At that moment, one man took him to an east-facing window & asked him to look out. Then he said, "Nik, how many times have you woken your children before dawn & said, 'Let's watch the sunrise?'" Nik answered, "Never." But he didn't get the guys point right away - the man meant that just like the sun rising & setting everyday, so it is with their suffering, it's a way of life for them. They don't write down the stories because it's their normal everyday life to suffer for Jesus.

Is that not an encouragement to your faith? When you hear stories of others withstanding such extremes for Jesus, doesn't it make sharing the Gospel with others here more doable? Think about all those prisoners who heard from Dmitri in song & word. Every guard who read the verses daily stuck to the wall of Dmitri's cell, probably the only Bible they'd ever read. Dmitri & the others didn't scream injustice for years. He didn't get angry, and go around telling his fellow inmates how unjustly he was being treated - he sang, wrote scripture from memory, prayed & witnessed.

Like Dmitri, as Paul's incarcerated for no other reason than his faith, he doesn't kick, scream & cry, "Injustice!" Rather he sees it as epic opportunity to witness, because worldly justice isn't our goal as Christians, but the glory, grace & word of Christ are! God's glory, God's mission. *2 Timothy 2:8-10 says this clearly, ⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.*

We speak up when we see injustice meted out upon others, and we may point it out when it happens to us, but we can't expect or demand it when it's not to be extended. We don't devolve into ranting & violence ourselves. Rather, we use such moments as opportunity to express Jesus as King! We endure everything for the sake of Jesus in others. If Jesus leads us into suffering under some injustice & leaves us there for a time, then He has reason for us there. Suffer well & represent Jesus!

Paul continues in v15...¹⁵ It is true that some preach Christ out of envy & rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸ But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Some have asserted that these may be the established Jewish & Gentile Christian leaders who feel eclipsed by Paul's intellect & spiritual presence at his coming to Rome. As humble as he was, Paul was a force to be reckoned with. We pastors struggle with out pride! If Tim Keller walked into this room, I'd be eclipsed, although it wouldn't be his intent to do so.

'Defense of the Gospel' is the Greek term *apologia*. From it we get the English word "apology" which means "a legal defense." Not blind faith, but a clear defense of the facts which transpired in the life, words, death & resurrection of Christ! Proclamation of the Gospel is of central importance, and when any other issue or ministry eclipses that in purpose, we've lost our Christ-centered vantage point. So we can say, it's not the Messenger, but the Message, not the Proclaimer, but the Proclamation which has power. Even preachers who do it wrongly, or out of selfish motive are often used by the Holy Spirit to bring salvation in a persons life. Our intent should always be to preach well, and out of right motive, but honestly, we don't always do that - thanks be to God who can bring good through all things! For instance, I'd never send someone to certain preachers to hear the Gospel, but I do know that God's used some of those preachers for people to come to know Christ & I rejoice in that!

The term, "put here" also translated as "appointed" (*keimai*) in v16 was a military term for a soldier on watch. Paul's placed there by his commander, stationed there, by the king. Its used metaphorically of one's being appointed to a task (cf. Luke 2:34). Paul's imprisonment & trial at Rome was no accident. Paul isn't put there because someone wanted to simply mete out injustice on him, neither was Dimitri put in prison by the will of people, it was for the purposes of bringing glory to Christ! It was the predetermined plan of God (cf. Acts 9:15). Jesus' life was also "appointed" (cf. Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:28). We're appointed in these instances to proclaim Jesus & the proclamation of Christ is worth the suffering of the Christian, because it's about Jesus, not us.

If we struggle with how God might call us to such suffering & not relieve it, we might need to go back to the foundational principles which govern our relationship to Him. In our sin we deserve death & in His mercy & grace we receive life. Christ is king & as such gets to define life, values, beliefs, morality, sexuality, finance, life choices, everything for the Christian. I submit & follow, not seeking my own desire, but working for the will of my King. It's helpful to see our lives in this same theological world-view as Paul!²

Even being attacked from within, Paul rejoices Christ is preached! Think about that! When you're attacked from all around, when you experience injustice, when your rights are trampled, and your life's in danger, do you rejoice in the fact that it all serves to glorify Jesus? Do you have the integrity of faith to be incarcerated & say 'I rejoice that this is happening so that Jesus is preached!'

Paul does & he continues...Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹for I know that through your prayers & God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me

² Robert James Utley, *Paul Bound..the Gospel Unbound: Letters from Prison (Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon..Then Later, Philipians)*, vol. Volume 8, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 1997), 170.

will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰ I eagerly expect & hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

²¹ For to me, to live is Christ & to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart & be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress & joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

The term “progress” is used again in v25 & in 1 Tim. 4:15. It had two primary meanings which relate to Paul’s use of the term: (1) it was a military term for the advance of troops through rough terrain by means of the advance scouts removing barriers; or (2) it was used by Greek philosophers (Stoics) as a catchword for the difficult path to wisdom. Although the gospel progresses, it’s sometimes difficult.³

Like Paul, if we pray with sincerity, *Father, glorify your name*, we can be sure of the same answer Jesus got in John 12:28 when he asked the same & the Father answered, “*I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.*” Paul’s whole attitude & demeanor towards life is to find joy in the advancement of Christ by whatever means - even if that means his own suffering or death! *He’s like John the Baptist when he said, The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits & listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. ³⁰ He must become greater; I must become less.* (Jn 3:29–30). That’s what this passage communicates so clearly - a sincere joy that Christ increases above my own life!

When we make Christ’s glory our desire & design may make it our expectation & hope. If it’s truly aimed at, it’ll be attained. Some may feel Paul’s being sort of morbidly expectant of death, but that’d be a shallow view of his words. Death’s a great loss to a worldly person, because they lose all comfort & hope. But to a Christian it’s gain, it’s the end of all weakness, misery & is the perfection of comfort & accomplishment of hope; it delivers them from all the evils of life & brings into possession the chief good.⁴ It was a hope & comfort for the thief hanging next to Christ to hear Jesus say in Luke 23:43, “*Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.*”

Believers will honor God with their bodies (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20), or not at all! For the Greeks the body was evil. For Paul it was morally neutral but it was & is the battle ground of

³ Robert James Utley, *Paul Bound, the Gospel Unbound: Letters from Prison (Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon, Then Later, Philippians)*, vol. Volume 8, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 1997), 169.

⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2322.

temptation & the place for honoring & glorifying Christ.⁵ We get tripped up in protecting our bodies & rights. Paul may've been incarcerated, but his life was already Christ's to own! And we must consider our lives as the same.

In conclusion, like Paul, Dimitri & many others throughout history - look at life from the vantage point of Jesus as King. Grasp every opportunity good or bad, difficult or easy, as chance to glorify Jesus. Place the desires of your king over & above your own. Find joy in the fact that you've been chosen to suffer for Him & that your life is worth glorifying Jesus no matter the cost! Pray against fear & anxiety, pray to be convicted that your life's no longer your own - it is to the glory of Jesus! The glory of Christ ought to be the end of our life, the grace of Christ the principle of our life, and the word of Christ the rule of it. The Christian life is derived from Christ & directed to Him. He is the principle, rule & end of it. AMEN!

⁵ Robert James Utley, *Paul Bound, the Gospel Unbound: Letters from Prison (Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon, Then Later, Philipians)*, vol. Volume 8, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 1997), 172.