

# The Greatness of the Gospel

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Preacher: Greg Holladay

[ 0 : 00 ] We're thankful to have Pastor Greg Holiday here from Grace Baptist Church in Warsaw to minister God's word to us this evening. Come, brother. It is good to be with you this evening.

This is not my first time here. It's my first time preaching. I have been here a number of times in years past when we've been vacationing in the area to at that time see my mom and my brother and sister-in-law.

So I would visit pretty much every year from like 2005 to 2017 and then I retired and we moved to Warsaw and haven't been back really since.

So I'm glad to be here this evening with you and I bring greetings from Grace Baptist in Warsaw to you tonight. I'd like to begin with a few questions for you.

What gets you up in the morning? And what keeps you going even through the rough patches? What thrills you?

[ 1 : 07 ] What gives your life meaning? What is it that motivates you? In short, what is most important to you in life?

For the Apostle Paul, it was the gospel of Jesus Christ. The good news that God graciously sent Jesus into the world to save sinners.

That Christ lived a sinless life to fulfill all righteousness. Died a substitutionary death to pay the penalty for man's sin. And that whosoever will may come to him by faith and receive the righteousness of Christ and find forgiveness of sin and abundant spiritual and everlasting life.

The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ was everything to Paul. It was his primary motivator. It was what gave him joy. It was the secret of his contentment in any circumstances.

It was what really mattered to him. And so this evening, I want us to look at the greatness of this gospel that meant so much to Paul as it's demonstrated for us in his life as he was in prison.

[ 2 : 28 ] If you have your Bibles, turn to Philippians chapter 1 tonight. Philippians 1, our text is going to be verses 12 through 26. And I'll be reading that for us if you want to follow along.

I'm reading tonight from the English Standard Version. Paul writes, Some indeed preach Christ from envy and righteousness.

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. Yes, and I will rejoice.

For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance. 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.

[ 4 : 08 ] For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.

I'm hard-pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on 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 cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again.

Paul exhibits the greatness of the gospel in a number of ways here, and he shows us first of all that the gospel is of greater importance than personal convenience.

The gospel is of greater importance than personal convenience. Remember that as Paul is penning this letter, he does so not as a tourist in Rome and not lounging on the Mediterranean coast, but he is in prison.

[ 5 : 27 ] He is on trial, and he is in chains. And the Philippians, to whom he is writing this letter, are concerned about his condition, and so he writes back to them to let them know that he's doing great.

He's not just fine, he's more than fine, because the gospel is of greater importance to him than his own personal comfort and convenience.

Now I want us to look at three kinds of circumstances that Paul was facing here that weren't convenient for him. Three difficult circumstances that you and I each experience in the course of life.

Paul, on this occasion, experienced all of them at the same time. He faced the unwanted, the unlovely, and the uncertain, or the unknown. And I want us to look at each of those.

First, he was faced with unwanted circumstances. And the unwanted circumstance was that he was in prison. Verses 13 and 14 address the fact that he is in prison at this time.

[ 6 : 31 ] And I'm confident that given the choice, Paul would not have chosen to be in prison. He had too many places to go, too many people to see, too many different things to do, quite apart from spending a couple of years in prison.

And while he may have had his own rented quarters for a time, according to Acts, that's still not being free to come and go as he pleased. And while he had a break from his usual preaching schedule, it was no vacation.

He was not free. He was captive. He was forced into a set of circumstances that he did not choose and over which he had no control. Now, I don't know about you, but if you're anything like me, when your expectations are not met, when you are forced to do something that is not of your own choosing, it's easy to become frustrated, angry, anxious, defensive, resistant, a whole host of other things.

But there is no such tone in Paul's words here. We don't hear any complaint from Paul. No grumbling. Look at his response in verse 12.

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. He's not blaming God.

[ 7 : 54 ] He's not asking, why me? In fact, he doesn't even focus upon himself at all here. He doesn't address his conditions or his comfort or his convenience or his lack thereof.

His sole concern here is the gospel. He only views his condition as it relates to the gospel and its progress. And looking at his condition from that perspective, he is even excited about his circumstances as he sees what God is doing through them.

In fact, he knows that God has put him in this situation for a good reason. He says in verse 16, he uses this phrase, I am put here. I am put here, and the word bespeaks God's divine placement of him for his ordained purpose, namely the proclamation and defense of the gospel.

I wonder if that's how you and I view the unwanted circumstances in our lives. When we lose our freedom, when we're boxed into some situation that we didn't seek or ask for or want or expect, is our focus on how God is using that situation for the furtherance of his gospel, his kingdom, his purpose, his glory?

Paul realized that the gospel was of greater importance than his personal comfort and convenience. Now, there's another element to Paul's situation here.

[ 9 : 25 ] Not only unwanted circumstances, but unlovely people. Verses 15 through 17. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.

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. There were some people that were using Paul's situation, his imprisonment, to advance themselves and hurt Paul. In verse 17, he says, they were thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

The word afflict is the word, literally, pressure. One writer likens it, in fact, to the painful rubbing of iron chains on a prisoner's hands and legs.

And so there were people that were trying to irritate Paul as he sits helplessly in prison. And it wasn't the Roman government.

[ 10 : 32 ] It wasn't the soldiers that were trying to inflict this hurt. It was professing Christians. In fact, it was other preachers of the gospel. Now, why would they want to inflict difficulty on Paul?

Well, the text doesn't say. We can only speculate a little bit. Was it perhaps they felt shamed that Paul was in prison? Or did they resent, perhaps, his apostolic authority?

I think one possibility is that they were jealous of his popularity. We don't know the details. But we can imagine, perhaps, that Paul comes to town and everyone is talking about the arrival of the apostle.

And everyone wants to hear what Paul has to say. And this may have caused the local preachers to become jealous, envious. Everybody's talking about Paul, not them.

Everybody's quoting Paul, not them. And so had Paul been free, probably he would have drawn the crowd. It was hurting the local preacher's popularity and prestige.

[ 11 : 43 ] But now, since Paul is in prison, now is their chance to get back at Paul and to advance themselves. And so they thought that Paul would have the same jealous, envious attitude that they had.

And that as they gained popularity, Paul couldn't do anything about it. And it would infuriate Paul. But they only thought that would happen.

Paul says, thinking to afflict me. Supposing they can stir up trouble. You see, in reality, these unlovely, unloving people didn't hurt Paul.

Why not? Well, again, it was because his attitude was grounded in the cause of Christ and the spread of the gospel. Verse 18, he says, What then?

Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed. And in this I rejoice. What does it matter, he says? Paul's attitude was, I don't care how they mistreat me.

[ 12 : 49 ] The important thing is, the gospel is being proclaimed. Now, I have to ask myself, is that my attitude when I'm mistreated by others?

When others use, misuse, abuse me, is my primary concern the gospel of Christ? Or is it getting back, getting even, getting ahead?

Paul knew what really mattered. And what mattered was the proclamation of the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus. There's yet a third kind of circumstance Paul faced, and that was the uncertain, the unknown.

And that's emphasized in verses 20 through 22. He says, It's 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.

For to me to live is Christ, to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose, I cannot tell.

[ 14 : 02 ] How would Paul's court case end? Would he live or would he die? Well, by the end of verse 25, he's come to the conclusion that he will go on living.

But initially, he raises this question here of life or death. Because his trial has not concluded yet. The verdict is not in. The decision has not yet been made.

Would he be released or would he be executed? The outcome is uncertain. And often, worse than the worst outcome is our waiting with uncertainty.

The unknown. And we've all experienced that, haven't we? Maybe it's waiting, anticipating a surgery. Maybe it's waiting for that phone call from the doctor with test results.

Maybe it's waiting for word on a job interview. Or a loan application. Or the results of a final exam. Paul faced some uncertainty as he sat in prison.

[ 15 : 09 ] He didn't know what the outcome of the trial would be. But when he says in verse 19, he knows that this will turn out for his deliverance.

He probably doesn't mean they're deliverance from jail or deliverance from death. Many would argue that the deliverance that Paul has in view here is not physical release from prison or deliverance from execution, but spiritual vindication.

A present vindication when Christ is exalted in Paul's body, whether that's by life or by death.

Whether he was released or executed, Paul was confident that through the prayers of believers and the power of the Spirit, he would not be disgraced by failing to trust Christ or to proclaim his gospel, but rather that no matter what the Roman courts decided, the gospel would be vindicated, he would be vindicated, Christ would be exalted, though he didn't know whether his vindication would be through life or death.

But in verse 20, he speaks of the possibility of both life and death. And sitting in prison, he had plenty of time to ponder those results of that trial, which of those two it might be.

And he could have spent that time stewing on the uncertainty of it all and been a real emotional basket case, but he wasn't concerned about himself. He was concerned with the gospel.

[ 16 : 49 ] His concern was that no matter what happened to him, he would in no way bring disgrace on the name of Christ and the cause of Christ.

And that whether he was dead or alive, Christ would be exalted. Verse 20, Now as we read on in the text, we find that Paul, considering the various outcomes by the time we reached verse 25, comes to the conclusion that he would be released because he believed that additional ministry on earth was the way God would further promote the work through him.

You see, every thought of Paul was centered around the gospel of Christ. The spread of the good news, of the saving grace of God in Christ.

That's what drove him. That's what controlled him. That's what made Paul tick. It's what gave him contentment to cope with the unwanted, the unlovely, the uncertain.

Oh, that we would capture that same attitude to see all of our circumstances in life as they relate to God's purposes and the progress of the gospel.

[ 18 : 23 ] What a difference that would make in our daily outlook on life. The unwanted, the unlovely, the uncertain situations in which we find ourselves would no longer be cause for complaint or anxiety, but cause for joy and for trusting in our Lord.

The gospel is of greater importance than our own personal comfort or convenience. Second way we see the greatness of the gospel. The gospel is greater than the opposition against it.

The gospel is greater than the opposition against it. Verse 13 makes it clear that Paul was in prison, it says, for Christ. It was because of his stand for Christ and his proclamation of Christ that Paul was in prison.

But any attempts that were made to squelch the spread of the saving work of Christ were frustrated. Throwing Paul in jail and chaining him up had not shut him up.

It had not slowed the spread of the gospel. In fact, just the opposite took place. Verse 12 is one of many passages that displays the truth that what man intends for evil, God uses for good.

[ 19 : 46 ] And Paul testifies, that which has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. And look at several ways in which the opposition's plan to slow the gospel backfires on them.

First, Paul's imprisonment resulted in greater access with the gospel. Verse 13, he says, So that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

Paul's imprisonment gave him access to the imperial guard. The word is praetorian. It can be a reference to a place like the palace or the governor's residence or a courtroom.

Or it can be a reference to people. Because of the next phrase here, and to all the rest, the context would seem to demand that it is referring to people here.

It's referring to those that were guarding Paul. And the praetorian guard was made up of 9,000 elite Roman soldiers who rotated on duty.

[ 20 : 59 ] And over the couple of years that Paul was in prison here, he no doubt had contact with many of these men. And on the occasion when they may have been chained to Paul, Paul had a captive audience with whom to share the gospel.

Can you imagine being chained to the apostle Paul? What that conversation would have been like. You can imagine the conversations back in the barracks.

These guys get back to their cohorts and they're saying, This guy, Paul, he is an unusual character. He doesn't grumble. He doesn't complain.

He's always rejoicing. He's constantly talking about Jesus to everybody that he comes into contact with. And so Paul had contact with an element of Roman society that he might never have been able to reach had it not been for his imprisonment.

And not only was there greater access, there was greater numbers involved here. Verse 13 continues, Throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest.

[ 22 : 10 ] So it wasn't just a few soldiers, but it says to the whole guard, and not just the guard, but others as well. All the rest. Others in Caesar's household. Others that were employed by Caesar.

The upper crust of society. Greater numbers of people. Influential people. Not to mention the public masses who had heard and talked about Paul's trial.

Jews and Gentiles hearing what was going on in the news. And people were interested. They were curious. They're talking. Word is spreading around Rome.

People are following what's taking place in the trial. We can only imagine what was being circulated. People's attention was piqued. Paul and the gospel were receiving all kinds of publicity. Perhaps all of Rome knew the names of Paul and Jesus better, and had a better understanding what this gospel was all about. Paul's circumstances resulted in exposure to greater numbers. [ 23 : 16 ] And so we have greater access, greater numbers. Third, greater courage. Verse 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.

Christians gained new boldness. They looked at Paul's life. They looked at the peace that he had, the joy that he had, and his boldness to proclaim Christ wherever he found himself. And that joy and that courage rubbed off. It was contagious. It produced a new enthusiasm and courage in the lives of believers in Rome to proclaim the gospel of grace. Now, some remained timid or fearful, but verse 14 says, most were confident and more bold to speak without fear.

They risked more abundantly. They spoke more fearlessly. Paul acknowledged in verse 30, beyond our text here, that Christians in Philippi were engaged in the same kind of conflict that he was in. [ 24 : 27 ] And in verse 28, he doesn't want them to be frightened in anything by the opposition. Why? Because the gospel is greater than the opposition against them.

Paul's own boldness served to inspire other Christians in Rome and elsewhere to be bold in their witness for Christ. As a result of Paul's example, the gospel workforce was increased in the streets of Rome.

It wasn't just Paul. Many proclaiming Christ as they had opportunity. And so what might have initially appeared to be damaging to the cause of Christ, discouraging to Paul the preacher, turned out for the greater progress of the gospel because the gospel is greater than the opposition against it.

A third way we see the greatness of the gospel. The gospel is greater than its ministers. The gospel is greater than its ministers.

Verses 14 through 18. Most of the brothers have become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, and they're much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.

[ 25 : 44 ] 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. Yes, and I will rejoice.

Now, not all of this new courage to proclaim the gospel was pure courage. Some of it was tainted with impure motivations, envy, selfishness, selfish ambition, rivalry.

And I've posed one possible scenario on why that might have been, people seeking revenge on Paul's popularity. Some preached, it says, from goodwill, out of love, verses 15 and 16.

Love for Christ, love for Paul, a desire to help in the ministry. Others preached from envy and rivalry, selfish ambition, verses 15 and 17.

[ 26 : 50 ] And in verse 18, their preaching is described as pretense. Pretense. That doesn't mean that they didn't believe what they preached, but that they were hiding impure motivations.

There was probably nothing wrong at all with their doctrine, and Paul surely would have rebuked any significant error. So the content of their message was probably fine. It was their motivation that was corrupt.

They viewed their ministry as being in competition with Paul's. And so they sought to elevate themselves at Paul's expense. Sadly, such rivalry and competition in ministry, envy, selfish ambition, those kind of motivations, is not unknown in ministry in our day.

And I know throughout my years of pastoral ministry, I constantly had to search the motives of my heart. It's far too easy to seek the approval, the praise, the popularity when you stand before people.

But the gospel is greater than its ministry. Good or bad. Properly motivated or not.

[ 28 : 17 ] And so Paul could say, what then? What does it matter? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or truth, false motives or true, Christ is proclaimed.

The message is of prime importance, not the mouthpiece that delivers it. The gospel is perfect, not the mouthpiece.

The message is indispensable, not the messengers. No preacher is indispensable. Paul understood that. He was proof of that.

He was in prison. But the gospel was not in prison. Paul knew that he could soon be dead. But he wasn't worried about the gospel dying out.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is greater than any of its ministers. Preachers come and go. They live and die. They change over time. But the gospel does not. It continues unchanged.

[ 29 : 21 ] That's how great our gospel is. Fourth, the greatness of the gospel is the source of great joy.

The gospel is the source of great joy. Verse 18, what then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

It is the proclamation of the gospel that was the source of Paul's joy. His joy was not produced by his circumstances. His joy was not dependent upon his personal comfort or convenience.

His joy could not be stopped by obstacles. His joy could not be robbed by those around him that were trying to cause him hurt and grief. His joy was not dependent on other men or how they treated him.

His joy was found in the proclamation of the gospel. And that joy was more than some spontaneous, fleeting feeling.

[ 30 : 29 ] His joy was a matter of the will. He says at the end of verse 18, I will rejoice. He chooses to rejoice whatever his circumstances. I will rejoice.

Paul willed to do God's will. His joy was not grounded in his own pleasure, but in God's pleasure. His rejoicing was in the eternal purpose of God. His joy was in Christ, in proclaiming Christ, in being united to Christ.

And in that, you see, he could always rejoice. Paul's joy and desire was not concern for himself, but to see Christ exalted.

In verse 20, he says, that he is eager. He has eager expectation and hope that he not be ashamed, but that in even the most trying of circumstances, Christ would be exalted in the way he lived or in the way he died.

Can we say that even in the most trying circumstances, our goal and our joy is not personal pleasure, joy does not come from the absence of troubles, but in the exaltation of Christ through them.

[ 31 : 58 ] Joy, real joy is found in and only in relationship to Jesus Christ. And that relationship is the message of the gospel. Therefore, the gospel, the good news of life in Christ, is the greatest news.

It is the source of great joy. And then fifth, the gospel gives the greatest meaning to life and death. Faith and death. Verses 20-26. 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.

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

I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

[ 33 : 15 ] 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 cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again.

Basing his joy in the gospel of Christ, Paul found himself in a no-lose situation, whether he lived or died.

In verse 33 he says that he is hard pressed between the two. Being hard pressed depicts something that is held under pressure from two sides so that movement in either direction is difficult or impossible.

Neither option, living or dying, release or execution, neither was bad from Paul's perspective. He was torn between the two.

No matter what happens, Paul is a winner. Verse 19, he expressed confidence that he would experience deliverance.

[ 34 : 28 ] Again, this does not refer to deliverance from prison or death, but spiritual victory, a vindication of the gospel, a vindication of Paul that whether in life or death, Christ would be magnified in both his life or through his death.

The gospel of Christ had given Paul meaning and purpose. The gospel gave meaning to his life. Verse 21, For me to live is Christ.

Paul's whole being was wrapped up in his union with Christ. Christ was his motivation, his goal, his strength, his joy, his peace, his confidence, his work, his purpose for living.

If he continued to live, he had added opportunity to continue serving Christ. Verse 22, For if I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.

Verse 24, But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on 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 cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again.

[ 35 : 45 ] If Paul lived, he wanted to do one thing. He wanted to serve Christ. He wanted to proclaim the gospel. He wanted to present Christ. Help others come to and progress in their faith.

And convinced that that was more necessary for the Philippians, he concludes in verse 25 that he'll be released and come to them again and continue to minister. On the other hand, the gospel gave meaning to death.

Verse 21, For me to live is Christ. To die is gain. Verse 23, I'm hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and to be with Christ, for that is far better.

The word depart is a military term for striking camp, unfastening one's tent and pitching it someplace else. It was also used as a nautical expression for releasing a vessel from its anchorage so that it could progress on its course.

Paul was a Roman citizen, but this world is not his home. He was a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. And nothing would be welcomed more by him than the day that he would enter into his eternal home.

[ 37 : 02 ] It wasn't that Paul had some kind of death wish or that he was just trying to escape the difficulties of this life, but death would mean gain for him.

He would share in the sufferings of Christ, become like Christ in his death. He would enter into the very presence of Christ. He would enjoy more intimate fellowship with his Savior.

He would receive his heavenly reward, the fullness of his salvation. It would be gain for him, but not just for him. For if he died as a martyr for the cause of Christ, that would leave its impact as well and would promote the Gospel and glorify God.

Whether he lived or died, his aim was to serve the Gospel, to honor Christ. In verse 20, he describes that as his eager expectation. Eager expectation.

Compound word. Made up of the words head and strained longing. It's been described as craning the neck to catch a glimpse of what lies ahead.

[ 38 : 16 ] The concentrated, intense hope which ignores other interests and strains forward as with outstretched head. Honoring Christ is what Paul longed to do.

Whether in his life or death. His singular aim was to exalt Christ. To proclaim Christ. The Gospel was everything to Paul.

Let me close with the questions that I ask at the outset. What gets you up in the morning? And what keeps you going even through the rough patches?

What thrills you? What gives your life meaning? What motivates you? What is the most important thing to you in life? For Paul, it was the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A Gospel of greater importance than personal convenience. A Gospel greater than the opposition against it. A Gospel greater than its ministers.

[ 39 : 21 ] A Gospel that was the source of great joy. A Gospel which gives the greatest meaning to life and to death. Does the Gospel occupy that place in your life and mind?

Perhaps the Gospel has no place in your life yet. Maybe you've not responded to the good news that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. That He offers deliverance from enslaving sin and grants everlasting joy in eternal life.

If that's you, I would call upon you to receive that gift of life. Forgiveness from sin. By turning from sin. Trusting Christ alone and Christ completely for deliverance from sin and death.

Trust Him. Depend on Him. Rely on Him today. The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. And believer, how about you and me?

What place does the Gospel of Christ have in your life and in my life? Does it affect the way we view life and death? Does it affect the way we view our circumstances and respond to them? [ 40 : 43 ] The way we relate to others? And is it the message of good news that we proclaim to those around us who need to hear it?

Let's pray. Father, what a glorious message You have given us to receive personally and to share with others in the dying world.

Lord, may this Gospel be fresh to us every day in the way we live life with the power of the Gospel. May it be our hope and our eager expectation to proclaim Your good news and to live it out in daily life.

We pray in our Savior's name. Amen.