

# Advancing the Gospel

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Date: 14 February 2021

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[ 0 : 00 ] We'll take your Bibles and turn to Philippians chapter 1, the New Testament book of Philippians. What we just sang was the driving, the motivating force of the Apostle Paul.

He longed to see the strangers come home. Philippians chapter 1, we'll read the first 18 verses. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart.

[ 1 : 14 ] For whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.

Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.

The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.

[ 2 : 41 ] 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.

March madness is nearly upon us. And I want you to suppose that your favorite college basketball team is playing in the final game of the NCAA championships.

And with three minutes to go, the score is tied. And your best player fouls out. Now, this is your top score with the one who runs the offense, who has the most assists, who's great on defense.

And now he's benched. He's on the bench, out of the game. We would understand if your hopes of victory would sink because he is no longer in the game.

Something similar happened in the kingdom of Christ in the first century. As we read the New Testament account of the spread of the gospel, the growth of Christ's kingdom, starting in Jerusalem and on out to the nations.

[ 3 : 48 ] There's one figure that stands head above shoulders over anyone else. And it's the Apostle Paul. For converts among Jews, Gentiles in all the nations, there was no one comparable to the Apostle Paul.

He was arguably the greatest missionary for the cause of Christ that the world has ever seen. And yet he was taken out of the game.

And news came to the church in Philippi. Oh, no, Paul's in prison. He's awaiting trial and could lose his life there in Rome. No doubt, many of the believers who heard it grieved.

Their spirit sank, wondering what's going to happen to the cause of the gospel mission now that our greatest missionary is out of the game, out of action, sidelined, in prison.

And perhaps even wondering, why would the Lord ever let that happen? So they sent Epaphroditus to find out how he was doing and to send some things with him for Paul's care.

[ 5 : 01 ] Now, Paul understood their concern for him, but he wants them to know, above all things, what we see in verse 12. This is his letter that he sends back with Epaphroditus to take to them.

He says, now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has fallen out or resulted in the advance of the gospel.

What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. Instead of my imprisonment resulting in a great setback for the cause of Christ, it has actually served to advance it.

Now, there are lessons here for our prophet. Two weeks ago, we began this study in Philippians and we identified three major themes in this letter.

We saw that there is the theme of joy, unity and the gospel mission, the mission. We also identified three things in current events that have been attacked, an attack upon our joy, unity and the mission, namely the issues surrounding the coronavirus, the racial tension and a contentious election and political scene.

[ 6 : 23 ] But rather than losing our joy and singing the blues, rather than losing our unity and dividing and quarreling, rather than being drawn off mission, these things can actually serve the good of our church so that we not only survive, but even thrive in such an environment.

Do you believe that? Not only make it through still alive as a church, but actually thriving as a church because of those very things that we're facing.

If we'll hear what the spirit is saying to the churches in this letter to the Philippians and be shaped by it, we can come through these trials and say with the Apostle Paul, what has happened to us has really served to advance the gospel, to increase our joy and to deepen our unity.

In 2006, I was preaching to two dozen pastors in Ireland and I met a dear brother, Puyen Mersahi. Puyen grew up in Iran and moved with his unconverted family to the UK when he was a teenager. It was in university there that the Lord Jesus saved Puyen. And when I met him, he was in his last year of seminary in Northern Ireland.

[ 7 : 50 ] The very next year, he began to pastor a church in Cheltenham, Great Britain, where he still labors. Two weeks ago, as I was preparing this message, remember we had snow and canceled, but I noticed that sermon audio featured a 30-second clip of Puyen's sermon in which he said, persecution is good for the church.

Not in and of itself, of course. It's wickedness, it's evil, it's sinful. But good for the church because of what God does with it and through it.

Now, some people who track these sort of things believe that the place where the church of Jesus Christ is thriving and growing the fastest in the world today is Iran, where persecution is perhaps the greatest.

But is that not just like our Lord Jesus? Not only that he makes the gospel advance in spite of persecution, but because of persecution.

Through persecution. Our Lord takes what the devil means for the destruction of the church and the silencing of the gospel and takes those very things and instead makes it serve for the strengthening of the church and the advance of his gospel.

[ 9 : 12 ] Isn't that what he did with Saul of Tarsus? The greatest enemy of the church. Breathing out slaughter against the church of Christ. Seeking to destroy it.

And that persecution that arose through Saul of Tarsus caused believers to scatter outside and run for their lives from Jerusalem.

And everywhere they went, they told about what Jesus has done for sinners. It was persecution. Satan's intent to destroy the church.

To silence her gospel that Jesus used to build his church and to spread it out even beyond the borders of Jerusalem and Samaria and Judea.

Well, that's a theme throughout the book of Acts. It's the repeated storyline. And it's still the storyline of church history right up today.

[ 10 : 11 ] And that's what Paul is saying has happened here. I want you to know, brothers, that what happened to me and what happened to him was persecution, imprisonment, potential death has really served to advance the gospel.

How so? Paul's going to tell us two ways. But before we get to his two ways, I think there's a third way. And it's staring us in the face even as we hold this letter in our hands.

Paul was a man of action. Always on the go. Remember that one time he stoned and left for dead. His disciples gather around him and the Lord raises him up. He goes and catches a night's sleep. And he's off to the next town to preach Christ. He's a man on a mission. He's a man on the go. When would a man like that ever have time to sit down and write something so precious and sweet and full of truth as this letter that we have in our hands today, along with the letters to the churches in Colossae and the church in Ephesus?

Well, our Lord arranged a secluded place where Paul would have plenty of time to write. It was prison. And there he wrote these three prison epistles of Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, which have served not only to advance the gospel in the first century and in those churches, but for thousands of churches and down through 2,000 years.

[11:48] Even our church. Haven't you profited from those prison epistles? Hasn't it strengthened your faith and advanced the gospel here? You see, the Lord loves to beat the devil with his own weapons.

He takes persecution and he uses it to advance the gospel. Now, that's one way, I think, that Paul's imprisonment advanced the gospel.

Now he's going to tell us two other ways that the gospel was advanced, especially in Rome, there where Paul is in prison. He tells us, first of all, many sinners heard the gospel who otherwise would not have heard.

Verse 13. As a result of my imprisonment, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I'm in chains for Christ.

So Paul's imprisonment brought the message of salvation in Christ to a new group of sinners, the palace guard. An elite group of soldiers stationed in Rome, bodyguards for Caesar and his household and all that concerned him, including his prisons.

[13:02] These were the toughest of the tough. There were some 9,000 of them there in Rome. And God's way to get the gospel to this group of needy sinners was to have Paul persecuted and thrown into their prison.

So where others see prison as closed doors, keeping Paul locked out from his mission field, Paul sees it just the other way around.

He sees prison as an open door into a new mission field of Caesar's palace with his mission field locked in with him. So we might wonder who really is the prisoner.

As these guards were assigned to Paul in shifts for a period of two years, maybe even chained to him. That's the captive audience that Paul sees and delights in, that the gospel is now going to invade the very house of Caesar and this palace guard.

So these guards, they heard about the Lord Jesus from this little man that loved them and wanted them to know his Savior.

[14:19] Now think what they must have seen and heard, chained to the apostle Paul. They saw him suffer, and they saw how he responded to suffering.

Patient in affliction, joyful always, gracious, thankful, kind, when cursed, when cursed we bless, he says.

Now these men had seen many prisoners. These were not the good guys usually that were locked up. But none like this. He didn't fit the usual mold, and he must have made quite an impression upon them.

We can just use our imagination to see these palace guards returning to the barracks after their shift of guarding Paul. And they're sitting around now, they're killing time with the others, inevitably they would get around to him.

Hey, what about that guy Paul? Isn't he something else or what? And then the stories would fly. Have you ever heard him curse or swear like the others?

[15:26] No, I haven't. Neither have I. I haven't even heard him so much as complain about anything, let alone curse. Yeah, he's different, all right.

But in a good sort of way. He always treats me with respect. It's almost like he cares about me. And hey, what about that Jesus he's always talking about?

He even sings to him. He told me this Jesus who was crucified under Pontius Pilate is God's eternal son. But he never had a beginning.

And he came into this world to save sinners. Paul said he himself was the worst sinner of all. And he said the bad things we do deserve God's punishment in hell forever.

But the. That this God. Rather than damn us all to hell, sent his son because he loved us. And sent his son to take that punishment in our place.

[16:28] That whoever trusts in Jesus won't go to hell but be forgiven and have everlasting life. I've never heard anything like that. I heard him say Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day and he lives today in heaven.

Paul told me he used to hunt Christians down and imprison them and even stone them. But that this Jesus met him one day and changed him and forgave him and gave him an assignment to serve him the rest of his life.

And that's why he loves him so much. Well, he told me that those who believe in Christ are going to be raised from the dead when he comes back to judge all men. Can you imagine that?

These these Christians that we've been beheading and crucifying. Paul says their bodies are going to live again. Say, have you heard him pray?

He talks to God as if. He was actually there listening to him. Yeah, and he's not afraid to die either. Emperor Nero may have him beheaded and he doesn't.

[17:37] It doesn't even faze him. For two years. They listened and they watched. And whatever their first impressions of the guy.

Over time, his influence on them grew and spread for he's able to write. It has become clear throughout the whole palace guard. And to everyone else.

That I'm in chains for Christ. The word got around. Throughout the palace guard. Throughout Caesar's household. And perhaps throughout Rome.

That Paul's in prison. Not because he did something wrong to other people or to our nation. He's in prison. For Christ's sake. And so.

Paul's willingness to suffer and die for Christ. Gave power and impetus to his witness. He's not just another guy out spouting off to get money or something.

[18:35] No, this guy's willing to die for his savior. And that gave. Credibility. Integrity to his message. And. And they listened.

And so. And so. Through his imprisonment. The gospel was advancing into the palace. Into places. And hearts. Where it had not been. Before. The very citadel of heathendom.

Rome. And it appears that even some of these soldiers did trust in Christ. He's able to say at the close of this letter. In chapter 422. All the saints. Send you. Greetings.

Especially those who belong to Caesar's household. There were some right there within Caesar's household. In the service of Caesar Nero. Even palace guards.

And so Paul is rejoicing from prison. And he's wanting the saints in Philippi to join him in rejoicing. So even prison does not steal Paul's joy.

[19:31] It's one of the themes of Philippians. Even prison does not steal his joy. Nor does it move him off the mission. As he writes.

You'll search in vain. To find. Paul telling them how bad off he has it. In prison. It's no call for a pity party. You won't hear about the food that he's being served there.

The restroom facilities. Or lack thereof. The stench. The dirt. The treatment he's receiving. It's not here. No. No.

The important thing is not what's happening to me. Philippi. But what's happening to the gospel. Of Christ. It's advancing. It's advancing. So rejoice. Rejoice with me.

Now. Is that how we view our troubles and afflictions. As servants of Christ. Should we not be asking in such trying times. As we're facing now. How can I best advance the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[20:35] Right here. Right now. In this affliction. In this situation. That God has me in. In this place. With these people. Has. Has your trial over the last year.

Due to. To COVID. Has it brought you into contact. With any people you otherwise may not have been in contact with. Have you drawn closer to certain people. Have. Are they observing you.

In this situation. Where. Where you're somewhat chained up. Like Paul. Maybe mistreated. And you're lacking some of the freedoms you used to enjoy. They're watching you. What are they seeing?

What are they hearing from you? That's different from the others. What an opportunity. To seize it. To advance. The gospel. New opportunities. To love.

To help. To evangelize. Our chief concern should not be about what we have lost. But what can be gained. To the cause of Christ. And his gospel. Now I'll admit.

[ 21 : 32 ] That's radical Christianity. Subordinating. Our own interests. Our own rights. To the cause of the gospel.

There are tamer versions of Christianity. Being preached today. But are we not followers of the crucified? Who submitted his rights.

And relinquished them. To come. And to lay his life down. In order to save. Hell deserving sinners. If we're followers of the crucified.

He said to us. If you would be my follower. You must deny yourself. Take up your cross. And follow me. This is the way the master went. Will not the servant.

Tread it still. Well. Well that's. The first way. That Paul's imprisonment. Has actually advanced. The gospel in Rome. The second way. Many saints were stimulated.

[ 22 : 35 ] To speak the gospel. More courageously. Not only did a new mission field. Hear the gospel. The soldiers. Caesar's household. But many saints were.

Stimulated to speak the gospel. More courageously. On a broader spectrum. Spectrum. It's like. You know. How we began. Your best player.

Has fouled out. And is out of the game. And so as he comes to the bench. It's like the whole bench empties. And they all go in. For that one guy. Now I know that doesn't happen in basketball. But it happens in evangelism.

It happens in the kingdom of God. Paul is sidelined. And what he says is. Many of. Most of the brothers. Have become bolder. And fearlessly. Proclaim the gospel.

Because of my imprisonment. Now. He says. They're preaching more fearlessly. Does the mission. Does the mission of the gospel.

[ 23 : 33 ] Not suffer because of our fear of man. An opportunity for witnesses. Staring us in the face. And we freeze. And we say nothing. Or little.

And the fault's not in the message. We have the very best message. To proclaim. It's a message that. Every single person in the world. Anyone we ever meet.

They need that message. More than they need anything else. That's the kind of. Gospel. That we're called to present. No the problem is not with our.

Our message. The best good news. We could ever announce. To anyone. It's rather with our own. Fears. And timidity. And lack of courage.

And. And you know. It was no different. For the saints. In Rome. They too. Struggled with fear of man. They too. Were often silent. When they should have. Spoken up.

[ 24 : 27 ] But that changed. When Paul was thrown. Into prison. And not just with one or two. But with the majority. Of the saints in Rome. Most of the brothers.

Most of the brethren. They lost their fear of men. They found new confidence. And courage. In the Lord. To speak his name. And his good news.

They became far more daring. Than before. And ventured to speak. Where before they had been silent. Well what was it. That stirred up their new boldness. To speak the gospel of Jesus.

Well. Paul says it was his imprisonment. It's because of my chains. Now we might think again. That the opposite would happen. And indeed. That was probably Satan's strategy. Oh no.

We better shut up. We might get thrown into prison. We might get dragged. Before the judges. And have our heads. Cut off. But no. It had the opposite effect.

[ 25 : 23 ] Under the blessing of Christ. So Paul's example. Emboldened them. This is the contagion. Of a positive example.

They saw that. Paul didn't quit. Proclaiming Christ. Just because of persecution. At his trial. He had boldly stood. For the defense. And confirmation.

Of the gospel. Before his judges. They'd heard of his witness. To the palace guards. And then heard of conversions. Going on within the palace. All of this. God used.

To put steel. In their backbone. To put courage. In their hearts. And the name of Jesus. On their lips. Without fear. How do you respond.

When you hear of. Brothers and sisters. In Christ. In Iran. In China. In Myanmar. In Sudan.

[ 26 : 18 ] In these places. Where they're under. Severe persecution. And you hear of them.

Proclaiming the gospel. Of Christ. What does that do for you? I'll tell you what. It does something like that.

To me. Then John. What are you doing? With all the freedom. You have here. Let's get busy. With the mission. With the mission. Something like that.

Happened. When Paul was put in prison. It stirred up. The rest of the. The body of Christ. To bear witness. In the same way. Your. Witness.

Of Christ. Stirs me up. And others around you. In the. In the faith. Up. To do the same. We saw this dynamic. In it. At work. In our. In our discipleship. Study.

A few weeks ago. On Saturday morning. That some men met. And. And there was some sharing.

Of. Of. Of how we're seeking. To bring the gospel. To people. And. I left that morning.

[ 27 : 12 ] Stirred up. There's this. This contagion. Of. A positive example. And it was that way. With Paul's imprisonment.

Instead of hindering. It actually served. To advance the gospel. So when Paul. Was sidelined. From freely moving about. With the gospel. Scores of other believers. Stepped up.

And spoke the gospel. More boldly. So the net effect. Was not decline. But rather advance. Of the mission. And for this. Paul rejoices. In prison. And he wants. The church at Philippi.

To join him. With that kind of joy. In Christ's gospel. Advancing. So let's spur one another on. During this hard time.

Let's spur one another on. To lay hold of the. Opportunities we have. To bear witness. By our example. To others. The same Holy Spirit.

[ 28 : 07 ] That empowered Paul. To bear witness to Christ. Empowered those other brethren. The same Spirit. That empowered Paul. To bear witness to Christ. Lives in you. Believer. And will empower you.

As you venture upon him. You know. We're on our way. To an eternal heaven. The journey. Is just a few years. And our aim. Is to take as many. Along with us.

As we can. So let's. Be stirred up. Though Paul's. Imprisonment. In Rome. Spurred many others. To preach Christ.

Boldly. Not all did so. For the same reasons. He says. There were two different. Groups of preachers. There were those. Who preach Christ. With good motives. And there were those. Who preach Christ. Out of bad motives. Notice them. As I read. Verses 15 to 17. It's true. That some preach Christ. Out of envy and rivalry.

[ 29 : 02 ] But others. Out of goodwill. The latter. Do so in love. Knowing I'm put here. For the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ. Out of selfish ambition. Not sincerely. Supposing that they can.

Stir up trouble for me. While I'm here. While I'm in chains. Now before we draw out. The differences. Between these two groups. I want you to notice. The one. Great. Similarity.

And it is their message. They all were preaching. Christ. They all were preaching. Jesus Christ. As the way. The truth.

And the life. No one can come to the father. But by him. The gospel message. Of both groups. Was rock solid. The anti-Paul group.

Was not preaching. Some heresy. They weren't the. Judaistic group. Preaching. Salvation. Through circumcision. And good. Religious deeds.

[ 29 : 57 ] Paul will have a sharp word. For them. In chapter 3. Of this letter. He couldn't rejoice. In their preaching. No. All of these. That he's speaking of now. He rejoices.

Why? Because. They're preaching Christ. Christ. So whoever this group was. They weren't. Apostate.

Judaizers. Those who preach another gospel. He will openly condemn. Later in the letter. Now. Though their message was.

The same. They were preaching Christ. Their motives were entirely opposite. And especially concerning. Their attitude toward. The apostle Paul. Some were pro Paul. And some were anti Paul.

Let's look first. At those who preach Christ. With good motives. Now. These were sympathetic. With the apostle Paul. Rightly so. And. They.

[ 30 : 53 ] Were friendly toward him. Their attitude toward him. Is marked by love. Goodwill. They wished him well. In prison. They. They preached. As those who were on the same team.

As Paul. Verse 16. Paul says. They know that I'm put here. For the defense of the gospel. Put here. Is a word that was.

Used with an assignment. That a. A general might make. To a soldier. I'm putting you there. Stand guard there. Isn't that a wonderful way. For Paul. To see his imprisonment.

That the commander in chief. Has. Has put him there. Knowing. I'm put here. Put here by. The commander in chief. To stand guard here. And to. To bear witness here.

That was Paul's view of himself. And they know that I'm here. Because God has put me here. For the cause of the gospel. There's something. To be done right here.

[ 31 : 49 ] And that's why God has me here. So Paul. So. So God has put him in prison. To serve him there. And these preachers know that. Paul's example. Has stirred them up.

Now. To use their freedom. To preach Christ. Where Paul can't. Paul can do so here. But he can't. He can't do it out here. So we'll preach Christ out here. Since he's limited.

And held. In prison. And they did so with no ill will at all. Toward Paul. No ulterior motives. Not so the other group. Of preachers.

And I want to begin by noting in verse 14. He calls them brothers. He calls them brothers. Brothers. These who preach Christ from bad motives.

Envy. Rivalry. Selfish ambition. Ill will. The anti-Paul group. Not all preachers liked Paul. That's what we're learning. These men were irritated by Paul's popularity.

[ 32 : 52 ] They were envious of his success. They were jealous of all the attention and honor given to him. And they're happy then to see him sidelined in prison. So that they might gain some of the attention in the spotlight.

This is the senior basketball player. Jealous of the freshman star on the team. So in that close game when the freshman star falls out. The senior is inwardly rejoicing. Because this will mean.

That with the star on the bench. Out of the way. I can now score more points. And get more of the attention that I deserve. Can preachers of Christ. Become envious of each other.

Of other preachers successes. Other preachers gifts. Other preachers honor and position. Yes they can. Yes they do. We're reading that.

It still happens today. And here they were preaching Christ in competition. With the apostle Paul. As if he was an opponent. Not on the same team.

[ 33 : 58 ] Seeking personal gain and advantage out of Paul's imprisonment. And I would just say that if it's possible to preach the right message with the wrong. That it is right to preach the right message with the wrong motives.

What's so wrong with this picture? Well the gospel speaks of love doesn't it? The gospel speaks of peace. The gospel speaks of unity.

That Jesus makes us one. In his body. And they're preaching it. With a spirit of envy. And rivalry. Preaching about Christ who humbled himself. While they themselves are seeking to exalt themselves. Preaching a Christ who made himself nothing. While they're out to make a name for themselves.

By preaching Christ. And if I as a minister can preach Christ out of selfish ambition. There is absolutely no good deed that any of us can do.

[ 35 : 01 ] But that we may be doing it for the wrong reason. That's why it's only when the motives of men are exposed. That they will receive their reward from God.

Because no deed is truly known until the heart's motive is known. And only God can see that. Do we do what we do for his glory or for our own?

But there's something even worse here in these men. They were not only preaching Christ for personal gain. It says that they were even supposing that they could stir up trouble.

For the apostle while he's in prison. They're wanting to add to his affliction and distress. As if he didn't have enough trouble being locked up in prison.

They want to add more trouble on his shoulders. They're hitting him when he's down. They're hoping that when he hears about them out there. Preaching more and more boldly.

[ 35 : 56 ] And with success. That it will irritate him to death. It will annoy him. It will make him envious and jealous. And give him grief. That's their aim. In preaching more. They're hoping that it will really get his goat.

As he's locked up in prison. In other words. They're thinking that he's just like them. Driven. With the same selfish ambition.

More concerned with personal stats. Than the team's score. And they could not be more mistaken. Sinners often do that.

We often do that. We have a certain sin. And we think everybody else is just like us. That's what they're saying. Paul's in it for the glory.

And we're hoping he's hurting right now. Because he sees we're getting the glory. They couldn't be more mistaken. Notice Paul's response in verse 18. To me it's the key to the whole passage.

[ 36 : 57 ] His response to their mean spirited rivalry. What does it matter? Who cares? Who cares? Who cares? What they think? What they say about me?

How they're treating me? Trying to stir up trouble for me? There's something so much more important. That consumes the apostle Paul. That these lesser things don't even matter to him. Oh that we could forget ourselves.

Because we're so caught up with the main thing. And he goes on in verse 18 to tell us what it is. What does it matter? The important thing.

The important thing. Let this search your heart. What is the important thing with you? What is the thing that matters to you? Paul says what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way. Whether from false motives or true. Christ is preached. And that's why I rejoice. If Jesus is being preached. I'm a happy man. Doesn't matter how they're treating me.

[ 37 : 59 ] You see. They can't steal Paul's joy. Because his joy is not. Hitched to himself. It's not tied to his circumstances. And how other people are treating him.

But rather his joy is hitched to the. The important thing. Christ. And his cause advancing. The mission that cannot fail.

That the gates of hell cannot. Stop from growing. And advancing. Paul hitched his joy to that horse. If the gospel is advancing.

I'm a happy man. Regardless of how I'm being treated. That's what really matters. So what if I'm being put down? Christ is being lifted up. He must increase.

I must decrease. That was true of John the Baptist's heart. It's true of the Apostle Paul's heart. And isn't there something gloriously beautiful. In that attitude. Do you know what it is?

[ 38 : 56 ] It's Christ. Being formed. In the Apostle Paul. Because as we're going to see in chapter 2. This was the son of God. Who. Who had all the rights and privileges. Of being equal with the father. Fully God. And.

Yet he did nothing out of selfish ambition. Or vain conceit. He considered others better than himself. He. He. He came. And became a no one.

And a. A servant. Slave. And selflessly served his heavenly father's mission. For the joy of seeing it advance.

He endured the cross. He scorned. It's shame. So. So the king comes. And. And he's despised and rejected by men.

[ 39 : 54 ] And Jesus says. But what does it matter? The important thing. Is the advance of my father's mission. And that will prosper.

As I lay down my life. At Calvary. Something much bigger. Than his own self-centered concerns. Had caught Paul's eye.

And captured his heart. It was his savior's heart. Toward him. Toward the mission. Toward his father. Paul's had his neck in the yoke with Jesus.

And he's learned from him. And it kept his spirit from being embittered. At his brethren. Who were against him. It kept his spirit. From being embittered.

And his joy from being stolen. Do you let the nastiness of others toward you. Get to you. Do you let it upset you. And ruin your day.

[ 40 : 50 ] Your joy. Your peace. How much. Of what bothers us. And gets us bent. All out of shape. Is an idolatrous concern for me.

We matter too much. And Christ's cause matters too little. If I thought more of the advancement of Christ's cause. I would care less about my own cause.

Isn't that something we can learn from. The apostle. From our savior. This blessed forgetfulness. Of self. And the apostle Paul. I need to know more of that. And it results from Christ.

Being. The important thing. When we make ourselves the main thing. Or too important a thing. All three things suffer. Our unity. Our joy.

And the mission. Your joy follows the most important. Thing. To you. You know that. It's a diagnostic tool.

[ 41 : 51 ] Would you have me know. What the most important thing is to you. Well I can follow your joy. Would you like me to know.

What your joy is. Well I follow the most important thing. To you. Those two. Are connected. It reveals.

Your joy reveals. What really matters. To you. So what is it. What's the real important thing. We've seen what it was to Paul. Is it what others think or say about you.

Is it the way they treat you. Whether you get respect. Honor. Justice. Praise. Is it that you have a life of ease. Void of hardship. And. And.

Suffering. And mistreatment. Or pain. Does the important thing. Begin. Continue. And end. With you. Oh if so. You've got a very fragile joy.

[ 42 : 49 ] Don't you. Easily stolen. By the many joy thieves. Or. Is the most important thing. With you. Jesus Christ.

His gospel. His mission. That his name. Is lifted up. And proclaimed. In truth. That he's exalted. That his kingdom is advancing. As sinners hear. And trust in him. That's where joy. Thrives. Even in a. Prison.

Even when. Gospel preachers. Are bad mouthing him. While he's down. They can't. Steal his joy. He's. He's rejoicing. Because Christ.

Is preached. So anchor. Your joy. To this rock. Hitch your joy. To this horse. Give yourself. To this priority. Christ. And his gospel.

[ 43 : 44 ] And no matter. What's happening. To you. You'll find a feast. Of joy. In the Lord. Himself. So let's be a church. That keeps our eyes. On Jesus. And his mission.

And so be a church. With joy. Joy. And unity. Because of what Jesus. Is doing in the world today. The opportunities. To let our light shine.

Are brighter. Are greater. Because of the troubles. That have come upon. Our world. Let's. Lay hold. And make the most. Of the opportunities. And if you're here.

Without Christ. This morning. There's many here. That would love. To talk with you. About the Lord Jesus. We love you. And want to see you. Rejoicing in Jesus.

Because your sins. Are forgiven. Because. Heaven is now your home. And God is now your friend. We. We want you to know. The love of Christ. That. Becomes the.

[ 44 : 41 ] Important thing. In life. And that will secure your joy. And your peace. And your hope. And your everlasting life. Forever. Together.

We would urge you. To run to him. He turns none away. Well let's stand. Church of Christ. And spur one another. On to our joyful mission. As we sing.

One is the race. There's one Lord. One. Faith. One baptism. And there's one race. Set before us. This mission. And that we're. That's still. Incomplete.

And we need to. Throw ourselves. Into it. And then. The end will come. Let's sing to each other. Let's pray.

Our father in heaven. It was for love. That you did not. Withhold your. One and only son. For us. And we. Worship you. We thank you. We thank you.

[ 45 : 39 ] Lord Jesus. For your willingness. To come. And lay down. In your life. And yes. To show us. The father's heart. And to. To reveal to us. Your own heart. And.

Holy spirit. We ask you. To take. What we've seen. Of Christ's heart. This morning. Burning inside. Of Paul. And make it. To burn within us. As well.

That the mission. That's yet incomplete. Might be completed. That we. Have the privilege. As your. And. To tell others. Where we have found.

The fountain. Of the water. Of life. And turn others today. To find their greatest needs. Met in this savior. We ask in his name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.