

Hope in Hopeless Times

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[0:00] Let's turn our Bibles to Philippians chapter 1. I didn't see Mrs. Aaron and the boys as we began.

I greet you all and we welcome you. Glad to have you with us. Pastor Aaron is preaching through the book of Philippians in Warsaw. He's going to bring a word to us from Philippians chapter 1. We met this morning one of the founding members of this church. As we saw the conversion of the jailer there at Philippi.

And so we are reading Philippians 1 verses 12 through 18. 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.

[1:12] 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.

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. It's good to be with you all tonight. To see your faces again. And to have the opportunity to open God's word with you.

Sometimes that word of God surprises us. We have a hymn that we sing sometimes. Sometimes a light surprises the Christian while he sings. I find it's true that sometimes a light surprises the Christian while he reads too.

[2:14] Or while he studies God's word. You see a passage in a new light. Or perhaps you're facing a particular difficulty. And you find help from an unexpected passage as you read through it.

And that's what I found as I studied Philippians 1 verses 12 through 18. It's been some weeks ago. But back in June the Supreme Court of the United States of America handed down two rulings. Rulings that were disappointing to say the least. One of them rendered unconstitutional a portion of the Federal Defense of Marriage Act. And the other one stated that the California citizens who had appealed a lower court's ruling of Proposition 8.

Which said only marriage between a man and a woman was recognized. Was to be valid or recognized in California. The people that had appealed that ruling had no legal standing to do so. And those rulings, you probably know, were broadly seen as victories for proponents of gay marriage. And I was not encouraged by these things.

[3:21] And I don't aim tonight to get into a detailed discussion of those rulings or those implications of them. Though they are many. And we've already seen them unfold in the weeks since those rulings.

Different groups and states trying to take advantage of them to push their agenda of gay marriage even further. But I do want to give a broader perspective tonight on those rulings.

And many troubling things that we see in our society besides those. And the passage here has relevant truth for the situation that we find ourselves in. Truth that should comfort.

And I trust challenge us as well tonight. As Pastor John said in Warsaw, we've started working our way through Paul's letter to the Philippians. And I'm not going to give you all the background.

Except to say that here in verse 12, Paul is turning his attention to something of a status report. The Philippians were so concerned about Paul's condition that they had sent a gift to him.

[4:20] And a beloved messenger, Epaphroditus, to see how Paul was and to minister to him. And now he's going to tell him, here's how I'm doing. You've heard about my circumstances. He's in prison. We believe that he's in Rome when he was imprisoned.

And when I say prison, he was under house arrest. You find that if you read the book of Acts. He was probably living in some sort of private residence. But he was in chains. Chained to a Roman soldier constantly.

And so he was effectively imprisoned. Even though it was under some form of house arrest. And he was going to tell them what those circumstances have wrought in his situation.

He's still rejoicing. Paul is in chains. And he's rejoicing. His circumstances are not everything that he would want them to be necessarily. Or if you found yourself in those situations or in those circumstances.

It's not what you would want. I mean, does anyone here really want to be in chains? Imprisoned? And as you found this morning with a Philippian jailer.

[5:24] This wasn't Paul's first go around in prison. And yet, Paul is still rejoicing. And the Gospel is advancing. And I want us to focus on verses 12-18.

Just the first part of verse 18. And as we do, we're going to think about joy and witness and hope. But before we get to those things, I'm just going to sum up a little bit more of Paul's situation.

What's going on. Why he is writing about these things. So, after we sort of summarize his circumstances, we'll look at joy, witness, and hope.

Now, Paul more or less says that his circumstances, including being under house arrest in Rome, have served to advance the Gospel.

Now, isn't that interesting? You might think the opposite would be true. What happens if you take the greatest missionary, proclaimer of the Gospel, known to the history of the church, and put him in prison.

[6:25] Well, it's going to hinder the spread of the Gospel, right? You lock up the missionary, the Gospel doesn't spread. But that's not the case. Look what he says.

Verse 12, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel. Really, Paul? Are you feeling okay? You're in prison. It's served to advance the Gospel. Cool. Instead of hindering it, the Gospel is being known throughout the Imperial Guard. The Palace Guard. The Praetorium. A group of elite soldiers from whom were likely chosen the guards that would be chained to Paul.

There was likely a rotation of guards that was chained to him. It wasn't one guard all the time. They probably worked shifts. And the guards chosen for that service were selected from this palace or Imperial Guard.

As far as we can understand the history of Rome and what Paul is referring to anyway. And these soldiers, along with others in Rome, are learning that Paul is in chains for Christ.

[7:29] Now, would the Roman army have heard about the Gospel of Jesus if Paul wasn't in prison? Probably not. Sinclair Ferguson says, how could the good news about Christ break into the world of the Roman army?

Only if Paul were to have extended periods in the company of Roman soldiers. Prison was the ideal setting for such an evangelistic outreach. And at this point, I was going to remind you about a certain jailer in Philippi, but our pastor did that already this morning.

Isn't it wonderful how God works these things together? And so Sinclair Ferguson says, was there one particular family whose faces broke into smiles when this part of the letter was read out in the church meeting?

The Philippians of all people knew that God did unexpected things in prisons. They knew that when a Christian such as Paul places his life at the disposal of Christ, no circumstances can ever prove to be a final barrier to the advance of the Gospel.

God's servants may be imprisoned, but the Word of God can never be chained. See 2 Timothy 2:9. Imagine being the jailer sitting there and reading Paul's letter.

[8:44] God's doing it again. He did it with me. He's doing it with the Imperial Guard now. And not only that, the Gospel is advancing in another way. Other believers are being emboldened to speak the Word without fear.

One commentator pointed out that the government wields the sword as a deterrent to others. And so, if I get a speeding ticket, for example, on a particular stretch of road, and I tell you about it, hey,

there's a speed trap on wherever, 331 going north up to Mishawaka, I got a speeding ticket there. You don't want a ticket, right? That's the government wielding the sword. And so you slow down when you go through there because you heard me say there's a speed trap. You find out I was punished.

You want to avoid the same punishment. And so if you imprison Paul, that should make other Christians say, well, if I speak about Christ, they'll imprison me too.

So I just won't speak about Him. I'll be a quiet Christian. But that's not what happened. The opposite thing has taken place. Paul's imprisonment has actually made other brothers bolder in their witness.

[9:52] They're proclaiming the Gospel with courage. They're emboldened by his imprisonment, not the other way around. Isn't it interesting how God works? Contrary to what we might expect.

And in ways far better than we could have planned ourselves. They see the Gospel spreading and they're glad to have a part in it. And so Paul's difficult circumstances brought about the spread of the Gospel through his own imprisonment and through other believers being emboldened to proclaim it.

But even with those good results, there's some problems. Not everyone who's proclaiming the Gospel is doing it for a good reason. Now the problem is not with the message.

The content of the message. Paul doesn't have any of the harsh words that he has for others who preach a different Gospel. These people are proclaiming the Gospel as Paul mentions about himself in v. 12.

They're proclaiming the good news of salvation to lost sinners through the work of Christ. That's the Gospel. They're preaching the Word, v. 14.

[10:57] That is the truth of God's Word. And they're preaching Christ. V. 15, 16, and 17. He is the content of the message. His person and work applied in our lives by the Holy Spirit.

It should be the work of every preacher to preach Christ. Our pastor, Jason Webb, brought us a beautiful word about Christ this morning down in Warsaw. Thank you for sharing Him with us.

Because we heard about Christ today. These people, although with the wrong motive, were preaching the right message. The message is wonderful and so Paul can rejoice.

He can have joy even though people are preaching for the wrong reason. That wouldn't be true if they were proclaiming a different Gospel. So content's not the problem. Motivation is.

Now for some, they were preaching out of goodwill. They were preaching for the right reasons. Out of love. Knowing that Paul has been put where he was for the defense of the Gospel. In v. 15 and 16. And while no doubt they're sad at his imprisonment, they delight in the spread of the Gospel.

[12:01] And their opportunity to take part in it. They love Christ. They love His Gospel. They love Paul. And they're glad to partner with Him in spreading the Gospel of Christ. They join with Him in that good work out of good motives.

That's encouraging. But then there's this other group that Paul talks about that sort of leaves us scratching our head. They're proclaiming the Gospel, the right message, out of envy and rivalry. They're not sincere in some way. They're actually hoping to stir up affliction for Paul and his chains. As if the chains weren't enough. They want to make it worse for Paul.

We don't know exactly who they were or why they were behaving this way. I think it's instructive that Paul doesn't tell us more than this. There is a helpful lesson here for the Philippians.

He's going to warn them in chapter 2 and verse 3, do nothing from rivalry or conceit. And these men were preaching out of rivalry. The very word Paul uses later. But he doesn't go into unnecessary detail.

[13:07] He doesn't pile on these people and stir up unnecessary animosity. He's not gossiping. He's saying as much as needs to be said to teach them a lesson about right motives.

Now we could speculate all day about who they were. One possible explanation is that because the church at Rome had been established for some time. Paul had written them a letter previously. We have it. It's a letter to the Romans. But because there had been a church there for some time, they would have been established. They would have had their own leaders. And then along comes the Apostle Paul.

And the attention that he generated may have taken away from something of the spotlight or the prestige or the role, the authority that the leaders of the church in Rome had.

Maybe they didn't like this newcomer even if he was an Apostle. Stealing the spotlight from them. Maybe they were glad to see Paul in chains and proclaim the Gospel as a way to rub it in.

[14:07] You great Apostle who loves to preach Christ. You're in prison. We're out here free and proclaiming the Gospel. Such a thing would be sad but hardly impossible.

Now, don't take that as fact. That's one suggestion about who these people may have been. And if it seems hard to believe there would be people preaching the Gospel, the right message for the wrong reason, let me assure you that preachers today struggle with poor motives.

This preacher struggles with preaching the right thing for the wrong reason. I seek to proclaim Christ and I trust you'll hear that tonight.

And I want Him to be honored. And I want much good to come to you. But I do battle with wrong motives. There are times when I want recognition to my name. There are times when I want the paycheck.

There are times when I am proud. And I want our church plant to succeed. And I may get jealous when I see other churches thriving. And ours not quite at the point of thriving.

[15:22] If what Paul says surprises you, it shouldn't. Preachers do battle with wrong motives. I have to pray, Lord, don't let it be about me. I want to preach it.

I'm coming back to Bremen, the church that sent me out. I want them to think they've got a good church planter down in Warsaw. I want them to preach a really good message so they didn't think that they wasted their time and money and energy and effort when they sent me there.

Wrong motive. Wrong motive. Am I preaching because I want people to think well of me or because I want Christ to be proclaimed?

I just want you to understand that what Paul says here is not unusual. But ask yourself about your own motives as well. Again, Sinclair Ferguson, what lies behind our Christian service?

When you are serving, when you are doing things for the cause of Christ, what is the reason for it?

What lies behind our... This is Ferguson again.

[16:24] What lies behind our Christian service? Is it an expression of our love for Christ and for others? Or does it mask a driving determination for self-promotion? Do we have mixed motives?

Or has Christ purified them? Are we sincere or hypocritical in our motivation? Examine your heart. I don't know what your motives are.

I know what I do battle with and assume that many people do battle with the same. May God give us grace to do what's right out of pure hearts. But for Paul, there's still cause for rejoicing whether in pretense, a pretended good motive, or in truth.

Christ is still proclaimed and he can rejoice in that. So, that's a little bit of a summary of what Paul's talking about when he writes this section of the letter. And now I want you to think with me about joy and witness and hope.

And we'll talk about Paul's joy and witness and hope and ours for each one of these. Alright? So we begin with joy. Now, Paul's joy is again surprising given his circumstances.

[17:27] He's in prison, but he's glad. That should shock you a little bit. Pay attention for a second. Paul is in prison and he is rejoicing.

Would you be? Not only that, Paul has people preaching out of rivalry and strife and selfish ambition and trying to make his imprisonment worse.

and he is rejoicing that the Gospel is being preached. Paul, it seems, believed he was appointed to this place by God. Look at verse 16.

The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here. That's the language of appointment.

Designation. Put here for the defense of the Gospel. He believed he was appointed to that place and so he can rejoice that Jesus is being proclaimed, that the Gospel is advancing, even if it means his own suffering.

It's something that the Philippians were going to need as well. Look down at verse 29 with me for a moment. They would face suffering too. Probably already were. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in Him, but also suffer for His sake.

[18:40] Engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. Paul wasn't the only one suffering for the Gospel. The Philippians were partners with Him in it, and so are you and I as followers of Jesus.

Our persecution may look different, but we too will suffer for the cause of Christ. Paul gives us a model of how to do that well. Paul rejoices in it.

Dennis Johnson, who is one of my seminary professors, just recently wrote a commentary on Philippians, and he says, they need to see in Paul, their father in the faith, how to handle the pain of

persecution in a way that brings honor to their Lord and joy to their own hearts.

Later, he'll say to them in chapter 4, rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice. Or again, I will say rejoice. But Paul, whoa!

You don't know our situation here in Philippi. We're suffering for the cause of Christ. They couldn't say that. Because Paul was suffering. Rejoice always.

[19:48] Well, except in imprisonment, right? No. No. Here's a man in prison. He's rejoicing. He's thankful. Their situation couldn't have been much worse than Paul's, and neither could ours.

And he finds reason for joy. And so let me say, what about you? Do you count it joy when you suffer for the cause of Christ?

When people chuckle at you because of your faith? When they mock you for needing a crutch of religion to get through this life? When they think you're silly for not going with them to a place where you know you'll be tempted to sin?

What feeds your joy? Are you able to be joyful when you're persecuted? Let me ask, is your joy dependent on your circumstances? Can you be glad when a man is elected president that you don't want to be president?

What about when the Supreme Court of the United States hands down rulings that you disagree with and that promote evil? And that so far as you can tell will prove detrimental to believers in Christ?

[21:03] Those things seem bad when we look at them. And they are. But we haven't yet seen the outcome of those things. Some of those things that we consider in such a negative light, is there a greater opportunity for the name of Christ to be proclaimed in a way that wouldn't have happened without those negative things?

Without those Supreme Court rulings? If so, that's reason to rejoice. What about on a more day-to-day basis? Bring it from a national level down into your personal life.

What does it take to rob you of your joy? Maybe it's easy to be joyful when the kids are quiet and getting along, and harder to be joyful when they are screaming and at each other's throats.

I'm just spitballing here, but it looks like that at our house sometimes. I mean, sometimes they're nice and quiet and other times they are not. And sometimes I let it rob me of my joy.

Maybe nobody else. I don't know. It's like that at our house. Maybe joy comes naturally at the beginning of the month when the bank account is full again, but it's harder to find when you're scraping together pennies at the end of the month.

[22:21] And could you find joy in the advance of the Gospel even through the means of people whose motives you question? We've talked a bit about our own motivation, but what about when we see others proclaiming Christ with what appears to us to be poor motives?

Can you rejoice when another church that proclaims Christ grows and yours doesn't? Even if they aren't doing everything the way that you would, or even if they seem motivated by money or fame or popularity, you've listened to messages from them, you know that they exalt Christ in their preaching, can you rejoice that He is being preached?

Paul could rejoice at the Gospel going forth from people intentionally trying to afflict him. What does it take to rob you of your joy? Think with me a little bit about witness.

That's a word about joy. Witness. And what I simply want to note here is that the Gospel didn't advance on its own. Paul in chains equals Gospel advance.

No. That's not how it worked. The fact that he was in chains did not automatically advance the Gospel. Paul writes that it had become known that his chains were for Christ.

[23:40] Or in Christ. Well, how do you suppose it became known in the Imperial Guard that Paul's chains were for Christ? I think he told them.

Might have seen it in his demeanor. Maybe he sang like he did in prison in Philippi. But I think that Paul told those Roman soldiers that he was in chains for Christ.

How else is the Gospel going to advance in the Imperial Guard unless Paul is telling them about it? Here was a prisoner. This is a commentator. Here was a prisoner whose talk was all of another.

Whether he sat alone with his guard or whether a visitor called to talk was always the same. It was all Christ. The suffering was the occasion of testimony to the Lord. And that may sound well and good and it's easy enough to read those words.

Oh, Paul in chains, the Gospel has advanced. It's become known that I'm in chains for Christ, that my imprisonment is for Him. That's easy to write. It's easy to read.

[24:42] Not so easy to accomplish. Again, that same commentator. His name is Motier. Motier. And that's why I said commentator before because it's hard to pronounce. Anyway, he says, we might be deceived into thinking that what is easily told was easily accomplished.

But why should it have been any easier for Paul than it is for us to leave the path of self-pity, to talk more of Christ than of our complaints, and to accept each and every circumstance as the place of duty He has appointed.

Do you think it was easy for Paul to be joyful in his circumstances? Do you think it was easy for him to speak of Christ rather than his complaints? Easy to accept this lot in life as an appointment from God.

Of course it wasn't easy. Neither would it have been for the others we've spoken of. The ones that were made bold to speak the Word with courage.

Verse 14. To speak it without fear. And notice there, just about their witness that it's the brothers. He didn't say the pastors here. He says the brothers.

[25:57] It's the saints in Rome who are bearing witness to the Word proclaiming Christ. Christ. And so what about our witness? It wasn't easy for them.

They needed courage. They needed to be fearless. That means there was something to be afraid of. Just as we have something to be afraid of when we speak of Christ.

Christ. It's easier to focus on ourselves. To take the path of self-pity instead of selfless self-denial. Our circumstances are hard. And it would be easier to talk about that. Isn't it easy? Talk about how hard life is. About that horrible ruling from the Supreme Court.

Isn't it easy to talk about how you've got no money and how your car broke down again the other day and how everything is breaking at your house? It's easy to talk about our complaints. To focus on me.

[26:56] I'm the most important one in the room is what we say when we talk about all of our complaints. Harder to talk about Christ. Paul had some complaints to talk about, didn't he?

The man's unjustly in chains. He mentions his chains here, but it's to talk about the advance of the Gospel. If we were in chains, we'd probably be talking about it a lot.

Man, can you believe what happened to me? What flows most easily from our lips? Complaints about the anti-Christian bias in our country?

Or praise for what Christ has done for you? Is it griping about our dismal circumstances of that poor health or poor finances or the crumbling house or the broken down car or difficult relationships?

Or is it rather eagerly taking all of those bad things and using the opportunity to proclaim to your doctor and your banker and your plumber and your mechanic that you're on a first name basis with and your friend to proclaim to all of those people that you might not otherwise have had an encounter with to proclaim Christ to them?

[28:06] The glories of Christ and Him crucified. Again, Dennis Johnson says, when your agenda is thwarted, do you follow His lead in looking around in the situation that you would never have chosen for yourself?

Eager to see and seize unexpected opportunities to show Jesus' kindness and to speak about His grace to people whom you would have not otherwise met. Do you complain about the car?

Do you speak of Christ to the mechanic? If our circumstances are to be occasions for the advance of the Gospel like Paul was doing, then we must be instruments in that advance.

It doesn't just happen. And it won't be easy. But lastly, I want you to think with me about hope. Joy, witness, and hope.

Paul's hope was Christ. And the good news of salvation through Christ, it's that Christ through whom He can do all things. Philippians 4.13 It's that Christ of whom He spoke and delighted to hear others speaking.

[29:19] Christ is being proclaimed. His Gospel is advancing. And that's why Paul is rejoicing because Christ is His hope and He knows if there's to be any hope for these Roman soldiers or the other people in Rome that need to hear the Gospel, then it will be because Christ is proclaimed.

And people come to know and love and trust in that Savior. Paul's selfless suffering and sacrifice makes no sense apart from the cross of Christ and His sacrifice.

Paul's hope was Christ's. That's the hope he proclaims to others. And that message that he proclaimed, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is the power of God for salvation to those who believe.

Paul had exactly the right message. When he writes to the Corinthians, he's got a message that speaks powerfully into his culture. We look at our culture and we wring our hands.

There's all of this anti-Christian. There's all of this wickedness. As I tell you about Paul's Gospel, remember that we have the same Gospel. And really, in many ways, a very similar culture.

[30:30] Paul's message spoke powerfully into the culture in which he lived. He's writing to the Corinthians about who will not inherit the Kingdom of God. And it's an ugly list.

And see if you recognize anything from our day and age here. Sexually immoral. Idolaters. Adulterers. Men who practice homosexuality.

Thieves. Greedy. Drunkards. Revilers. Swindlers. But you know what he's able to say? 1 Corinthians 6.11 He gives this list.

Such were some of you. But you were washed. You were sanctified.

You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And by the Spirit of our God. The Gospel speaks.

[31:26] It's a powerful word and that should give us hope. The Holy Spirit applying the truth of salvation by Christ can and does affect radical change in all kinds of sinners.

Christ was present and powerful for Paul and for those to whom he preached. And so of course he's glad that Christ is being proclaimed. Have you experienced that power of the Gospel?

Has the message spoken clearly into your heart? Have you received the truth of the glory of Christ? And what kind of sinner are you? Maybe you're a rebel against parents. Maybe you're a drunkard. Maybe you're sexually immoral. Maybe you're greedy.

Do you know the greedy won't inherit the Kingdom of Heaven? Whatever kind of sinner you are, you're not beyond the reach of Christ. And that's why we proclaim Christ.

[32:33] Come to Him. Do it now where you sit. And you will be saved. That's Paul's hope. It's the Christ of the Gospel. But we also see hope in God working in all circumstances.

Even ones that appear bad to us. I'm giving you lots of quotes tonight. I don't always have this many, but there's all these guys and they said a lot of good things. Ferguson says, God's logic is very different from ours.

We assume that the circumstances must be right if we are to be really effective Christians. God is not waiting for the circumstances to be right. He is committed to producing really effective Christians whatever their circumstances may be.

until we find hope in knowing that God is working in the midst even of circumstances like imprisonment for the advance of the Gospel.

And isn't that the case time and again in Scripture? I was reading William Hendrickson on this and he starts listing all of the places or many of the places in Scripture where God brings good out of bad.

[33:36] You look at the situation and you say, that's impossible. There is nothing good that can come from that. God brings good out of it. Because He's the One that's ordering it all together.

I mean, you think about, we're not going to talk about all these, but you think about Job. Could anything good come from that? What about Joseph? His own brothers sold him into slavery.

Naomi and Ruth suffer unspeakable loss. Through it, the line of Christ is preserved.

All of Israel, really. One big story of difficulty and God bringing good from it. Think about Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, and from that we get, Your mercies are new every morning.

Great is Thy faithfulness. Good from evil. You think about the imprisonment of Peter and John. Persecution of the early church.

[34:41] And yet, the Gospel spreads. And that's to say, nothing of Christ Himself who is our hope. Was He not opposed and mocked and killed?

Which to His disciples looks like it's done. It's hopeless. The one we put all our hope in is dead. Hopeless circumstances, but from God's point of view, looks very different, doesn't it?

It's part of His plan. God delights to bring good from bad and show that the power is from Him and not us. The sacrifice of Christ secures for us good out of evil.

Do you have that hope today? The same hope of Jesus and the all-wise God is ours today.

And so for one thing, we shouldn't be surprised when we face those difficult circumstances that we tend to throw our hands up and go, what are we going to do? What's going to happen? We've got, I can't handle this. You're right.

[35 : 49] You can't. God can. God can. But difficulty is the norm for people of God throughout the ages. And so we ought not despair. It is exactly out of such circumstances that God delights to demonstrate His power.

Your car breaking down or even the death of a loved one might be a Gospel opportunity that never would otherwise have occurred. Several weeks ago, maybe a month or so ago now, two months, I did a funeral for a sweet lady.

Her name was Barbara. And Barbara was the first person to come to Grace Baptist Fellowship in Warsaw from the community. Outside our original group, the first, she was there the first Sunday. She was the first one to come and then to stay with us. And before she came, Barbara had had cancer and beat it once. And then she got it again while she was with us. And beat it again, it looked like.

And then it came back. And Barbara died. And Barbara's husband, so far as I know, is not a believer.

[36 : 59] And I've had opportunities for Gospel witness with him. And I preached to a funeral home full of people. Many of whom, as far as I know, don't know the Gospel.

And they got to hear the Gospel because Barbara died from cancer. Evil disease. God brings good out of evil.

Never would have wished cancer upon Barbara. I'm not wise enough or powerful enough to work all things together for good. God is. Not only might the Gospel advance in spite of the Supreme Court rulings on gay marriage, it might advance in ways that wouldn't have been possible without those rulings.

We see these things and we start the hand-wringing and we despair. It's going to work against the cause of Christ. Isn't the story of Scripture about the advance of the Gospel in unexpected ways through the very means that were meant to stop the advance of the Gospel?

That's the story again and again and again in Scripture. Haven't we learned our lesson when bad things happen that we don't need to go? It's over for us Christians.

[38 : 21] Those are the things that God uses to bring good. Didn't they kill Jesus trying to stop Him? And wasn't that part of the unstoppable plan of God?

Now, again, this is going to require work. It won't be easy. It doesn't come without cost and pain and suffering.

It's true for Paul. It will be the case for us. And we can't sit back and simply say that the attack on marriage and those who hold it dear and the demonizing of all those who speak against gay marriage, oh, that will be for good.

We must work for that good. God ordains means to bring about His end. And some of those means will be your sweet testimony of Christ before a watching world.

It will be the example set in your strong marriages. Not just sort of a facade where your marriage looks good, but it's really crumbling. But in reality, your strong marriages will be the witness that shows the world the practical benefits of the ideals that we hold.

[39 : 30] As well as hold forth a beautiful picture of Christ and the church. The Gospel. Husbands, does the watching world see self-sacrificial love when they look at your relationship to your wife?

Wives, would anyone want to be part of the church by seeing your heart towards your husband?

Does the world see compassion in our interaction with sinners?

If we hold our views with as much spite for those with opposing views as some of them have for us, then our witness won't be effective or winsome.

If our marriages are in shambles, we'll have little more than a shred of credibility when we speak about the institution of marriage. If we want people to listen when we condemn the sin of homosexuality, then we'll have to condemn all sin.

And we'll have to proclaim the message of Christ to all such sinners equally. It won't do to say that we have a church where people with nice little sins can come and find forgiveness, but people with really big sins, they're not welcome.

[40 : 43] We'll need to be consistent when we talk about sin. We'll need to be firm in insisting upon repentance. And we'll need to show love to sinners. And we'll need to be constant in holding out the powerful, life-transforming Word of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who is again our hope.

Now was I disappointed and discouraged at the rulings of the Supreme Court? The potential fallout from it? Yes. Am I encouraged and challenged at the prospects before us?

After reading about Paul's circumstances and his view of those dismal circumstances, yes. And I hope that you are encouraged and challenged as well. We may reach a point in our country where every preacher who speaks against homosexuality is locked up where this sermon would be considered a hate crime.

Guess what? 2 Timothy 2.8-9 Remember Jesus Christ. Risen from the dead. The offspring of David is preached in my Gospel for which I am suffering.

Bound with chains as a criminal. But the Word of God is not bound. You chain up Paul. It didn't stop the spread of the Gospel.

[42:04] Our days are not so different from those of Paul. There's rampant wickedness and opposition to the church and the Gospel of Christ. But don't forget what happened with those wicked Corinthians who believed and men like the Philippian jailer.

Our message, dear people, is exactly the same and just as powerful now as it was then. We have exactly what we need for the days ahead.

We will need wisdom and courage as we have sung tonight. But we have Christ and His Word and the confidence that God is going to bring good and use us to do it.

And so, indeed, may God make us bold. May He grant us wisdom and courage for the facing of these days. Bold to proclaim His Word, His Gospel. to speak of Christ as the light that answers men's darkness.

You are the light of the world. Don't read that generically. If you are a believer, you are the light of the world. Go and let your light shine before men.

[43:08] Let your marriages shine. Let your kind words ring in their ears that they may glorify your Father who is in heaven. The God of Joseph and Israel and Job and Jeremiah and Peter and John and Paul and the church throughout the ages is still at work today.

And so we have hope. And the Christ who suffered unspeakable evil suffered it so that we might enjoy unspeakable good. So we have hope in Christ.

Our God can work in our days as well. And I trust You'll find comfort and challenge in these truths. May we have grace to trust our God for the facing of these days.

Let's pray. Father, we thank You for the truth of Your Word.

We thank You for a servant like Paul that would set down his own experience as an example for us and we pray that we too would be able to find joy in the midst of difficulty, in the midst of persecution.

[44:22] We pray that we would have an effective witness in those circumstances. And we pray that we would keep our hope firmly fixed on Jesus, our Savior, trusting in our God who does all things well.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Take Your grace hymns and turn with me to number 9. Oh, church, arise.

I trust you'll see some of the truths that we've spoken of tonight. And may this be our rally cry as we go from here. May we be about the work of Christ our King raging against the captor.

And Christ will have the prize for which He died. He will have an inheritance of nations from the Middle East to the Far East to the West to the ends of the earth.

Oh, church, arise. Stand. Let's sing. Hear this blessing from God's Word to His people. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

[45:33] Amen. We're dismissed.