

Gritty Partnership

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[0 : 00] If you haven't met yet, my name's Dave, and it's wonderful to be able to bring you God's Word this morning, and I'd love to chat with you briefly afterwards as well. Philippians chapter 1, starting at verse 12.

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel, so that it's become known throughout the whole Imperial Guard, and to all the rest, that my imprisonment is for Christ.

And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the Word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.

The latter do it out of love, knowing that I'm put here for the defence 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. Well, that's an interesting word, isn't it?

[1 : 14] And church is a wonderful gift. We've got brothers and sisters to encourage us in our walk with Christ, don't we? As we seek to serve Christ, to grow in Him, to make Him known.

Brothers and sisters who care for us when we're having a hard time. Core values we share, even though we come from such different backgrounds. Fellow believers, true partners together.

But it's not always easy, is it? Church conflict is all too real and painful. What does it mean to be a church when we don't get on with each other?

And not just little issues, but big ones. Weighty disagreements. In past conflicts and conflicts that will come, in different churches.

Philippians is all about partnership. What is it actually? What does it mean? How do we actually have it? And so Philippians is this book that focuses on joy.

[2 : 15] Fifteen times it mentions joy. And it's all about this partnership. But what does that actually mean? Do we all just kind of put on our happy church faces and show up together?

No, it's a lot deeper than that. And this whole letter speaks to this issue of partnership a lot more deeply than that. And particularly, partnership in the context of conflict.

Conflict against opponents outside of our fellowship. And conflict within our fellowship. We're all citizens of heaven. But how do we contend for the gospel in one mind when we actually clash with one another?

How do we go on about being true partners in the gospel when it's not all sunshine and rainbows, but it's the gritty reality of sin and opponents and conflict? So they're the questions we're going to try and tackle.

Why don't I pray now for us? Father, we thank you for your word from Philippians. And as we pray, as we look at partnership, face a conflict, that you will help us to consider the implications for our lives, for our church, that you'll be at work by your Holy Spirit to help us to consider what this means for us personally.

[3 : 30] We pray that you might continue to grow us in our gospel priorities, in our partnership together. Amen. So Paul's opened this letter with this thankfulness and joy and confidence and this expression of partnership that he has with the Philippians.

And last week, Josh said there's two questions to keep coming back to in Philippians. And they are, well, who are we? And then secondly, what do we own? Right? And for the Philippians and for us, who are we?

We're citizens of heaven. Right? We're co-partakers in the gospel. The gospel is ours. We're saved by Jesus Christ. We belong to heaven where God is. We eagerly await a saviour from there.

And then after this, Paul shares the partnership and the confidence that he has for the Philippians. And then we've got today's passage where Paul speaks autobiographically about his imprisonment. And so we're going to cover this under three points. The gospel advances, Christ's speech, and Paul rejoices. And so it's in the outlines in front of you as well. And so he starts off this section, verse 12.

[4 : 33] Do you see that there? I want you to know, brothers. So there's a clue. He's going to say something important. And the questions that we should have is, well, why does he want us to know this bit here that he's about to say?

Right? So along with Josh's two questions from last week, who are we? What do we own? Keep in mind, why does Paul want us to know this little episode about his imprisonment? So what's happened?

Well, since he planned the Philippian church, he's been back there at least a couple of times. His latest visit was on the way to Jerusalem, where then he was attacked by a mob, taken into custody by the Romans, put on trial after trial after trial, and eventually made it to Rome as a prisoner, awaiting trial before Caesar himself.

And he's writing this letter from a Roman prison, and he says in verse 12, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

It looks like it's the worst thing that could have happened. Paul, who's done so much to advance the gospel, all over the place, is now wasting away in prison for years.

[5 : 39] What a disaster. How's the gospel going to keep growing when the main person who's been spreading it is trapped in prison? But Paul wants them to know that his imprisonment has not been a defeat for the gospel, as it might seem, but it's actually a means for the gospel to go forward in the mission the Lord gave of making disciples of all nations.

And there's two ways that the gospel has advanced. So firstly, verse 13 there, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest, that my imprisonment is for Christ. So, why was Paul even in prison? Because the Jews wanted to kill him out of envy and strife. And the trial after trial has found there's no guilt against Paul.

He's still in prison. And now he's in Rome and the imperial guard headquarters shared a wall with Caesar's palace and all the imperial guard know why he's imprisoned.

Not as a criminal, not as a troublemaker, but it's for Christ. The elite guard of Caesar, right at the heart of the Roman Empire, have heard about Christ.

[6 : 50] And that Paul is a prisoner for him. Right, the gospel is advancing despite the worst of circumstances. Now, the Greek is slightly weird here and more literally says, my chains have become manifest in Christ.

Or, it's plain to see I'm in chains in Christ. So, there's two senses of this. One's how ESV has translated it. Paul is imprisoned as a Christian.

He got put here by the Jews and the Romans for following Christ. And secondly, the sense that his chains are in Christ. That is, he's here because Christ put him here.

The idea that everyone knows Paul is in chains in Christ. His whole life, his whole purpose is about Christ and that's, he's in chains for that. So, Paul speaks of his whole life being in Christ.

His chains are just another part of what it means for him to follow Jesus and to be in him. And that fact has become manifest or revealed throughout the whole elite guard and to all the rest.

[7 : 56] Paul is in chains in Christ. And there's a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful confidence that Paul has here, isn't there? He can be content in chains knowing that the gospel is advancing.

I wonder how we can have that same confidence. We have the same Father, the same risen Lord Jesus. We have the same understanding of the sovereignty of God that all things work together for good, that his purposes are never thwarted, that the gospel can't be stopped.

Can we have the same confidence that Paul does? Paul knows that he who began a good work in the Philippians will bring it to completion the day of Jesus Christ. He knows there'll be a day of Jesus Christ and God is working till then.

And so whatever the circumstances that he finds himself in, he can be content, which he speaks of in chapter 4, whether he lives or dies, see verse 12 there in prison, he's okay with that.

He presses on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in chapter 3, verse 14. Are there times when circumstances of life do get you down?

[9 : 10] Of course there are. Or perhaps opposition to the gospel makes you fearful for the future of Christianity and civilization. Just as Christ's death meant salvation for many, so Paul's imprisonment has meant the knowledge of Christ to spread right to the heart of the empire.

God works through humility, weakness, imprisonment to advance his gospel and bring salvation to many. And Paul's confident in God's sovereignty to bring about that advance despite the circumstances that he's in.

Are we? Do we share that same confidence? Because we can. It's the same God. And in that confidence, most of the brothers, they grew in confidence and this is the second way that the gospel has advanced.

Firstly, it's been known through Paul's imprisonment to all the imperial guard and second, verse 14, most of the brothers having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

That's awesome. That's pretty odd, isn't it? A key leader of the movement is put in prison facing all the might of imperial Rome and yet instead of cowering the brothers, they've become emboldened.

[10 : 30] Why? Look closely. They've become confident in the Lord. It's not a reckless fatalism, but it's a confidence in the resurrected and glorified Lord.

Imprisonment doesn't diminish Paul's hope or courage. Why should it dampen mine? But rather, I consider Christ is faithful in the worst of circumstances so I can be bold. Now, do you notice who's become confident in the Lord?

Most of the brothers. This isn't talking about the brothers at Philippi, but most likely those at Rome where Paul is. Paul wants to encourage the Philippians by telling what's happened amongst the church in Rome.

And notice, brothers, Christians, significant to keep in mind for the next couple of verses. This isn't the overseers and the deacons, verse 1 that he's talking about, this is the ordinary Christians.

What are they bold to do? They're bold to speak the word without fear. And that's Christianity, isn't it? The church leader is imprisoned and it's not bold to raise a violent coup or an act of terrorism or protest or political activism, it's speaking the word.

[11 : 46] That's how the gospel advances. And Paul surely would rather have been free and proclaiming the gospel, but he wants the Philippians to know that despite him being chained, others are speaking.

and the word is becoming known and the gospel is advancing. And that's how we advance the gospel too, isn't it? It's not political activism, it's not silent good deeds, it's speaking the word.

The good news of Jesus comes and is advanced in words because who are we? We're citizens of heaven. Can imprisonment or even death take that away?

No. What do we own? We own the gospel of the Lord Jesus, the very words of eternal life, the good news of the risen king. And so we speak it that the gospel might advance.

And Paul could have left it there. I want you to know, brothers, this wonderful bit of encouragement, like heaps of the soldiers are knowing about Jesus and the other brothers, they're all telling people about Jesus. How good is that?

[12 : 55] But he doesn't. He goes on. He breaks it down to show, well, actually, it's quite a bit messier than that, really. Have a look at verse 15. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.

Now, that's a bit more like real life, isn't it? Good things are happening, but actually, it's kind of complicated. And the question we should have is, why does Paul want us to know that?

Why did he write that to the Philippians and to us? And there's two motives described, so let's have a look at these and let's take the goodwill first. Some are preaching Christ with his goodwill toward Paul out of love, verse 16, knowing that he's put here for the defence of the Gospel and verse 18, Christ is proclaimed in truth.

Alright, so there's some brothers that have all the best motives. They're walking in a step with the Spirit, they've got this goodwill to proclaim in Christ that he might be glorified out of love for Paul, knowing that he was put there, see that in verse 16, for a reason.

They know he was put there by God to defend the Gospel and if God has got his man where he wants him, well then I can have courage to trust God. And so, off I go and they proclaim Christ in truth. The risen King saves people from their sin and praise God for those brothers.

[14:18] Isn't that who we want to be like? These are the ones who have understood Gospel partnership, isn't it? This is what Paul's been talking about. Like, a game of rugby, if a player gets tackled and they've got to get the ball to the back of the rack to someone else on their team, it's like this, Paul's in prison, he's been taken out, he's stuck, someone else has turned to run with the ball and these brothers have gone, oh, we've got it, off we go.

They are bold, they're speaking the word without fear, they're proclaiming Christ on the same team as Paul, citizens of heaven. And what a wonderful encouragement that would have been to Paul. What a wonderful example it is to us of Gospel partnership. So why does Paul want the Philippians and us to know that? Well, that's pretty obvious, isn't it? That we might be emboldened like those brothers.

That we might have that same Gospel partnership, that same courage to trust God and proclaim the word without fear. But what about the other motives described?

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict Paul in his imprisonment and proclaiming Christ in pretense.

[15:38] What is with that? Despite the fact that Paul does rejoice in this, he doesn't condone it, the language he uses to describe the motives is clearly bad, isn't it?

So envy, wanting what someone else has, rivalry, this isn't the friendly sort of rivalry, this is strife, this is bad competition, this is going for the same target but in order to take it away from the other person.

Not sincerely, trying to afflict Paul. It's horrible, isn't it? It's in prison and they're trying to add to his suffering. What are they doing?

It's kind of the idea of, well, now Paul's out of the way, it's my time to shine. I'll get the glory.

Discovering that this inside lane has opened up and trying to get advantage over someone.

They're not trying to afflict Paul by, you know, if I go talk about Jesus then guys will beat Paul with sticks now but rather, Paul would see they're being successful while he's languishing away in prison.

[16:41] So they go about proclaiming Christ, you know, the one, the king of all grace out of envy. They go about preaching the risen king who takes away sin out of selfish ambition.

They proclaim the way, the truth, the life insincerely in order to cause Paul pain and he knows it and it's so backwards, isn't it?

It doesn't make any sense but it's real and people really act this way and perhaps you've seen it. Perhaps you've even felt the temptation toward this kind of thinking.

Have you ever had one of those gospel conversations where someone just gets under your skin and then as you're talking with them it becomes more about winning an argument against the other person than actually sharing Jesus with them?

Or perhaps taking the opportunity now that Paul's in prison to share Jesus so that they'll get the credit. Perhaps they'll be the people who built this church in Rome, the people who saved the day for the gospel while Paul was in prison, who did a better job of proclaiming him anyway.

[17:54] More successful, more warm, more in touch with the Roman youth of the day. Whatever it is, they're after their own gain at Paul's expense. And that kind of motive, I say, isn't actually that far from any of us.

It can be sneaky. Remember, who has become confident in the Lord? Most of the brothers. That is, these people that Paul described, even these ones with terrible motives, he's calling them brothers. Though these guys are proclaimages with terrible motives, they're Christians. Clearly, immature Christians. They've got a way to go in their progressive sanctification and maturity.

But they're brothers, nonetheless. Proclaiming Christ out of pretense means they're making only an outward appearance. So you have preaching by people with sinful motives, yet they're actually saved people.

And Paul rejoices. How can you rejoice at this terribly motivated gospel preaching? He certainly doesn't commend what they're doing.

[19:06] He does condemn selfish ambition in chapter 2, verse 3, where he says, do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit. So how can you rejoice when they're doing it?

And there's two aspects to it. I take it objectively, what they're doing, it's not desirable in the sense that it would be much better if they were preaching out of goodwill.

They should not preach out of selfish ambition, they should grow in godliness and keep in step with the Holy Spirit. But subjectively, what does it mean for Paul?

These people are proclaiming Christ in order to hurt him. He goes, well, I'm not hurt. You're trying to hurt me by telling people about Jesus? You're trying to show that you're more successful than me? Well, great! If God gives you more fruit than me, well then praise God. I'm just excited the Gospel is going out. Do you see that objectively, it's not good they're doing these things, but subjectively, Paul can rejoice the Gospel is going out and he is not hurt, he's not wounded by them trying to cause him affliction.

[20 : 12] And so, he rejoices. And this is the third point in your outlines. Paul rejoices that Christ is proclaimed, whether in pretense or in truth. How does that make any sense?

Firstly, only because of the sovereignty of God. Because God will do what He wants through the Gospel and God will complete His good work in immature and selfish brothers and God will save people through that Word of Christ.

And the same God who's put Him in prison for the defence of the Gospel will see the Gospel advance even by such means. And so, Paul trusts God and He rejoices that the Gospel is advancing.

Secondly, He rejoices because, well, He's truly humble. He's suffered all over the place. He's gone for many sleepless nights and hunger and thirst and shipwrecks and beatings and stonings and riots and trials before governors and before kings and He's worked hard laboring and preaching with blood and sweat and tears.

But He hasn't done it to say, ha ha, look what Paul has done. He's done it to say, well, look at Christ, look how good He is. And so, these insecure brothers can't stop Paul rejoicing because their intended insult just doesn't land.

[21 : 32] Their attempt to wound Paul's pride doesn't work because it finds nowhere to strike. Paul says, later in the letter, he's learnt the secret of being content and here he is now putting it on display, rejoicing that God's Word is going out and trusting God to grow and mature brothers with dodgy motives.

Which brings us all back to the question of, okay, so, why does Paul want us to know this little episode? Why does he write this little bit to the Philippians? And it takes us to the context of the whole letter and those two questions that Josh said are key.

Who are we and what do we own? As Josh said last week, this letter is all about partnership because we're citizens of Heaven, we own the Gospel, it's ours and what's happened to Paul is advancing the Gospel.

That matters to Paul and to the Philippians because the Gospel is theirs, they own it, they want to see it advance, they want to see it grow, they rejoice when that happens but it also isn't a fair weather partnership and this isn't just like a happy weekend away or flashing the pan or something. It's a partnership forged in the blood of Jesus and it comes with storms and trials and it's gritty but it's a heavenly partnership in a world of sin. It's a partnership that has opponents without and conflict within and Philippians tells us stacks about how we actually handle both of those.

[23 : 06] How do we as citizens of Heaven deal with conflict? Conflict with those who oppose us and conflict with those who are partners with us and Paul is going to go on to speak about both of those in this letter so look out for it as we keep going through Philippians.

What do we do about opponents? As he calls them in chapter 1 verse 28 and chapter 3 he calls them evildoers and dogs and here Paul has been imprisoned by those who oppose the gospel by his opponents and yet he wants the Philippians to know these opponents can't stop the gospel it's still advancing through the partnership with believers both through Paul's work in prison amongst the Imperial Guard and through the brothers' proclamation to those outside of prison we're citizens of Heaven we don't need to fear our opponents that's what Paul wants them to know but secondly what about conflict with other citizens of Heaven that's what Paul's speaking of in verse 15 to 18 isn't it?

And in chapter 4 Philippians there's conflict between two Christian women Eurotia and Syntyche who are partners with Paul in the gospel and the conflict is big enough that Paul specifically addresses it and addresses them by name to resolve it with the help of some co-workers but in this letter before he gets up to their conflict he first shows himself as an example one that he says should be imitated chapter 3:17 and then he shares the example of Christ in chapters 2:5 to 11 what is he doing?

He's showing us how we deal with conflict between Christians we're all citizens of Heaven sometimes we disagree and sometimes the disagreement isn't even well we both have valid points of view but rather like in Paul's situation here perhaps someone or many are actually genuinely sinful with terrible motives and insincerity and are actually trying to cause you affliction what then? How should you respond to that? Well Paul gives himself as an example to follow what do I do when one of my gospel partners is out to hurt me? Firstly you should have humility like that of Christ himself humility like that of the Apostle Paul if someone is trying to wound your pride they can't do it if you don't have any humility is a key to being a citizen of Heaven and secondly know the difference between opponents who need to be opposed and brothers who are selfish with sinful motives but are still your gospel partners we belong to each other as citizens of Heaven and we've got to seek unity striving in one spirit side by side for the faith of the Gospel and Paul shows us a masterful example of that in himself and he'll keep showing us what it looks like throughout this whole letter and thirdly and ultimately

[26 : 12] Paul wants us to get our priorities right he wants us to see in him the kingdom priorities that we all need to have Paul shows us the example of what it is to live for Christ he's not upset that he's stuck in prison he's rejoicing that while he's in prison the Gospel is advancing and he's not upset that people are trying to hurt him he's rejoicing that the Gospel is advancing he's a citizen of Heaven with heavenly priorities and he's showing us what it is to live in this gritty partnership with fellow sinners who have been granted citizenship in Heaven it's not all rainbows and sunshine there's real pain there's real grit it's a huge challenge isn't it what do we do as a church when there's conflict and trust God's sovereignty we seek true humility we seek to have our priorities right we rejoice in the Gospel advancing have you ever been rubbed the wrong way by another Christian of course you have perhaps you've been hurt badly by another Christian in another church or in this one perhaps it was just a misunderstanding or thoughtlessness difference of opinions or maybe the other person has genuinely sinful terrible motives and was trying to afflict you you've been wounded by another Christian ugh feels so wrong doesn't it sin shouldn't have such a place in God's people it's not how citizens of Heaven should behave but it happens it's true that it shouldn't be the case so repent of it yourself be humble be on about the Gospel advancing seek to follow the example of Paul jettisoning our own pride holding fast to Christ caring for his priorities rejoicing and seeing them fulfilled trusting God in all his sovereignty and in true partnership with fellow citizens of Heaven and in humility together being on about

God's mission of Gospel advancement making disciples of all nations let's pray Father we thank you for your grace to us in the Lord Jesus we thank you that you have called us as your people put us together as partners with Christians everywhere we pray that you will help us to be to understand to know how to do partnership well that we might be people who trust in the sovereignty of your control over all things you're working all things out for good you seeing Christ glorified pray there might be people who are humble who don't react to wounded pride but rejoice in the Gospel advancing that we might be people who have our priorities right that we are citizens of Heaven and we have heavenly priorities looking forward to and rejoicing in seeing the Gospel being proclaimed Amen