

The sermon

Intro

I've always been troubled by the way some have presented today's passage. When I hear stories of a pastor who's beating their wife I can't say, "Yeah, but the gospel was preached."

Maybe it's recently when the sins of Ravi Zacharias came to light. I can't bring myself to say, "Yeah, but the gospel was preached." Am I wrong? Has Paul been misrepresented?

Let's consider God's word in Philippians.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

Paul's outlook is 100% positive when it comes to his imprisonment. The gospel is made known, it's spreading, people are being converted, and gospel preachers are gaining confidence.

Point 1: Speak the gospel to spur confidence in others (1:12-14)

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, - 1:12

Paul's putting a positive spin on his imprisonment. A negative has become a positive. Imprisonment hasn't ended ministry. It's increased ministry.

Result 1

so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. - 1:13

"so that" indicates result. Many know Paul is imprisoned because he speaks a message about Jesus.

"whole imperial guard" = a select group of soldiers. 9,000 guards in Rome who were the emperor's personal troops and bodyguard.

How did awareness of Christ reach the whole 9,000?

Maybe Paul isn't being exact? Maybe every last one was reached?

Paul was chained to a guard 24/7. When questioned, why are you in chains? What did you do? Paul told them it's because of a man named Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, who died on the cross for our sins and rose from dead. He answered questions by explaining the gospel. As Paul had visitors, (e.g., Timothy), the guards overheard their conversations. When they asked, "what are you writing about?" Paul told them. When they asked, "why are you willing to die?" Paul told them.

The guards rotated and worked in shifts. More than one heard Paul's account. Then the guards talked amongst themselves. So the gospel spread throughout the 9,000.

"and to all the rest" = the gospel became known to more than just the guards. "The rest" likely means other high-ranking officials in Rome who were in contact with the imperial guard. The gospel infiltrated Rome's elite through one prisoner named Paul.

This comment about the imperial guard indicates Paul is in Rome. There's debate about whether the imperial guard is a place or a group of people. "and to all the rest" indicates the imperial guard is a group of people.

Result 2

And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. – 1:14

The 2nd result is brothers are boldly speaking the gospel ("the word"). Fear is subsiding and confidence is increasing.

"**most of the brothers**" = the brothers in Rome. The Roman church is emboldened to speak because of Paul's imprisonment ("by my imprisonment").

"**become confident**" = to be convinced or persuaded, to be sure or confident. "**having become confident**" = confidence wasn't present, but now it is.

"**in the Lord**" = their confidence is placed in God. Their confidence in God is increasing.

So how does Paul's imprisonment encourage confidence in God? It's the results of Paul's imprisonment. At the end of the letter (4:22) Paul notes the effects of the gospel spreading throughout the palace:

All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. – **Philippians 4:22**

The gospel was being heard then passed on to others. Then embraced. People were being converted. The kingdom was advancing. The gospel really is powerful. The gospel really does convert sinners!

The fears were real. Fears like family rejection, loss of employment and loss of income, violence, imprisonment, even death. These fears subsided when they saw the gospel spread and believed. All because one man was imprisoned!

Identity

I've been trying to highlight the importance of identity. How we view ourselves. Here we're "brothers" (1:12). Or we could say "brothers and sisters" since Paul was speaking to the whole church, not just men.

What are we? Brothers. We're family. We should view ourselves as part of a family of believers. You and I have spiritual

Gospel

Let's note how Paul describes the gospel:

- 1) Something that advances (1:12)
- 2) Something that is known (1:13)
- 3) Something that is spoken (1:14)

"the word" = the gospel.

Confidence

Confidence lacking is now confidence possessed. Fear is waning. The gospel is being spoken.

There's confidence because guards are hearing the gospel through Paul and the guards are spreading what they heard (believer and unbeliever). Yes the gospel is being passed on by unbelieving guards! And there's confidence because some in Caesar's household are believing.

My point is Paul's boldness inspired boldness. Gospel proclamation is contagious. Like COVID and the flu spreading in the home or the church. Gospel proclamation leads to more gospel proclamation. The snowball effect. Like a large ball of snow rolled down a hill with sticky snow picks up more snow, the more we speak the gospel the more the gospel spreads.

Imagine a Palermo where non-Christians are saying amongst themselves, “Do you believe what these people at PCC are saying?” That’s non-Christians spreading the gospel in our town.

Sinners converted sparks gospel speaking. The Bible repeatedly tells us the Bible is powerful to convert sinners:

Of his own will he [God] brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. – James 1:18

The cake maker who’s prosecuted for refusing to make same-sex cakes has opportunity to spread the gospel. People will talk about the gospel, if he frames the issue correctly.

Paul framed the issue while in court. In **Acts 23:6**, before the Jewish council, Paul said, *“It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.”*

In **Acts 26:8**, before Agrippa, Paul said, *“Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?”*

He then shared how he *“declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance” (Acts 26:20).*

On trial, Paul framed his charges in terms of gospel hope. Then he spoke about the message.

Don’t frame your moral convictions in terms of conservative values or political affiliation. Rather, frame moral convictions in terms of gospel hope. If we do, we’ll encourage gospel spread and gospel confidence.

Point 2: Speak the gospel with right motives (1:15-18)

I confess the way Paul frames this 2nd section troubles me. When Paul rejoices over the gospel being proclaimed with wrong motives, I think how can Paul be so indifferent to these grievous sins?

Christianity Today has been doing a podcast called “The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill.” In 1996, Mars Hill church was founded in Seattle, Washington. At its peak, the church was approximately 15,000 people in 15 locations. In late 2014, the church elders encouraged the Senior Pastor to step down for a variety of sins. The church was dissolved in 2015. From the podcasts I gathered the following sins:

- 1) Crass, immoral speech.
- 2) Abolishing plurality of elders to consolidate control.
- 3) Firing people immediately when they challenged him in any way. And doing so repeatedly.

Not talking biblical church discipline. Talking removal because of perceived threats to his power, being unteachable, and insecurity.

- 4) Forcing the congregation to shun such people and cut off all contact.
- 5) Bragging publicly about trampling people.

“There is a pile of dead bodies behind the Mars Hill bus and by the grace of God it will be a mountain by the time we’re done. You either get on the bus or you get run over by the bus, those are the two options but the bus ain’t stopping.”

- 6) Pulling the “God told me” when challenged by Scripture.
- 7) Saying attendance numbers justifies the means. Growth by any means necessary.
- 8) Repeated refusal to listen to godly counsel.
- 9) Using church funds to buy his books so he could be on the New York Times best seller list.

10) Leaving a wreckage of church people who put their trust in this guy, were manipulated by this guy, had pastors torn from them by this guy, and had friends removed from the church by this guy.

Respected Christian author and speaker **Paul David Tripp** was brought in to offer counsel. His observation?

“This is without a doubt, the most abusive, coercive ministry culture I’ve ever been involved with.”

I couldn’t listen to that stuff and say, “Yeah, but the gospel was preached.” Am I wrong? Or are we misunderstanding Paul when we say, “Yeah, but the gospel was preached.” It that God’s attitude?

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. – 1:15

That’s some preach Christ from bad motives. Envy = jealousy, ill will towards a person because they have something you don’t. Rivalry = discord because there’s a rivalry between brothers.

A rival is someone who stands in your way. Like Tom Brady and Payton Manning stood in the way of each other’s Super Bowl aspirations.

Others preach from good will = good intentions towards hearers.

The “**some**” are the bold speakers in Rome. Some preachers in Rome value Paul.

Other preachers see Paul as a rival. They’re genuine Christian brethren. They “preach Christ.” They’re church leaders. Maybe they view Paul as a threat? They want to be the top guy? Like the 2nd string quarterback wants to take the starting quarterback’s job. They want to be the voice of the Roman church.

The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. – 1:16-17

Two groups of preachers with two sets of motives. Some preach from love. Love for the Christian, the non-Christian and Paul himself (the emphasis here). They know that Paul is imprisoned by God’s providence. Who put Paul in prison so he could defend the gospel? God. Defending the gospel isn’t the aim of Roman authorities.

Another group of preachers sees Paul’s imprisonment as opportunity for personal gain (selfish ambition). They also want to afflict Paul, the common word translated “tribulation.” They preach in order to bring internal distress to an imprisoned apostle.

I can’t think of a finer motivation for preaching to God’s people (joking).

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. – 1:18

Whoever speaks proclaims Christ. One group speaks sinfully (pretense). Pretense = they pretend to preach with good motives when they actually want to harm Paul and outrank him.

But Paul rejoices anyways. The gospel is advancing, spreading, and likely yielding new converts through men with horrifically sinful motives.

Conclusions

Is Paul saying, “Yeah, but the gospel was preached” so their sinful motivations are no big deal? I don’t think so. Why? Because these motives are corrected later in Philippians.

- 1) Love is commended in 2:1-2.
- 2) “being in full accord and of one mind” is commanded in 2:2.

That's anti-rivalry.

- 3) Selfish ambition is prohibited in 2:3.
- 4) The theme of fellowship or gospel partnership is severed when a group of preachers sees Paul as a rival to harm.

What caused the rivalry isn't stated. That's not Paul's point. We can make some guesses. The church wasn't founded by Paul so they were afraid he was going to move in and take over?.

Why the joy? Paul is highlighting the positive.

- a) Despairing over sin would mar the theme of gospel advance.
- b) Having joy despite their ill motivations = Paul wins. He's not giving them what they want: a disheartened Paul. He's making known their efforts are in vain!
- c) Paul sees the larger picture, the divine perspective.

Their sinful motivations are serving Paul's purpose: gospel advance among the Gentiles.

- d) That's not to say Paul's an unfeeling Stoic.

Elsewhere in **1 Corinthians 11** Paul notes numerous hardships he's experienced. One of these "*is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches (11:28).*"

Paul was surely distressed that gospel preachers view him as a rival and preach from sinful motivations. Because he cares about the health of the local church.

- e) So Paul rejoices in gospel advance, but he doesn't rejoice in sinfully motivated preaching.

Application

So I didn't say, "Yeah, but the gospel was preached" when I listened to the Mars Hill podcasts. I was angry and grieved when I learned of abuse of power, severed fellowship, ungodly removal of leaders, horrific spiritual examples, and sheep ruined in wake of a corrosive local church atmosphere.

Paul's not saying I don't really care about that stuff. He points out the sin. It makes him anxious. But he sees gospel triumph in the midst of horrific sin.

- 1) 1:18 ≠ a blank check for ungodly preachers.

Not hinting at problems here. It's a reminder, warning to your elders. The chief application is to the elders and those who teach in this church. What are my motives?

- 2) Talked this week with a brother from another state sitting under an ungodly and abusive pastor. Near unanimous counsel has been get out of there. One counseled, "God does work through men who are broken and lacking in character."
- 3) Response. God says elders have character requirements (1 Tim 3:1-7) and verified sin requires removal (1 Tim 5:19-22).
- 4) Some of you have been damaged by controlling, abusive, self-seeking dictators. God didn't obligate you to remain under their care because they preached the gospel.
- 5) What should my brother in another state do?
 - a) Bring the matter to the church (he already brought it to the pastor).
 - b) Give time for the church to do the right thing = remove the pastor.
 - c) Leave if the church refuses to remove this pastor.
 - d) I'm not allowing for restoration here because the pastor in question never had the prerequisite character to be pastor. He should have never been pastor to begin with.

Back to the gospel...

- 1) Something that's preached
- 2) From good and bad motives
- 3) Something that's defended
- 4) The gospel preached brings Paul joy

What is the gospel? The good news that God saves sinners through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the cross, Jesus died as a substitute for sinners. If we repent (turn) and believe (trust), that's turning from sin to trust in Jesus' death and resurrection, we're treated as if we never sinned.

On the cross God treated Jesus as if he lived our sinful life. If we trust Jesus, God treats us as if we lived Jesus' sinless life.

If you would say I've never believed I understand my sin, respond to the gospel by confessing your sins to your Creator and accepting God's offer of pardon in Jesus.

Conclusion

Speak the gospel to spur confidence in others. Be the start of gospel spread in our community.

Speak the gospel with right motives. Speak from love and passion for God's glory, not personal gain or rivalry.