

Living as Citizens of Heaven – Part 2

Advancing the Gospel – Phil. 1:12-18a

Intro:

- In all of our lives, we have our share of momentous events, twists and turns, joys and sorrows. Some of these can be planned for and anticipated, and others are not. We are grateful when we encounter unexpected joys and help, and often, we bemoan hardship and difficulties.
- Our series title is “Living as Citizens of Heaven,” and we are reading the letter to the Philippians through this lens. In so doing, we have to ask ourselves, as citizens of heaven, what should our perspective be on the variety of circumstances and situations in our lives?
- Paul helps us today by reflecting and reporting on his circumstances and by teaching us how to understand, process, and proceed through our own. Here is the first way, as citizens of heaven, we are to respond.

Pray your circumstances will serve to advance the Gospel

Phil 1:12-14 NIV

Now, I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the Gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the Gospel without fear.

- On the surface, being in jail does not seem to be a desired or hoped-for circumstance. The Philippian Christians had certainly heard that this had happened to Paul. Upon hearing this news, they sent Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25) to help with Paul’s needs. They viewed Paul’s circumstances as a setback to his mission. Paul reported back to them through this letter that this imprisonment, what had happened to him, was not a setback but actually served to advance the Gospel.
- Then, Paul lists two reasons why this situation resulted in the advancement of the Gospel. First, all those in the palace guard and everyone else who knew why he was in chains knew he was there because of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. People undoubtedly then asked what the Gospel was and why this message would cause him to be put in chains. The message of the Gospel was being spread because of his imprisonment, not hampered by it. Paul understood that God, in His providence, ordained these chains so that they would serve the greater purpose and good of Gospel presentation and proclamation.
- Second, because of his chains, not despite them, most of the brothers and sisters, instead of becoming intimidated and frightened by the threat of punishment and imprisonment, became confident in the Lord and gained the courage to proclaim the Gospel message all the more without fear. This is what hearing and reading about the suffering of others for the cause of Christ can do for you . . . and why it is important to know about the deeds and suffering of others.
- This is also why Joseph, from the book of Genesis—from his experience of being sold into slavery by his brothers, being wrongly accused and imprisoned by his master, and being forgotten about for years after continuing to do good—could proclaim after seeing the full plan of God that what others meant for evil against him, God meant for good (Gen. 50:20). This knowledge is why Paul confidently wrote:

Rom 8:28-29

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

- So I have to ask you, are you viewing your present circumstances, the “chains” you feel you are “imprisoned” by, as a means that God uses to advance the Gospel? I am asking you to view your life through this lens, and I am telling you to pray that God will use your “chains” to serve to advance the Gospel. This will help you make the most of your life in the circumstances that you are presently experiencing. Think this way, pray this way, have this outlook, and you will find encouragement and find a way to rejoice in and through them as you see and use these things to produce gospel fruit in and through your life and circumstances.
- Now, Paul turns and reflects upon some of the motives of those who are sharing the message of the Gospel, some out of good motivation, and others out of bad, concluding that the most important thing is that Christ is preached. So, another way for us to live as citizens of heaven is to hold the preaching of Christ as most important.

Hold the preaching of Christ as most important

Phil 1:15-18a NIV

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the Gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 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.

- This, again, is an incredible perspective, a supernatural one. This is the right and good perspective of citizens of heaven. The most important thing is not our circumstances or conditions, but that Christ is preached.
- Paul was also saying that the message of the Gospel was not always being told with good motivation. As people were telling the story of what happened to Paul, they had to tell the reason why Paul was in prison and facing this kind of trial and opposition. The Jews, and perhaps others, told the message of Christ to others, and some did so out of envy and rivalry. They wanted their philosophy or religion to be the dominant one, and they spoke the message about Christ out of selfish ambition without any sincerity, hoping to cause trouble for Paul and diminish the message of Christ.
- Others preached the message of Christ because of love, love for Christ, love for the church, and love for those who have not believed or heard the message. Paul concluded that despite the motive of the messenger, the gospel seed would be spread on the soil of the souls of mankind. The most important thing is that the message of Christ is shared.
- In evangelism and outreach, the most important factor is not the motive of the messenger but the power of the message. For the *Gospel is the power of God for the salvation to everyone who believes (Rom 1:16)*. However, there is a difference between Gospel sowing and Gospel growing, and in this, the intent of the “messenger” matters.
- A key truth from this passage is that our missions and outreach work must have the preaching of the Gospel of Christ at its core. All Christian humanitarian aid or help of any kind, for it to be

Christian, must keep Gospel proclamation as most important. All the things we can do are good, but they are limited. What is truly of greatest value is the message of the Gospel, for this is of the highest eternal worth, and we must use these other things as ways in which doors will open to the message of the Gospel. Communicating the message of Christ is the most important and must be the primary focus of our mission and our lives. This is the biblical way to think about your life as a citizen of heaven.

Conclusion

- We are going to conclude this passage with one connected story shared by two people. This is the story of God's providence in using sacrifice and suffering for the proclamation and preaching of the Gospel message.
- Pray your circumstances will serve to advance the Gospel and hold the preaching of Christ as most important. This is the way we view our lives as citizens of heaven.
- Pray

Benediction

May God's grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work (2 Cor 9:8-9).

Questions for small groups

- What did you learn from our passage for today?
- What from this passage spoke to you personally?
- How can you use your circumstances to advance the Gospel?
- How can you help others see their lives through the lens of heaven?