

“The Profit of Pain”  
Philippians 1:12-18  
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She was in middle management and a good employee.

In fact she had gotten the highest job performance reviews possible year after year.

Her boss came to her on one occasion and asked her to delete some accurate but negative legally required information from a report so the report would not reflect badly on the company.

She explained to her supervisor why she could not do that or ask her subordinates to do it and she was abruptly fired.

Not from her, but from others, the word of her firing quickly spread.

Oh sure there were some who wanted her to file a lawsuit against the employer but for her that was not the most important issue.

For her the more important results of her ethical stand were the conversations about ethics and her Christianity that were initiated by the situation **and** the self-examination that went on in the minds of many others who heard about what she had done.

Many of her co-workers had known she was a Christian but it wasn't until this happened that Christianity took on relevance in the minds of others.

Her loss of a job resulted in the advance of the gospel.

- Have you ever suffered loss because of your Christian values?
- Have you ever been the brunt of opposition because you are a Christian?
- Have you ever lived with ridicule because of your faith?
- Because of differences of opinion on matters of faith, have you ever been pushed away by the very people who you most thought would love you – your own family?

- Have you ever had Christian friends turn on you and seek to hurt you, speak ill of you, and even take delight in your hardships?

### **What is to be our attitude in such times?**

The message today is probably not applicable to all of you at this time in your life.

The Apostle Paul speaks of circumstances that only some of you have or are experiencing.

In the text before us today, the Apostle gives us a glimpse into his personal circumstances.

In so doing, he also gives us some insight into a very captivating perspective on how to think and respond when we face personal opposition because of our relationship to Jesus.

There are several reasons why people suffer in life.

This text doesn't address all of them.

1. Some people suffer because of their own stupid mistakes.

It isn't suffering for the gospel when someone contracts emphysema after smoking two packs of cigarettes a day for 30 years, or someone lands in the hospital after trying to take a 90 degree turn in the road at 75 miles an hour.

But as much as **their own** actions may have been the **cause** of their suffering, it is still suffering.

Fortunately God doesn't turn his back on us when we bring suffering on ourselves, **but this text isn't about that.**

2. Others and even most people suffer sooner or later simply because we are part of a fallen world where disease and violence inflict their pain on young and old, rich and poor without discrimination.

But it's **not** suffering for the gospel to get hepatitis from contaminated blood, or to have a surgery go wrong, or get hit by a drunk driver, but it is still suffering.

Again it is a gracious God who helps us in those times of suffering, but **this text isn't about that kind of suffering** either.

3. The suffering this text deals with is the suffering that comes because of our faith in Christ, because we are Christians.

And the way we are called on to deal with such suffering is very different than I would have expected.

For example, God doesn't come to Paul in his prison and console him with assurances of release and vindication.

The consolation for Paul is found in a very different way.  
But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Let's look at Paul's words:

Philippians 1:12-18

"Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. <sup>13</sup> As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. <sup>14</sup> Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. <sup>15</sup> It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. <sup>16</sup> The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. <sup>17</sup> The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. <sup>18</sup> 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.

Paul begins with the words, "Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel."

What has happened to Paul?

After his time with the people in Philippi, the very people to whom he has now written this letter, Paul continued his missionary work in others parts of Greece and Asia Minor.

But almost every place he went he met opposition from both Gentiles and Jews.

And the opposition was often violent.

For example we read this of his time in Jerusalem:

Acts 21:27-33

“Some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and... the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul... they were trying to kill him... Soldiers...ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains.”

At his arraignment, the crowd literally tried to break into where Paul was and kill him.

The authorities took him out of Jerusalem to save his life and took him to Caesarea where he was imprisoned for two years.

As a Roman citizen Paul finally appealed to Rome.

On the way to Rome for trial, bound as a prisoner, the ship crashed into the rocks off the island of Malta and Paul was about to be killed by the soldiers before the commander intervened.

When he finally arrived in Rome he was still held either in prison or under house arrest for several more years.

All of this happened because of his faithfulness to Christ.

To the Corinthians in a letter he spoke briefly of some of his experiences:

2 Corinthians 11:24-27

“Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.<sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,<sup>26</sup> I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.<sup>27</sup> I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

Whether he was still in Caesarea in prison or in Rome at the time he wrote this letter, Paul's comment that "what has happened to me" is a reference to his imprisonment and suffering for the cause of Christ.

A man by the name of Epaphroditus, had been sent by the church in Philippi to visit Paul in prison and take food and clothing AND to bring back to the church in Philippi a report of how Paul was faring.

But rather than talk about his physical condition, which probably was deplorable, Paul responds with something quite UNexpected.

Paul says, "What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel."

I would have expected Paul to write of how much he felt sidelined and ineffective in prison, of how much he longed to be free, and of how they should pray for his quick release so that he can get back to the important God had called him to do.

It isn't that Paul preferred to be jailed, but notice where his focus was: not on his condition but how effectively the gospel was making inroads into people's lives.

Paul writes that there are two ways that his suffering, his hardships, his imprisonment are helping to advance the gospel:

First, in verse 13, "As a result (of his suffering), it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ."

One commentator wrote, "When Paul was arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21) and shut away in prison in Caesarea (Acts 23,24) one could easily imagine that this was the end of his ministry, especially as his imprisonment dragged on month after month (Acts 24:27). But in the providence of God the place of his imprisonment, the Praetorium of Herod (Acts 23:35), and the length of his imprisonment, both served to thrust the gospel up into higher levels of Roman society than it had ever reached before. Roman military officers...and centurions (Acts 23:24,26), as well as Romans soldiers in Jerusalem and Caesarea, heard the gospel. Two Roman governors, Felix and Festus, along with King Herod Agrippa and their wives heard Paul speak about faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 24:24-27; 25:1-26:32). One of those governors, over a

span of two years, often sent for Paul to converse with him (Acts 24:26). News of this celebrated prisoner and his teaching must have spread through the Praetorium, the barracks and out into the surrounding community. Thus what appeared at first to be a fatal blow to the Christian mission, the arrest of Paul, turned out to be the means of its revitalization, the key to preaching the gospel before governors and kings (cf Mark 13:9) and their staff personnel.” (Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 35)

We tend to think that suffering and opposition are indications of setback and failure.

We lose a job because of our ethical stand or our family shuts us out because of our faith in Christ and the temptation is to not only feel sorry for ourselves but to think that ends our ability to influence them.

But Paul’s word is that God works through our hardships to advance his kingdom.

Don’t assume that hardship is failure – God is still in control.

The stoning death of Stephen in Jerusalem, the first Christian martyr, certainly appeared to be both a personal tragedy and a victory for those who opposed the gospel.

But late in his ministry Paul gives some insight into the effect his witnessing that death made on Paul’s life.

It certainly seems reasonable to speculate, if not conclude, that Stephen’s death greatly influenced the eventual conversion and worldwide ministry of the Apostle Paul himself.

What appeared to be loss and failure became the seed for an awesome expansion of the gospel in the world through a young man who saw Stephen die.

Now back to Paul’s own imprisonment: Verse 13, not only did the gospel become widely known among non-Christians **because of Paul’s imprisonment** but Paul writes in verse 14, “Because of my chains, **most of the brothers in the Lord** have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.”

Contrary to what we would expect, Paul’s imprisonment and suffering didn’t intimidate the other Christians but emboldened them.

This truth has been demonstrated many times in history.

Bob Knapp recently gave several of us a biography of a Chinese Christian named Yun.

Telling how Christianity came to his remote part of China, Yun tells of a single young woman named Marie Munson who sailed from Norway in 1901 to be a missionary to the Chinese.

What is dramatic about this is that this was less than a year after the Boxer Revolution wherein hundreds of western missionaries serving in China had been slaughtered.

And Marie was the forerunner of literally thousands of missionaries who followed her to China.

50 years later the Communists drove out or killed the missionaries and Christian converts.

That appeared to be the end Christianity in China but now we know that it only proved to be the very impetus needed to grow the church as never before.

In the early and mid-1950s the deaths of some of those missionaries to China and the martyrdom of Jim Elliott, Nate Saint and three others, killed by the Auca Indians in Ecuador, were the catalyst needed to send out a flood of missionaries around the world.

1900 years ago Tertullian, who helped the church face persecution after persecution at the hands of the Romans, saw what we see today: "the blood of Christians is seed [of the church]."

We look at Paul's preaching in city after city in Asia Minor and Europe and see great results of churches being started.

We look at the large crowds drawn in Europe and America by George Whitefield in the Great Awakening or the multitudes attending crusades of Billy Graham and we think this is how God does his work.

We think of the times that we have been able to share the gospel with a neighbor or relative, or the times we have been effective in teaching or serving and we think that is what it means to be a fruitful, successful Christian.

And then we are set aside by losing a job where we had worked so hard to build relationships and effectively share Christ, or we are pushed out by our family members who don't want to hear about Jesus anymore or we feel marginalized by friends who we know privately ridicule our Christianity.

And we think it's all over, we've lost.

God says it is probably in those times that he is **most** doing his work. Setbacks may not be setbacks at all, if we had God's perspective.

God calls us to trust him.

We cannot know whose lives we are influencing more through our hardships than through our victories.

But it is what Paul writes next that takes many of us into new territory as far as having a Christ-like attitude.

- It's one thing to be fired from a job by a non-Christian who can't stand your Christian values and ethics.
- It's one thing to be ostracized by non-Christian friends and even family.
- It's one thing to be mistreated at the hands of those who don't know the Lord.

**But how are we to respond when those who treat us worst are fellow-Christians.**

Listen to Paul: "It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. <sup>16</sup> The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. <sup>17</sup> The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains."

We are given relatively little information about these people who preached Christ out of envy, rivalry, and selfish ambition, and were trying to stir up trouble for Paul even while he was in prison.

But don't miss it – these were not false teachers or enemies of the church; these were fellow believers who disliked Paul.

- They took delight in the fact that Paul was in prison.

- They thought that by their preaching they could cause Paul even more harm.
- They thought that if they were more successful, it would cause Paul to feel defeated.

This is like the jealous or offended pastor or parishioner who can hardly wait for something bad to happen to that other church or pastor.

Several years ago I heard of a church staff in our community that had as their informal slogan, "Gaining on Gables."

They were successful in ministry but out of what motive?

And when they have finally gained or surpassed Gables, what then?

And what is our attitude then?

There are whole denominations that spend more time badmouthing other Christians than proclaiming Christ.

There are individual churches that mark out lifestyle issues or petty doctrinal positions and castigate every other Christian who doesn't see it their way.

There are individuals who because they differ with you on something about the way the church should run, or the kinds of programs we should have, or the way we raise our kids, or the kind of Christian music we like, or the way we supposedly looked at them, take secret delight in seeing us put down, sidelined, or suffer in some way.

It's the Christian who thinks that his success will make you feel defeated and jealous.

And the truth be told, we fall for it too often.

We measure our own success by outward appearances.

We feel failure and jealousy, if not a certain bitterness in the success of others.

This is where Paul's attitude surprises and challenges me.

- It seems almost impossible not to dislike those who dislike us.

- It seems almost impossible not to compete with those who are competing with us.
- It is hard not to retaliate against those who seek to hurt us.

Why?

It is because we are thinking first of ourselves.

The greatest issues for us are how we feel, how others perceive us, whether we are being misrepresented, etc.

Now I find it impossible to believe that Paul wasn't hurt and offended by brothers in the Lord who were seeking to add to his misery by doing what Paul couldn't do – be successful in ministry.

I'm certain that it hurt.

And we know from Scripture that Paul was ready to defend himself when it was right to do so.

But what trumped his hurt and even his rights was his perspective.

Paul put his own sensitivities and rights second to the priority of the gospel.

Listen to Paul in verse 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."

Paul had written to the Corinthians that the credibility of the gospel, the testimony of the church was more important than their rights.

He forbid them to enter into lawsuits before non-Christian judges because of the negative testimony it would be.

As one author put it, "It was more important for the church to be the church than for its members to receive the personal satisfaction of winning lawsuits against fellow believers. Now Paul himself faces people who have wronged him, and consistent with his advice to the Corinthians, his response is to subordinate his personal agenda to God's. Shrugging off their animosity, he rejoices that they preach Christ." (Thielman, Philippians, 63)

In other words, Paul's first concern was not his comfort or his physical welfare or even his reputation, but the gospel and the reputation of Jesus.

Gordon Fee wrote, "The gospel was bigger than (Paul's) personal role in making it known." (Fee, *Philippians*, 114)

Can I by God's grace rise to that level of kingdom mindedness?

Can I experience those who oppose me, maybe even those who delight in my difficulties, and be more concerned about how the gospel is faring than the way it makes me feel or look.

Can I delight in the good things fellow-Christians are accomplishing even when their motives are rotten and even when they are doing those things, at least in part, to spite me?

Will I rise to the kind of thinking where Jesus' reputation and the good of the Kingdom of God are more important to me than my own reputation or welfare?

Will I join Paul in saying:  
Philippians 1:12-18

"Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. <sup>13</sup> As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. <sup>14</sup> Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. <sup>15</sup> It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. <sup>16</sup> The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. <sup>17</sup> The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. <sup>18</sup> 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."

See also p 130 in Phillip Yancey's book 'Soul Survivor' about Tolstoy's letter to Lev Nikolayevich