‘EMBRACE THE ESSENTIALS’

Philippians 1:12-18

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The Queen Mary was in her heyday the largest and most opulent ocean liner afloat.

Now the ship is permanently moored at a pier in Long Beach California. It has been restored to its original magnificence, but it doesn’t ply the oceans anymore. It’s just a maritime museum, conference center, and hotel.

Many come to reminisce their ocean crossing aboard it. It has fine restaurants and it hosts elegant parties. They still use all the marine terminology. Your stateroom is either on the port or starboard side. Liz and I stayed in one a few years ago.

No one gets motion sickness anymore because there is no movement; no stormy weather to prepare for; no fear of icebergs or enemy torpedoes. The ship serves no purpose except to capitalize on its history.

This is an allegory of some churches. Their effective service for God is past. They may speak as if the church is still carrying out the Great Commission, but it has long been decommissioned.

Just because a sign on the outside says “Church,” doesn’t mean it’s what God’s Word says a church should be.

- Christ Jesus our Lord commissioned his church to make a powerful impact on the world with the good news of salvation by faith in Christ. We call this the gospel.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the engine that drives a healthy church.

The Apostle said it’s a powerful engine: *‘I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.’* (Romans 1:16)

In his letter to the Philippian Church we see how the gospel of Jesus Christ was the powerful driving force in Paul’s work, and in every church he served.

1:12 *Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.*
1:13 *As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.*
1:14 *Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*
1:15 *It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.*
1:16 *The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.*
1:17 *The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.*
1:18 *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. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,*

The Apostle Paul’s experience described in Philippians 1:12-18 gives us reasons as a church to place our confidence in the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I. THE GOSPEL IS NOT LIMITED BY ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES. (1:12-14)

We hear this word, *gospel,* so often in the church that it’s practically a cliché.

So I want to refresh your memory for a few moments.

For many Christians the gospel is like the weekly newspaper in a very small town. The people know all the news before the paper comes out. But they take the paper anyway because they like to see if the editor got it right, the way they heard it.

Let’s see if this is the way you heard the gospel.

- The church exists to bring hope to a fallen world. This hope comes through the gospel.

The gospel is the good news that in Jesus Christ God came into our world to save people from the evil that has corrupted everyone.

- We call this corruption sin. It separates people from God who is holy and righteous. Sin is so deadly that it actually makes people enemies of God.

Sin is not a joke. It ultimately condemns a person to eternal punishment in a real, literal hell.

- God never intended any human being to go to hell. Hell is for the devil and his evil angels, and they will be condemned to hell in the end.

But sin brought people under the devil's control. Those whose lives are controlled by the devil will ultimately share in his damned destiny.

- That's why our Christian message of hope is called gospel, or good news. It says, *'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish—shall not be condemned to hell—but have eternal life.'* (John 3:16)

And this gospel is powerful. The apostle Paul said it is has God's power to save from the horrible consequences of sin everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ as Savior.

You've heard the saying that *No news is good news.* Well, that's not true if you're talking about people's spiritual condition.

No news is actually very bad news. People desperately need the gospel, which is God's good news of a Savior.

We read in the Bible that *'"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?'* (Romans 10:13-14)

People desperately need to receive this good news of salvation.

- But right now this world we live in is in the grip of evil (1 John 5:19). The Bible, God's Word, explains that *The god of this age (the devil) has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.'* (2 Corinthians 4:4)

There is a war going on against the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The evil one is determined to do all he can do to keep people from hearing and believing the good news of salvation.

- But if you sincerely confess to God in prayer that you are trapped in sin and you are ready to be rescued, and if you receive this gospel and place your trust sincerely in Jesus Christ, then you are saved—your sins are forgiven; you are spiritually reborn into new life.

You receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ your Savior. This means that when God looks at you, he sees you as completely free of the pollution and guilt of sin.

You become a beloved child of God, and nothing will ever be able to separate you from his love.

- That is the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

But proud people hate it. It calls on them to admit that they are sinners who need Christ to save them.

- The gospel of Jesus Christ is so powerful, that nothing in this world is strong enough to keep it from doing its intended work.

No hardship or opposition can stifle the gospel. Isn't this what Paul wrote in the text I read?

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

Paul was in an imperial prison awaiting trial for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. And he had already been there for at least two full years.

- The Christians in Philippi, Macedonia had become Paul's partners in his work as a traveling preacher of the gospel (1:4).

I suppose Paul could have written, *'Please get all the believers to pray urgently that God will deliver me from this horrible place as quickly as possible.'*

But instead we see in v. 12 that Paul wrote: *'Don't worry about me. Exciting things are happening here. My setback is actually an advance for the gospel.'*

Paul had opportunities that would never have come to him any other way.

1:13 *As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.*

1:14 *Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*

Paul's imprisonment made people interested in Christ—especially the guards.

I imagine an exchange something like this between the guards and Paul: *'You mean you didn't incite a rebellion against the Empire? You didn't even denounce Caesar? Then why were you arrested and imprisoned here?*

Paul responds, *It's because of what I said about Jesus Christ.*

And who is Jesus Christ, and what did you say about him?

What an opportunity! Paul's eyes light up, he smiles real big and asks: *'Do you have some time? I'd love to tell you.'*

The guard says: *'I've got you for six hours. Is that enough?'*

Those praetorian guards changed shifts four times a day. Paul had a chance to give the gospel of Christ to at least these four shifts of guards every day.

- Can you imagine what it was like to be assigned guard duty to the Apostle Paul?

Paul was a breath of fresh air in the prison. Paul probably asked the guards about their families and prayed for them every day.

As the apostle Paul explained the good news of Jesus Christ to those proud Praetorian guardsmen, something stirred in their souls. That's the power of the gospel.

- Was Paul some kind of a spiritual super-hero with powers the rest of us Christians don't have?

Not at all! He also struggled; but he didn't give up.

'Since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. . . . We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.' (2 Corinthians 4:1, 8-9)

Christians have no basis for expecting an easy life.

An empty ship doesn't ride well in a storm. But a ship that his loaded to capacity rides a storm well. A captain won't take to the high seas with an empty ship. He has to load the hold with ballast for stability.

It's the same with your Christian life. If you don't want anything heavy to bear—just light-hearted living—then when a storm comes, you may be spiritually shipwrecked.

- A Christian with real joy even in adversity has a powerful influence on others.

We see in verse 14 that other Christians were *'encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly'* because of the way Paul responded to his setback.

f you are going through a really tough spot right now, are you willing to ask the Lord to use it to make an eternal difference in the lives of others, as Paul did.

- The powerful gospel of Jesus Christ is not weakened by your difficult circumstances.

II. THE GOSPEL IS NOT COMPROMISED BY IMPURE MOTIVES. (1:15-18)

I wish it were true that all Christians are always loving and without any ulterior motives. But that's not true.

Some Christians are delightful. No matter what their circumstances, if you visit with them you feel that the joy of heaven has kissed your soul.

Then there are others who have lost all joy.

They're as cold as a cast iron commode on the shady side of an iceberg.

Their words can cut like an arctic blast into your soul.

These are Christians. They may know their Bibles well.

But they have no qualms about besmirching the name of a fellow-Christian.

- What did the Apostle Paul think of Christians who shared the true gospel of Jesus Christ, but their motives were impure?

He said it was better to have the gospel preached from rotten motives, than to have no gospel at all.

- This was a real-life issue for Paul.

1:15 *It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.*

1:16 *The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.*

1:17 *The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.*

1:18 *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. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,*

That's shocking! Scandalous! But Paul said, *It doesn't matter. Christ is being preached, and I rejoice.*

- The Apostle Paul had some mean-spirited detractors who were trying to stir up trouble for him.

They spread lies to defame and discredit him while he could not defend himself.

- But others preached from a pure passion for Christ.

They understood that Paul had been commissioned by God to be a defender of the true Christian gospel. (16)

They warmed Paul's heart.

- But what about these other jerks?

They wanted people to receive Christ but to reject Paul.

They preached the gospel of Christ from envy and strife (15) and selfish ambition (17)

- This term, *selfish ambition* in verse 17 has the connotation of campaigning for office.

They played religious politics. They wanted people on their side, instead of on Paul's side.

- So Paul contrasts two motives in preaching here. One is pretense or pretext: *prophasei* (18). The other is love and truth—this means with pure, true motives (16, 18).

Here's a question you may never have considered before: Who are more dangerous—Christians who seem to love everybody and want all Christians to get along, but they distort or dilute the gospel, or Christians who hold to the true gospel, but they are cold and unkind toward their fellow Christians?

It's not a nice question. But Paul wouldn't hesitate: *'Give me the guys with the bad attitudes who hold to the truth of the gospel—any day!'*

That doesn't play well today. Lots of Christians value being nice and feeling good—maybe more than holding to the truth.

- Thanks to God's amazing grace, even when Christians' motives are skewed and wonky, lives are still being transformed by faith in Jesus Christ.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is infinitely more powerful than any impure motives. That's because the gospel is the power of God.

Francisco Pitty was a man from Panama whom David Howard met in Costa Rica. He tells the story in his book, *What Makes a Missionary*. Francisco told how he became a Christian. He said, *'I came to Jesus Christ in a tavern. I was the tavern keeper.'*

One night when Francisco was serving drinks, a drunk man climbed up on a table and began to preach the gospel in a mocking sort of way. He must have had a Christian background, because he knew the Bible. He was quoting the Bible and preaching the gospel in a mocking way. His friends were clapping and egging him on.

Francisco said, *'The word of God was powerful that night, even though it was preached by a drunken man in my tavern. The Word of God got through to my heart and I repented of my sins and put my trust in Jesus Christ as my Savior.'*

When David Howard met him, Francisco had just arrived at the seminary in Costa Rica to prepare for pastoral ministry.

Let us be certain that our Christian faith does not rest on the character of other Christians. Will your faith in Jesus Christ be shattered if a Christian you respected fails you?

Christians will let you down and disappoint you. The gospel of Jesus Christ will never let you down or disappoint you. You must stand on the truth that is inherent in the gospel.

<u>1:18</u> *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. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,*

Paul doesn't endorse or condone envy and selfish ambition. He deplores it.

Paul is adamant that those who qualify to serve as leaders/overseers in a church must be godly in character. (see 2:1-5; 4:8.)

But here Paul just hands over to God these spiteful Christians. It's God's business. Paul just rejoices that Christ is being preached.

- Frankly, I would never have come to Paul's position. I would feel that I was giving tacit approval to a vice.

I would say: *If you can't walk the walk, then don't talk the talk.*

I stand corrected by the word of God.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is so powerful, it is not diluted or compromised by impure motives. That's a fact.

If you're going through a challenging time right now, will you ask our Lord to turn it into an opportunity for the powerful gospel to make an impact on your family, among your friends or colleagues?

Throughout the centuries God used hardships to open doors for people to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

Have you been hurt by some other Christian who said things about you that aren't true and besmirched your character? Are you willing to let God handle if, and pray that the situation doesn't discredit the good news of Jesus Christ?

Have you received this gospel and confessed your sin and placed your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior?

Have you felt something stirring in your soul today, perhaps the way the Praetorian guards were stirred by the gospel as Paul spoke to them?

Remember, the powerful gospel of Jesus Christ is the driving force of Crossroads Church. That's what it has been, and shall continue to be.