

Philippians 1:12-18

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 November 2024

Preacher: Robin Silson

[0 : 00] In our house, we love watching Attenborough. Everybody loves Attenborough, don't they? We were watching the other week an episode on what happens when a forest fire takes place.

We've seen forest fires on the news, probably at this time of the year. We see it in Australia, these countries, where it's a real danger. You see forest fires, it obliterates everything and there's nothing left.

Total devastation. And yet, in the middle of that, when we were watching one of these, I think it was planet Earth, something remarkable was happening. Something remarkable.

When the whole land is suffering, when everything was burnt to a cinder, there's an amazing plant. You might have heard it, you might have seen it. The amazing plant called the fire poppy.

The fire poppy grows in grassland areas, but it will only germinate, it will only germinate by when smoke from a forest fire hits the seed.

[1 : 08] It will only germinate. These plants, the seeds, they go for years without flowering. They rest underneath the soil, underneath the areas where they are.

Unbeknownst to everyone that they're there, they're just waiting for the perfect moment to grow. When everything else is dead. When everything else is scorched and burnt.

And it looks like nothing can grow. That is when the fire poppy flowers. In the middle of the land, suffering, devastation. In the middle of that, there is beauty that is unearthed.

Lots of death and destruction. Yet, we see in the fire poppy, new life. It's peculiar, it's unexpected. The fire poppy grows, not despite the suffering and devastation, but because of it. What we see in the beauty of the fire poppy, I want to suggest tonight that that's what we see in how the church grows.

[2 : 13] That's what I want to suggest. That the church, that the advance of the gospel is just like that fire poppy. That what we see in when the gospel advances, that it happens when the church grows, not despite suffering, but because of it.

That's what Paul, we see, is wanting to tell the Philippian church. You must remember that Paul writes this letter from prison. But the gospel, the good news of Jesus, even though he's in prison, is growing and the church is advancing.

You look with me from verse 12. I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

The fact that he's in prison suffering. And what I want us to see is three areas where we see the effect that suffering has.

Things that would not happen if it wasn't for Paul in prison. That would not happen if it wasn't for Paul in prison. Three things that I want us to see. We see that suffering, it makes gospel witness happen.

[3 : 30] Suffering causes gospel confidence to increase. And that suffering causes gospel joy to abound. Gospel witness, gospel confidence and gospel joy.

Firstly, that suffering causes gospel witness to happen. We know what a witness is, don't we? If you're in court and called to a witness box, it means you are under oath to give a true account to what happened as you saw it.

And you witness to whoever is in the room. You could actually say the same thing about any time you tell somebody about something you've seen or heard. When you tell a story about your holiday. When you tell of that funny time where you fell off the banana boat. You give an account of what you got up to. What you saw and what you heard is what you witnessed.

In prison, Paul witnesses. He speaks about what he's seen and what he's heard about Jesus Christ. What he's seen and what he's heard to people that he would never normally meet.

[4 : 41] Paul is able to witness of the good news of Jesus in a way that is only possible because of his suffering. He doesn't witness. It's not in spite of his suffering.

It's not that he's making the best of a bad situation. But rather, the witnessing of the good news of Jesus happens to a particular group of people because of the suffering.

Look with me. In verse 13. In verse 13. So that. It advanced the gospel. End of verse 12. It has really served to advance the gospel. Verse 13. So that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest of that my imprisonment is for Christ.

Christ. The prison guards watching Paul know that he's in prison because of the good news of Jesus. The people in chains alongside him. Therefore, all sorts of real criminality.

You can bet your life, can't you, that Paul would have been talking to the thieves, the murderers, about the offer of forgiveness. And who knows else who was in there.

[5 : 47] The people perhaps in Rome, the outsides of Rome, who knew he'd been put there. This man is in prison for Jesus Christ. This man, Jesus, must really matter to him.

For him to go to that lengths for him. His message must be worth hearing if this man will go in chains for him. His chains advance the gospel because he's able to witness to the good news of Jesus that can only happen because he's there.

And actually, we heard it earlier. We heard it read earlier. This is not the first time it's happened for Paul either. Because he's writing to the Philippian church from Rome.

You remember we heard it read in Acts 16. Paul's in Acts 16. Paul's in prison with Silas. They're singing and they're praying. The earthquake happens. The jailer becomes a Christian.

Him and his family are all baptized. You think the jailer would very likely, most likely, have been receiving this letter? Isn't that amazing?

[6 : 56] The jailer who has been converted because of Paul being in prison, that wouldn't have happened if he wasn't there, is receiving this letter about him in prison again? He would know himself that without Paul going to prison, he wouldn't be a member of the church.

Ministers and Christians in some parts of the world go to prison all the time, don't they? We hear about that in Iran, in North Korea. And maybe when we hear those stories, we read them.

It is terrible. We moan with the fact that they aren't allowed to worship in the same ways that we do. But we could be tempted to think, perhaps we do, to see that as a setback for the church in those areas.

But here what we see is that it's not a setback. Because the ministry of Jesus thrives in prison. It's such a different way of looking at difficulty, perhaps, even, that we might even encounter in our own life.

You see, the living God, the living God, Jesus Christ, is able to witness and does witness to different people in unique ways. It's not despite suffering, but because of it.

[8 : 16] Maybe even because of the suffering that you and I go through. You think it's... I mean, it's still relatively recent that we went through COVID, isn't it? It's still relatively recent.

But I don't know, at the time, were we not tempted to think that because we couldn't meet people face to face or go to church in the same way that people wouldn't hear about him?

Our saviour. But in fact, people started to follow Jesus, not despite COVID, but because it happened. They started to look for answers. They started to look for the existence of God because the world wasn't making sense anymore.

It was because of the suffering that people started to follow Christ and who think about who Jesus is. What about personal difficulty? When that happens, I mean real personal difficulty.

Grief, loss, hardship, illness. And as hard as that may be, and look, I don't want to discount that it's hard in any way.

[9 : 18] I don't want you to... Hear me rightly. It's not that I'm making light of those things in any way. It's hard and we shouldn't want it and we pray for it to go away. Of course we do. But what it does mean is in the face of those things that God works, not despite the fact that they're happening, but because it's happening.

He witnesses to others in ways that we don't even know that we're doing. We don't even know this is happening sometimes because, you know, when we grieve, we grieve not as others do, but as those who have hope.

That's different, the way the world grieves. And people notice. When we struggle, when we go in through struggles as a believing community, we rally around one another, pray for one another,

provide support, even maybe provide meals.

That's different. It witnesses. And it's happening because of the suffering. We find strength from the Holy Spirit that God supplies, which can't be explained. And it witnesses of the good news of Jesus, that God works, not despite our difficulties, but because of them, in and through them.

That's the first thing. The suffering gives gospel witness. Second thing is that it gives gospel confidence. So we've talked about the suffering advances the gospel in one way.

[10:44] The second way that it advances the gospel, that it thrives, is that the believers, the believers that he's writing to, or the believers in Rome, we read, they grow in gospel confidence.

Confidence in the good news of Jesus. Look with me in verse 14. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Is that what you would normally expect? Normally, I think, I take this as pretty normal, that if someone is in prison, if someone's, if you then want, you know, think that you're going to go do the same thing that got the person into prison in the first place, you would, you might try distance yourself from that.

Or at least distance yourself from the person. But here, what we see that in the church, the opposite happens. The Christians in Rome, where Paul is in prison, are confident, again, not in spite of his chains, but because of them.

The imprisonment encourages them to do more for Jesus, to speak more boldly, without fear. A few years ago, I was given the opportunity to spend a few days, I can't remember what it was.

[12:10] It was a few days with a pastor from Syria. It was drawing all the trouble, about maybe 10 years ago, it was drawing all the trouble with ISIS, when that was at its height.

He was flown over in secret, and he shared with us how it had been. He showed us pictures of his church. He told us stories about how people from his church had been killed, some of them walking to church.

And yet, the congregation still came out every single Sunday to the same place to worship. And any suffering or hesitancy that we might feel, or that I might feel, it kind of put in a little bit of a different perspective.

Any fears that maybe I did, that lack of confidence, or things that we feel about being up front about following Jesus. You know why that happens?

Well, I'll tell you why it happened to me. Because you think, well, if he can do that in the middle of a war zone, fearing his life, and his congregation, going to church, knowing that taking the same route, somebody was killed only the week before.

[13:20] If they can do that, then what is stopping me? You think of the war zone. You remember, we've seen the pictures of what happened in World War I.

You remember when the men went over the top, they went over the top and they ran across no man's land. They went out as brothers together. They didn't leave it, did they, to the man who went over and just sort of watch him on his own, like, run with no one else with him.

Get blasted to pieces. They were right with him. Side by side. For the gospel, for Jesus. It was the first man going over that led the rest.

But when he goes over, he gives the whole troop confidence to go again. Paul had that effect on the Roman church. If Paul can go to prison for Jesus, then what's stopping us out here?

And if the Holy Spirit can sustain Paul, then he can surely give every need we have. There's a strange empowerment that comes on the church that almost says, we're not going to take this lying down.

[14:43] It reminds us, doesn't it, that living as a follower of Jesus is a battle, a real battle. It's a war zone. But we're not going to take it lying down. We're not just going to leave people and let them figure out what eternal life is out for themselves.

Lost, wandering with no hope. We're not just going to do that. We're going to show compassion and kindness. We're going to show how Jesus has changed us.

We're going to let people know that there is a saviour out there who wants them. Who is hungry for them to follow him. Who has that compassion, that gut-wrenching compassion.

That they have a future and a hope if they would turn to Christ. That he is the hope we all need for our past, for our present, for our future.

That everyone needs to have a relationship with this man. We're in the trenches together. And we're going to stand and be counted for the sake of Jesus.

[15:47] Paul's in prison and we're right there with you, brother. We're right there with you. That's the mindset of a follower of Jesus. So we've seen gospel witness.

We've seen gospel confidence. Thirdly, gospel joy. Gospel joy abounds. The final way that Paul's chains, his suffering advances the gospel.

Because of the suffering, not despite it. Is that he becomes surprisingly joyful. You do not expect in these last few verses from 15 to 18.

You do not expect that what Paul says is that his response is going to be joy. Paul tells the Philippian church. He's writing to them. He tells them what's been going on in Rome.

In the church. He says there's two groups of people who are preaching and telling others about Jesus. But these two groups have different motives. On the one hand, we have the first group that Paul mentions.

[16:49] They're against him. Verse 15. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry. That's who we read. But others from goodwill.

They're telling about Jesus, but they're jealous and envious of Paul. They don't see themselves on the same team as him, but as a rival. Verse 17.

We read a little bit more about them. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition. Not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

They're thinking about themselves. Perhaps they want to be known like Paul is. And so to make matters worse, they want Paul to suffer whilst he's in prison.

They don't see themselves on the same team. The second group, however, could not be any more different, could they? The second group, on the other hand, they preach.

[17:52] They preach Christ, but it's not from selfish motives. They tell others about Jesus. Verse 16. The latter do it out of love.

Knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. They love Paul and know why he's suffering. They have good intentions. Now, I don't know what you make of Paul's response to these two groups.

You can imagine how you'd feel, can't you? Maybe, how would you react if you were Paul? This group, whoever they are, are kicking him when he's still down. While saying they follow Jesus themselves.

Would there not be a temptation? Well, I know they would in my heart. Would there not be a temptation, if you were Paul, to kick back? Even just a little bit. Just to get a wee bit of revenge.

To get your own back. Paul's response. I mean, it's wild, isn't it? Look with me. Verse 18. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed.

[18:53] And in that, I rejoice. Peace. Paul's imprisonment. His chains. What they've done is they've given him a clear perspective on what really matters.

He's in chains anyway. And so the most important thing that matters is that Jesus Christ and his good news is announced and proclaimed. He doesn't care who's doing it.

But that it happens. The good news is that Jesus Christ, God the Son, came to earth to live a perfect life. To die the death of a slave in our place.

And be raised to new life so that everyone who would call on his name would be forgiven, redeemed and adopted into the family of God. As long as that's being heard, I don't care.

I don't care. As long as that's being heard. And just knowing that someone is saying that, whoever it is, fills my heart with joy. That's what Paul's saying. He's joyful that Jesus Christ and his good news is being made known, whoever's doing it.

[20:01] Now, unfortunately, if you look at the history of the church, we've seen lots of churches and leaders be a little bit like the first group.

That instead of partnering with together, there's trying to compete with one another. Small churches are jealous of big ones.

Other churches differing, seeing one another as threats. Leaders disagreeing over secondary matters. There's jealousy and looking over your shoulder. And that selfish ambition can creep in, and it has done.

When that happens, it doesn't represent Jesus. Now, in saying that, I'm not saying that we have to agree with everyone on everything.

But in a church that is faithful to the proclamation of the good news of Jesus, we give thanks. Wherever the gospel is proclaimed faithfully, wherever it's...

[21 : 04] Here's the truth of the matter. Wherever the gospel is proclaimed faithfully, Jesus Christ is present. And he loves that church. Now, does Paul want them to mature and stop being vindictive?

Of course he does. But he can leave that in God's hands. Trusting that he'll sort them out in his own time. Paul has the right perspective about what really matters about the number one thing.

The most important thing. If you saw someone starving and you knew they needed food. If you saw someone freezing and you knew they needed warmth and shelter.

If you know of someone who's suffering from illness. Does it matter how the hungry get fed? Does it matter who gives the cold person a blanket? Or who administers the person life-saving treatment?

It doesn't matter at all, does it? What matters is they get what they need. All of us, at one point or another, have been spiritually empty.

[22 : 13] All of us. The only thing that matters, the one thing that has mattered is that somebody told us. The only thing that matters to our dying world is that they hear it.

Because the gospel is the cure, the solution that will fix any soul. That will fix your soul. It's the only thing that will do it. The middle man is not important.

What matters is that it's delivered. Paul doesn't care. It's not his concern. He's full of joy.

Perhaps it's more than joy. Perhaps it's also relief. Yes. People are hearing what they need to hear. And so have joy in the good news of Jesus today.

Because we can rest assured, we know that his good news is being heard everywhere. Throughout the world. The news that we all need to hear. The medicine for spiritual sickness is being dispensed.

[23 : 16] Free of charge. Isn't that good? Isn't that worth rejoicing, singing about? It is good. Suffering, therefore, as we come in for landing.

Suffering advances the gospel. Suffering advances the gospel, not despite suffering does the gospel advance, but because of it. Like the fire poppy.

Peculiar growth. It happens. It happens because of the fire. Because of the suffering. Because of the devastation. That's why the poppy grows. Gospel witness.

Because of suffering in prison. Able to speak to people that you wouldn't normally speak to because of what you're going through. Gospel confidence. If he can do it, so can I.

And with him, we're right there with you, Paul. We're right there with you, pastor in Syria. Going through awful troubles. We're not going to take this lying down.

[24 : 21] And gospel joy, because the gospel is being heard. The news that saves. What better joy is there to know that that is being heard. And Jesus works where his good news is proclaimed.

Take stock. We can take stock, can't we, in the things in our life. And take great joy in what God is doing. Suffering is hard.

Suffering is hard. And I don't want to minimize it in any way. And we pray for it to go. But there is a subtlety or a degree of confidence that we can get.

Maybe afterwards we can notice it more as we look back. How God will use that. Let me pray. Let me pray. Living God.

We love you. And we love the good news. We thank you so much that you've rescued us. That we were lost.

[25 : 38] We were in darkness. We were in a pit. And you reached out and grabbed us. Somebody. Witness to us. And so I thank you that for what we hear of Paul's testimony here.

That despite being in prison. Not despite being in prison. But because he was in prison. The gospel advanced. And people heard about you. Became Christians. Became followers of you.

Because of. Because of your suffering. That people were emboldened to share the good news.

Because you were in chains. And that you.

We rejoice wherever the gospel is heard. And so I pray that you would use us. I pray that you'd be with us. With this church. With the church throughout Scotland.

That you'd give us great confidence in you. And what you're doing in our lives. Help us we pray. Help. I just want to pray for those who are suffering.

[26 : 34] And we pray. We can still pray Lord. That you would take away their. People's affliction. We know that it is hard. That there's many things that are hard. In life.

We pray. For those in other countries. Where. They don't have the freedom of the gospel. We pray that you'd give them faith. To keep going. We pray that you'd strengthen them. And comfort them. When. Following Jesus. Is. Not easy. Whether there is a threat to life. And we pray that. In the midst of all this. That you would use it. To bring more people to Christ. To grow. Your church. We ask for this. And we pray for our. Our own hearts. That as we. Meditate on these things. That as we go out from here. That we would be trusting in you. For our week ahead. That this. What we. That your word. Would resonate with us. In a deep way. And that we'd be changed. [27 : 28] To live as your. People. We ask for this. In the name of Christ. Amen. Amen. Thank you. You. Wow, that you. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Goodbye.