

In AD 197, Tertullian said that “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” In 2012, Christian rapper Andy Mineo paraphrased Tertullian by saying, “We ain’t scared o’ ya, What they gonna do? What, murder us? What murder does is send a surge of us to go put churches up.” You try to murder us, we put more churches up. The history of Christianity in some ways is the history of the enemy trying to stamp out Christianity (the seed of the Serpent trying to eat the seed of the Woman), but the church remains steadfast because Christ promised that he would build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. Listen to the 19th C hymn, the Church’s One Foundation: “The Church shall never perish. Her dear Lord to defend, to guide, sustain, and cherish, is with her to the end. Tho’ there be those that hate her and strive to see her fail, against both foe and traitor she ever shall prevail.” This morning we’ll see how God doesn’t merely overcome opposition; in fact He uses it to further his own ends: **Phil 1:12-18** (921) – “This is the Word.”

I. Persecution doesn’t prevent the promotion of the Gospel – 12-13 – Paul wants this supporting church to know that all is well. I’m fine. Everything is fine. What has happened to me has actually helped not hindered. One would think that the imprisonment of the Apostle would hinder the mission, right? How can churches be planted? How can the mission move forward? But because we serve a sovereign God, Paul’s imprisonment has caused gospel advance, not retreat. It is going forward. That is what it does.

This gospel goes forward and grows. It bears fruit. I love how Colossians puts it. **1:5-6**. Paul doesn’t even name the people who brought the message to Colossae because at the end of the day, it doesn’t matter. Christianity is founded upon one man and a message about that man, not the men who spread that message. It comes to new places, it bears fruit, it multiplies.

Even when leaders get locked up. Here we have a traveling Apostle who can no longer travel. This is like a chef with no taste buds or a concert pianist having her hands tied behind her back.¹ He can no longer be on mission but God can – and God does. The gospel spreads. / What is the gospel? 4 hooks.

So, Paul’s locked up. In chains. He would have been chained to a roman prison guard. The imperial guard refers to the elite Roman soldiers who served under the emperor. Typically, a guard would be there for four-hour shifts. No telling how many guards were stuck with Paul for four hours. Can you imagine? Its like the small talk on a plane. “Where you headed? What do you do? I am a Baptist pastor. The old school kind. You ready?” Can you imagine being chained to the Apostle Paul for four hours. The dude who wrote Romans!

And, just imagine. Remember, this letter was first read to the church at Philippi. Remember how this church got started? Paul was in prison in Philippi. Acts 16. The Philippian jailer was converted when Paul was locked up with him. You know he and his family were smiling ear to ear. / Paul told everyone. The last four chapters of Acts are about just that. He was constantly gossiping the gospel.

Imprisonment of the Apostle doesn’t slow gospel promotion one bit – it speeds it up. Historically, God has used persecution to grow the church. Today is the international day of prayer for the persecuted church: According to the World Watch List, last year, in 2022, 5,621 Christians were killed, over 2,100 churches were attacked, and more than 4,500 Christians were detained for their faith. God doesn’t merely overcome opposition; in fact He uses it to further his own ends. Acts 14:22 says that the Apostles strengthened “the disciples by encouraging them to continue in the faith and by telling them, ‘It is necessary to pass through many troubles on our way into the kingdom of God.’ Jesus said, “You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world” (John 16:33). Being in Christ doesn’t necessarily keep you from

¹ Wright, *Pau for Everyone: The Prison Letters*, 89.

being in chains.² “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” When non-Christians observe how Christians suffer, they are compelled to know more about the God we serve. They will ask about our hope, as 1 Pet 3:14-15 “But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be disturbed, but honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”

Like the missionary in India who walked from village to village to share the gospel but was rejected again and again. One day after yet another day of rejection, he was discouraged and exhausted so he went to the edge of the village, and lay down under a tree to get some rest. When he awoke the whole town was gathered around to hear him. They had come to check him out, and when they saw his blistered and bloody feet they concluded that he must be a holy man and he must have something to say.³

Suffering doesn’t stop the message. In fact, we see the influence of the gospel waning in places like N. America where it is easy to be a Christian but booming in other places in the world. Last Sunday, there were more Christians in church in China than there were in all of Europe. The church in China is looking to be 300 million strong by 2030. The Christian faith has grown from 11.4 million in East Asia just 50 years ago to 171.1 million today.

Flip over to **Acts 7:51-8:4**. Persecution causes the gospel to scatter. God doesn’t merely overcome opposition; in fact He uses it to further his own ends. / A few weeks ago on a Sunday night, I shared about John Bunyan who wrote *PP*. Over 200 languages. Edified doubtless millions of Christians. He never would have written it had he not been imprisoned for 12 years.

Just zoom out and notice that Paul is in jail. What would we be writing about? Ima be honest, I’d probably be either complaining or scheming about how to get out. Paul is rejoicing in the promotion of the gospel. Here is how one commentator put it, “This verse reminds us of the necessity of evaluating all of one’s circumstances in light of the progress of the gospel. Am I thinking through my difficulties, my suffering, my prosperity, and my opportunities as the means by which God is advancing the reach of the gospel? Or have I fallen into the easy trap of thinking that God’s blessings in my life are an end in and of themselves rather than a means to advancing His gospel?”⁴ Paul’s faithful endurance encourages us to faithfully endure. His example fuels our faithfulness.

II. Faithful Endurance Encourages Others to Faithfully Endure – 14 – Again, one would think that the imprisonment of the Apostle Paul would cause a lack in confidence not a boost in confidence among believers! “We better back off or we may end up like Paul.” No, they became confident because of Paul’s imprisonment and are now much more bold to speak the word. And they do so without fear. Confident, much more bold, no fear. This led to bold and explosive witness.

How? How does his imprisonment produce confidence? Well, first notice that their confident *in the Lord*. Their confidence is not in themselves but in their God. But second, when we see Christians risk it all for Christ it emboldens us. Their example is a reminder to us that He is worth it. That’s why Foxe’s Book of Martyrs has been so influential since it was published. If you are not familiar with it, it is story after story of those who gave their lives for Christ. Let me mention a few examples:

² Fowl, 39.

³ Recounted in John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 94-95.

⁴ Harmon, *Philippians*, 114.

Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna in the 2nd C. Rome would call Christians atheists because they refused to worship the Roman gods. The Roman proconsul gave him one last chance to swear by Caesar and say “Away with the atheists” talking about fellow Christians and instead he looked at the crowds and said “Away with the atheists!” He was 86 years old. When he was put on trial and asked to swear allegiance to Caesar rather than Jesus: “Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never did me any wrong: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior.”⁵ Doesn’t this old man embolden you?

Then there are the young Christian Moms, Perpetua and Felicity in 203. Godly women. Felicity was gored by a bull. When the bull tossed Perpetua around in the air, her hair became undone. She asked to be allowed to put her hair back up because undone hair was a sign of mourning, but this was a day for triumph and joy. Stop this execution, I need to fix my hair. Isn’t that encouraging – meaning give you courage.

John Chrysostom was a bishop in Constantinople in the 4th C. Exiled from his home for speaking truth to power. One time he was in trouble with the empress and she threatened to banish him. Here was his reply: “You cannot banish me, for this world is my Father’s house.” When threatened with death, he responded, “No, you cannot, for my life is hid with Christ in God.” The empress threatened to take away his treasures and John said, “No, you cannot, for my treasure is in heaven and my heart is there.” Then the empress said she’d drive him away from all his relationships and he said, “No, you cannot, for I have a friend in heaven from whom you cannot separate me. I defy you, for there is nothing you can do to harm me.”

Or the Englishmen Ridley and Latimer, arrested by the Catholic Church when Bloody Mary Tudor reigned. They refused to recant of their Reformation teachings so would be sentenced to be burned at the stake. You can stand where it happened in Oxford today. When the executioners lit the wood at Ridley’s feet, Latimer turned to him and said, “Be of good comfort, Dr. Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God’s grace in England, as I trust never shall be put out.” Doesn’t hearing of this faithful suffering cause you to desire to play the man?

Jim Elliott and his five friends who were speared to death by a Waodani tribe in 1956. They had a gun in the plane they could have used. “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” Then his wife Elizabeth goes back to serve the very tribe that took her husband’s life and many became Christians. / “Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still; His kingdom is forever.”

We are not only encouraged, we are rebuked. Because Christians down through the ages and suffered physically and lost their lives for speaking the truth and we avoid it lest someone think we’re weird. D. James Kennedy: most believers around the world fear the raised fist; we Americans fear the raised eyebrow.

III. Petty Preachers Still Proclaim Christ – 15-18 – Not all the boldness has a good motive though. There are two groups of evangelists: some preach out of love but others are preaching Christ from envy and rivalry (Rom 1:29 Gal 5:20-21 1 Tim 6:4). This word for envy refers to a state of ill-will toward someone because of some real or presumed advantage experienced by such a person. They are jealous of Paul or of the church. We are not sure why, but someone is doing okay and they don’t like it. They rejoice when others weep and weep when others rejoice The word for rivalry refers to conflict resulting from rivalry and discord. Xenophon said, “The envious are those annoyed only at their friends’ successes.”

⁵ Bird, 49.

This can happen in the church – **4:2**. Members can envy the lives of others, especially with social media. Fakebook, where we post our scoreboards but only the Dubs. We present our best sides and hide reality. As a pastor, I cannot tell you how many times I am counseling a couple that are miserable but look like a power couple on Fakebook. Don't believe it. And certainly don't envy it. James 3:14-18: "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

Paul says some also preach Christ from selfish ambition. This refers to looking out for one's own interests first and foremost. It is the attitude and posture that evaluates every situation in terms of how it benefits me. Me-firstism. They are preaching Christ for their own benefit, for self-regard, for self-interest, for self-promotion. They are not really in it for Jesus, but for themselves. Sadly, this is rampant today, most notably in the Prosperity Gospel movement. They are in the ministry to pad their own pockets. Shameful. But even in Baptist circles, there is a ladder of "success," moving from smaller church to larger church to even larger church. But notice how Paul defines success: gospel advancement! He's in jail, talk about downward mobility. / We are to crucify selfish ambition. This little letter is filled with better examples for us: Christ **2:4-7**, Timothy – **2:19-21**, Epaphroditus later in Ch. 2.

Paul says this group is not sincere but are thinking to afflict him in his imprisonment. They want to stir up trouble for Paul. Why? Ultimately Satan. He hates the Christ, he hates the gospel, therefore he hates gospel ministers and he'll use anyone and anything to get them off track. You know what one of my ministry life verses is? 2 Tim 4:16-18. One would think that Paul would finish well. They'd give him a plaque and call him Pastor Emeritus. Rather, we read this: "At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

So, the bad group does ministry with wrong motives, but the good group preaches Christ from love, and good will, and with sincerity. Does this mean love for Paul, love for the church, or love for Christ? Yes! They share Christ because they love Christ, his church, and his ministers. 2 Cor 5:14: the love of Christ compels us. They preach Christ out of goodwill, which can be translated as pleasure or delight. Their delight in Christ overflows to ministry to others. They can't help but speak of what they have seen and heard.

But look again verse **18**. We would expect him to say these self-centered people are sinful and selfish so remove them and disregard them. This is actually a surprising verse. Even if preachers have a sinful motive, Paul still rejoices if their message is on point. And that is crucial. They are rightly preaching Christ. Their motive is just off. That's the key. The message is what matters ultimately, not the man. Paul has a category for people who preach a false gospel. We saw that in Gal 1 last week. If you add to justification by faith alone with anything, you are accursed. In 2 Cor 11, Paul speaks of false apostles, deceitful workmen who disguise themselves as servant of righteousness and preach a different gospel and another Jesus. The message matters.

So, if bad people get the message right, Paul rejoices still. Paul *rejoices* when Christ is proclaimed, even when he is in jail because of that proclamation. It just reveals where his heart really is. The man was Christ-

consumed (1:21). Paul had recalibrated what the good life was: Christ exalted, not personal comfort and health and wealth. Gospel advance not personal advance. The gospel was of utmost importance. Why was it so important? Because it is the most important news of all of history. Because eternity is at stake. Because without this news, mankind is hopeless, helpless, doomed, and damned. Because Christ walked out of the tomb and was enthroned with all authority at the right hand of God.

The gospel was everything for Paul. Is it for you? What is your ultimate aim in life? Is it to get married. To have a happy marriage? Kids? Well-adjusted kids? To make a lot of money? To be well known? To have a good reputation? To see your grandkids grow up? To retire comfortably.

None of those things are inherently wrong, but church – make sure that these aims do not become so consuming that the ultimate aim is pushed to the periphery or squeezed out entirely. The aim is to see the gospel advance.

Seeing the gospel advanced in the nations, in our neighborhoods, but also in one another. This word here in verse 12 for advance is only used one other time in Phillipians. **1:25**. That word for progress is the same as advance. So we want to see the gospel advance among our neighbors and the nations, but also in us. Gospel advance in our own hearts. And helping others with their gospel advance. Our vision statement is SSBC exists to help move people from wherever they are to where King Jesus wants them: submitting every aspect of their lives to his gracious Lordship. Our mission statement at SSBC: All of Life for Christ. To see the gospel take over every aspect of our lives. Gospel advancement.

“The Church shall never perish. Her dear Lord to defend, to guide, sustain, and cherish, is with her to the end. Tho' there be those that hate her and strive to see her fail, against both foe and traitor she ever shall prevail.” God doesn't merely overcome opposition; He uses it to further his own ends.