



**KING'S
CHURCH**
EDINBURGH

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Total Focus

Philippians 1: 12-26

1. Imprisonment

Talking about his imprisonment: “what has happened to me has really serve to advance the gospel” (verse 12).

This is shorthand for over three years of unjust suffering, which takes up the last quarter of the book of Acts: imprisonment all that time because of false accusations and corruption, now under house arrest in Rome, constantly chained to a member of the praetorian guard: Caesar’s elite force, the toughest, most loyal Roman soldiers. We might think this is awful but Paul sees it differently: the soldier chained to him can’t escape him telling them about Jesus, and that means God can work in some of them, change their hearts through His power, and then they’ll go off and tell others in the most significant place in the world (verse 13)!

What is it about Paul’s way of thinking that enables him to turn what we would see as awful and hopeless situations into brilliant opportunities that lead to many people being blessed? He sees everything through the gospel, which shows us that in the plans of God, even the very worst thing, the crucifixion, can be used for good. This isn’t “every cloud has a silver lining” thinking, this is confidence that God can turn anything to gold. If you believe in a God who raises the dead to life, you can hope for the same pattern in your circumstances.

The gospel also tells Paul that he is a servant, not the master (verse 16), so he doesn’t assess circumstances by how well things are going for him but by how he can use them for His heavenly master. This is difficult for us because many of us are used to

comfort and encouraged to expect it.

2. Opposition

Talking about people who don't like him preaching his message: "I rejoice" (verse 18).

Whilst Paul was imprisoned, people were inspired to preach about Jesus. Some because they loved Paul, others because they hated him (verse 17). This kind of thing makes us very nervous: people who we don't trust trying to preach about Jesus. This also expresses itself in us being so worried about saying everything right and nothing offensive that we never say anything.

Paul isn't casual about people who proclaim a false gospel like "behave better and God will love you" or "God wants you to be rich", but when he hears that people are telling others about Jesus and His message, he's overjoyed! He knows that their motives are bad, and he's not bothered (verse 18). It's a question of focus: if Christ is being preached he doesn't care why, he is totally focused on Christ's reputation. So long as the person says what is right about Christ, that's all that really matters to him.

Paul knows that the gospel is very powerful: its life-changing power can work through anyone. It advances when its best preacher is arrested, it advances when people with bad motives preach it – you can't stop it advancing! But you can miss out on helping it do so. This should protect Christians from the paralysis of perfect preaching performance. When opportunities come, let's take them: you've got live ammunition in your mouth when you talk about Jesus.

3. Death

Considering whether he'll be executed or released soon: "Which I shall choose I cannot tell" (verse 22).

Have you ever met someone as joyful and successful as Paul clearly is here, who considers death to be the more attractive of the two options before him? Again, it's because of what he is focused on, or rather, who he is focused on. His entire philosophy is described in this passage: "For me live is Christ, and to die is gain." (verse 21) Ever since Paul had been knocked to the ground by Jesus on the road to Damascus thirty years before, he had grown to know and love Him more. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, studied the Scriptures, talked with Him in prayer and followed in obedience. All that he saw and heard and experienced and learned made him more

and more in love with Jesus. What he'd known so far would be but a taste, a glimpse, a shadow of the real thing which is promised for all who trust in Jesus when they die (23). In his own metaphor, death is the end of being engaged and the beginning of the fullness of married life. No wonder he was eager for it, and excitedly curious about whether now was the time that consummation would take place. God's wants all who are His think this way, because it's the truth. This is not "Keep calm and carry on" but "Get excited, delighted, and carry on until He takes you to what is better."

Questions

- How did God speak to you on Sunday?
- What did you feel most inspired about?
- Luke spoke about the shape of the gospel (death followed by resurrection) giving us hope for whatever we're going through. What does this look for you at the moment?
- "This isn't 'every cloud has a silver lining' thinking, this is confidence that God can turn anything to gold." – how can we pray this way?
- "You've got live ammunition in your mouth when you talk about Jesus." Really? Why doesn't it always feel like this?
- What can you do to increase your knowledge and love of Jesus such that life after death is becoming increasingly exciting to you?
- What are the challenges of seeing the world upside-down (as it seems to those around us)?
- How can you as a group encourage each other in having this total focus?



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