

## Philippians 1 vv 12-end HT & Zoom 20.9.20

Have you ever noticed that some of the nicest and most inspirational people have been through some of the most horrific experiences? Have you also noticed how, if you have been through a difficult experience God tends to bring you alongside others who are now facing something similar.

If, as I did, you answered yes to either of these questions, that creates a bit of a dilemma. You see, what we have agreed is that sometimes the world is a better place because we have gone through some form of suffering. So when we pray for healing or release – and this doesn't come – it could be that God might not see the problems as negatively as we do when we are in the situation.

I want you to imagine that you have received a special letter – a letter from God addressed especially to you to say what he has given you. Imagine yourself preparing to open the letter and wondering what special blessing might it hold? You open your letter with excitement – what could God possibly have granted you? and what you read is: *29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,*

How would you feel? You may well want to say that this isn't what you signed up for – you became a Christian for the joy and peace and answered prayer – suffering wasn't in the contract. Well actually, it was in the contract -and not even in small print - I counted 44 times in the New Testament that talks about Christians suffering and completing Christ's suffering in the world. This is what Paul says applies to him and also applied to the Christians in Philippi.

I expect that it also applies to many of us – Life has not gone as we had planned – health, money, relationships – whatever - feel like the booby prize not some great award. Despite all our prayers the situation hasn't improved – where is God in it all? So how is it that Paul is able to view suffering so positively? Let's look at what Paul wrote to the Philippians and see what insights he gives.

Paul was writing from prison and it was no secret that death may be the result - He starts off by recognizing that his friends in Philippi were wondering how God had let Paul down so he begins by stating that they should know that what has happened to him has really served to advance the gospel. What follows is **the problem, the purpose, and the encouragement**

### **Problem**

Paul's problems arise from 2 groups of people

Those outside the church

Those inside the church.

### **Those outside the church**

Paul was under house arrest because his preaching of the gospel had upset the authorities– and you might have thought that this was the end of his mission – but surprisingly he proclaims that

## Philippians 1 vv 12-end HT & Zoom 20.9.20

what has happened to him has served to aid the gospel: House arrest meant that he would have rented the house– but would spend his time permanently chained to a guard. The guards would be constantly changed – so a whole succession of Roman soldiers ended up being chained to him for periods of time. Now let me ask you, from what you know of Paul – what sort of conversations do you think Paul had with his guards? You can be fairly sure that not too much time would elapse before he told the guard about the saving work of Jesus. As the Philippians heard about Paul’s captivity, at least one of the listeners would have been smiling – he knew what happened when Paul was put in jail – he had been the jailer in Philippi when Paul had been imprisoned there and he will have remembered how they worshipped God and then were released by an earthquake at midnight. He knew that putting Paul in jail was not the way to keep the gospel quiet!

Even in the worst of situations Paul continued to trust God and share his experience of his love.

The guards holding Paul were no fools – they knew how to read people – and they knew that they had never encountered anything like the power of Christ at work in and through him.

So for us the key to finding God’s positive in our apparently negative situations is to make an active decision that we will continue to trust and praise God in all circumstances and to ask: “What opportunities has God given me that I wouldn’t have had were it not for this circumstance? – who has this situation brought me into contact with that I can share the love of Jesus with?”

### Those inside the church

Some people preached the gospel because they loved Paul, loved Jesus, and loved the lost. Others preached partly, at least, out of opportunity for promotion of themselves. Paul’s imprisonment gave them opportunity - possibly by criticising Paul, possibly because he wasn’t around to either be compared to or to criticise their message.

Paul’s attitude is that whatever their motive, essentially Christ is being proclaimed. Sometimes we might feel critical of other churches who don’t do things the way we do. – Paul would encourage us to rejoice that the diversity in God’s church means that a wider range of people are reached.

### The Purpose

But what lay behind Paul’s ability to be so positive in situations that could so easily destroy our hope and confidence?

The answer lies in his **source of strength** and sense of **purpose**

**1. source of strength:** Paul’s letters are never some sort of self help guide – teaching us to tap into hidden strengths which he had and we feel we haven’t. Paul was taken so far beyond his own strength that he knew he was completely dependent upon the prayers of his brothers and sisters and the empowering from the Holy Spirit that followed. Perhaps the problem for many of us is that we live so much of our lives within our own capabilities that we never learn to really trust in Jesus – then when the suffering comes we are unprepared and see only our weakness and not God’s strength.

## Philippians 1 vv 12-end HT & Zoom 20.9.20

His **sense of purpose** came from his sense of what really mattered. There really was nothing more important for Paul than knowing that he and others were going to be with Christ. For him to live was Christ – because he could continue the mission which Jesus had given him of being an apostle to the gentiles – but to die was gain because his work would be finished and he could go to be with his Lord.

### **The Encouragement**

The last paragraph could be summarised in 4 words: “Right, over to you.”

We’ve seen how Paul did it – now it is our turn and when we get the letter from God that says: <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,

may we be granted the strength from God to continue to praise him and to use the opportunity to proclaim Jesus with the people he puts us in contact with!