

Week 3: Gospel Courage

Chapter 1:19-30

So far... we've seen Paul's affection for the Philippian church, his gratitude for their Gospel partnership, and his desire for them to grow in Gospel-centred love. He then goes on to re-assures them that the suffering he is experiencing hasn't hindered the Gospel, but rather served to further the desire of Paul's heart - that Christ would be preached.

Gospel Perspective

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (1:21)

As far as statements of worldview go, there can't be many more powerful than this one. Paul is in the very real situation of not knowing whether he is going to live or die - without exaggeration any day could potentially be his last as he lives surrounded by Roman guards, deprived of his freedom, and staring down the barrel of a possible execution. As Paul looks ahead he sees two roads - one is life and the other death - and Paul is weighing up the repercussions of the decision that others will make regarding his life.

If you did a straw-poll of peoples attitudes to this conundrum I'm pretty sure the answers would be heavily, if not exclusive weighted towards life - after all, our lives are what we nurture and cherish, and want to fill with the best experiences that we can. However, Paul doesn't go along with the crowd - his answer is the opposite of your average man on the street - as crazy as it may sound, the better option as far as Paul is concerned isn't life, but death.

How does Paul get to such a radical position? He simply gets there by becoming absolutely convinced of the truth of the Gospel - the great truth of Heaven, eternal life, and the hope waiting for all

those who have trusted in Jesus. All Paul is doing is exactly what millions of people do in work everyday - they stare out of their office windows and they think to themselves 'if I had the choice right now to stay here or go home, I know exactly what I'd do'. It's a no-brainer. Why? Because the majority of people are convinced that to be at home in peace, comfort and freedom is far better than the boredom, stress and difficulty of the workplace.

When you think about it it's simple - simple, but in no way easy. This attitude grates against every worldly instinct that's inside of us, and we have to fight to make this attitude part of who we are and how we live. However it is worth it - to live by Paul's philosophy here is to make our lives revolve around what really matters, and that which will really last - as he himself says: 'to live is Christ.'

For Discussion:

How can we train ourselves to think and live according to this eternal perspective?

Other Verses for study:

- Romans 8:16-27
- 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10
- Revelation 21:1-8

Gospel Courage

"...it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death." (1:20)

This is one of the big implications of Paul's eternal perspective that he shares here with the Philippian church. As we've already said, Paul literally was in a life or death situation, with his captors no doubt using the threat of execution to try and deter Paul from continuing to preach the Gospel that they hated so much. However it clearly isn't working - Paul tells us that all the palace guard are under no illusion why he's there, and what the message is that he's defending. You see, Paul isn't scared of dying because he knows that what's beyond that final curtain is much better than what is here, so in a strange way he'd almost welcome it.

The truth is, if someone isn't scared to die, there's very little you can do to shut them up, and Paul's Gospel-centred courage is an attitude that we would do really well to imitate. We may face many enemies just like Paul did - not just people, but fears, desires, and temptations that, though they may not try and kill us, will certainly try and stop us speaking the truth of the Gospel. Our goal as Christians is that

Gospel Unity

"...standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel" (1:18)

Again and again in the book of Philippians the idea of unity comes up. Paul urges this young church not just to demonstrate their commitment to Christ in living for eternity, but also their commitment to each other as brothers and sisters, working together in the family of God. It's a huge part of the witness of the Gospel that men and women drawn together from every walk of life, united often by nothing but their faith in Jesus Christ, stand together side by side. In a world where people are forever striving to better each other, and are quite happy to use each other for their own purposes, the church is to be different.

It's an extension of those words that Jesus spoke - He told his disciples that those looking on will know that they are His followers by the love and commitment they have towards each other. The purpose of the Gospel is to show people a better way to live, and a big part of that is the absence of the envy, jealousy and self-centred conflict that takes place in the world.

This idea of unity speaks as well to the fact that the mission of the Gospel isn't something we can do as a

those enemies would have no hold over us at all, because this world has no hold over us. We don't need to make our home in this world, because we belong in another world - the world to come - and so risking that which we possess in this world is really no risk at all, even when it comes to our life itself.

The history books are full of accounts of men and women who lived just as Paul did - Revelation 12:11 sums it up well: "they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die" (NLT). Our challenge though is to apply that same Gospel courage to our own lives, not regularly faced with life or death situations, but daily having the courage to risk those things that could become precious to us in this life for the sake of that which is far more precious - the glory of Jesus displayed in the Gospel.

For Discussion:

What decisions might we have to make in our lives that require Gospel courage? How do we ensure we're ready to make right choices at those times?

Other Verses for study:

- Joshua 1:1-10
- Isaiah 41:8-16
- Matthew 6:19-34

solo exercise - the nature of the Gospel means it just doesn't work that way. To advance the cause of the Gospel, and to demonstrate to a watching world the reality of Gospel-shaped lives, we have to stand united, there just isn't any other choice. Though unity may be a difficult thing to practice, and be full of challenges, we simply can't start talking about a message of love, commitment and sacrifice, and then isolate ourselves from those who belong to the same family.

Paul goes on to tell us what the result of both this Gospel unity and the courage we've already spoken about will be. To those outside, when this kind of character is displayed in God's people it is a 'clear sign' that the salvation they speak about is real. There is simply no other explanation for a group of ordinary human beings living this way than the reality of the power of God at work in their midst.

For Discussion:

What does Gospel unity require of us as God's people, and how can we foster it in our lives?

Other Verses for study:

- Psalm 133:1-3
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
- Ephesians 4:1-16