

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Philippians 1:12–14, 19–30**

**Sermon: “Prisoner For The Gospel”**

Our text this morning is from Philippians. Philippi was the first place that Paul actually stayed after heeding the “Macedonian call.” Philippi is described as *“a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia”* (Acts 16:12). Since there apparently was no Jewish synagogue in Philippi, Paul, Silas, and Timothy went outside the city to the river to pray. This presented an opportunity to speak to the women who were there, including Lydia, who came to faith along with members of her household.

As was so often the case with the Gospel, the acceptance among some led to rejection by others. Yet the Gospel thrived in Philippi. It is the Gospel of the Lord and not of men, not even men as courageous as Paul and his companions. The words of Paul, after his initial greetings, burst forth in an exclamation of joy and thanksgiving. Although Paul is totally dependent upon God, and he reminds them of this in the strongest words.

Paul was in prison as he wrote our text from Philippians, a place we are only fairly likely, not certain, to find ourselves at some point for the sake of our Christian faith. But we ought to start getting ready, because even if it's only our children or grandchildren who actually go to prison for what our country is already labeling hate speech that is, faithful speaking of God's Holy Word, we ourselves certainly do and will suffer for our faith. Philippians was probably the last of Paul's Prison Epistles written during an extended stay in a Roman prison.

If a believer trusts in the promise of Christ Jesus, who suffered all so that his faithful people would receive the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation, he or she will face ridicule and separation from those who in this world reject the truth of this Gospel. The level of suffering may range from mild attitudes that the believer is naive and out of touch with the world of science and technology to severe abuse that may lead to painful physical suffering and even real imprisonment.

How deep the suffering goes will be based on the locale and circumstances of the believer and his or her life experiences in the world and society. But persecution is real . . . and it's going to get worse.

Well, Paul was in prison and with this cheery welcome, he invites us to join him. But not just to join him in prison. To join him in seeing our sufferings as Christians for what they really are. Paul invites us to join him in saying, “my imprisonment is for Christ.”

Paul tells us his imprisonment is for the advancement of the Gospel. Paul clearly is writing to fellow believers—his brothers in Christ faithful pastors and others who are standing strong with him for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He wants all believers to know that his imprisonment has served to advance the Gospel, the saving message of Christ—even to the Roman imperial guard (vs 12–13).

The Gospel, the saving message of Jesus Christ, is the suffering of Jesus to crucifixion and death. It begins in the testing and ridicule of Christ by those who disbelieved: the devil in the wilderness, Pharisees and Sadducees, the self-righteous who judged him.

Then there were the forces of evil in the politics of the Roman Empire: Pontius Pilate, Herod, and the religious elite who accused him of blasphemy and called for his execution. Even his own disciples caused suffering and pain for Jesus when they betrayed, abandoned, and denied him in the last hours of his earthly life.

But this suffering was Christ's glory, his all-loving acts of redeeming us. And the glory is seen in the resurrection, as he broke the bonds of his own imprisonment of the tomb and rose to life, bringing freedom from sin and death to all who trust in him. Paul knows that he is imprisoned for the purpose of proclaiming that glory to those who imprison him: "***My imprisonment is for Christ***" (v 13b).

Paul sees his imprisonment as a call for us to proclaim the Gospel boldly as well. Paul sees his brothers in the ministry standing firm and becoming even stronger in their confession of faith as a result of his imprisonment (v 14). Their example should be an encouragement to all the Philippians to proclaim Christ boldly as Savior and Lord in all circumstances of life, even when it means they may suffer for doing so.

Further, the apostle calls upon the whole community of believers to live out their faith and follow his example in action as well as words as they testify of Christ to the world around them. *“<sup>21</sup>For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup>If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. <sup>27</sup>Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel...”*

And if we, too, proclaim the Gospel, we, too, should be ready to be imprisoned for the sake of Christ. Paul makes clear that God has called all Christians to a life of faith . . . and that it has been “granted” to the believer to suffer for Christ’s sake (v 29). It’s a privilege! This conflict between Christian faith and the world will not cease as long as we live on earth. We’ll have our testing and ridicule as Christ did. Look at the world around us, abortion on demand not for medical reasons like saving the life of the mother but merely because you partied too much and got pregnant. And if a child isn’t aborted then look what society and our schools are doing to them and sadly in many cases against the parents will.

Scripture is very clear on God's gift of marriage; it is between man and woman but our government has made same sex marriage legal and now if as Christians we adhere to God's Word we are spuing hate speech.

Government is progressively (and aggressively) oppressing us, as it did Christ. Even our friends will distance themselves from us, as Jesus' disciples did. Yet the believer need not be frightened by those who would oppose the Gospel (v 28). For it will be their "destruction" that they oppose the will and purpose of the Gospel revealed in Jesus Christ. But in other parts of the world things are even worse.

Paul encourages all believers to understand that they are not alone. We are in this with Paul and all who hold firm to the faith (v 30). Our sufferings are simply our forms of "imprisonment for Christ."

As long as we live in this world, it is to mean what Paul calls "fruitful labor" (v 22) in proclaiming the saving Gospel of Christ. In fact, if we are silent in our witness, especially if we're silent in order to avoid persecution, then we are the ones who must repent, for that is sinful indeed!

But when we repent, there is forgiveness for the sake of Christ's death on the cross. And whenever we suffer the world's hatred, even real imprisonment or death, he gives us hope, for by God's love and grace, as Paul invites us to say with him, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (v 21).

Amen