

How God Advances the Gospel

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[0 : 00] We're going to start at Philippians chapter 1 and verse number 12, and then we're going to work down through verse number 18. Genesis chapter 37 and verse number 13.

Genesis chapter 37 and verse number 15, and verse number 15, How do you think that goes? It goes very poorly, right? It goes very poorly. And so Joseph's brothers, and there are a lot of them, like a whole football team of them, Joseph's brothers hate Joseph. and they hate him so much that they planned to murder him. Do you know what you call that? Premeditated murder. And so they have this plan to murder Joseph and then we don't really know for sure whether out of convenience or out of a guilty conscience or maybe a little of both, they decide, here's a better plan.

Let's sell him to these traveling merchants that are passing by and then we don't have to be responsible for either killing him or leaving him in this deep pit with nothing to eat or drink.

[2 : 32] We'll just sell him and that'll be fine. We'll get money and we don't have to deal with him. And then they deceive Joseph's father and make his life horrible by telling him that his favorite son Joseph has been killed by a wild animal.

Do you remember I told you that his family life was dysfunctional? It's a disaster. Now, Joseph's father thinks he's dead. He's as good as dead, right?

He's been sold to these traveling merchants as a slave. Nobody knows where he is. Nobody cares where he is. You would think this couldn't get any worse for Joseph and then it gets exactly worse. His new master's wife tempts him to sin repeatedly and Joseph refuses. And then his wife brings a false accusation against him that he did the very thing that he had repeatedly refused to do.

Joseph's master is not pleased, throws him into prison where Joseph is forgotten by all but God.

[3 : 45] Years later, well, speaking with his brothers, speaking with those who caused him so much hurt, so much suffering, so much unimaginable pain, Joseph says this.

This is Genesis chapter 50 and verse 20. You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive.

Notice first what Joseph does not say. He does not say, you meant this for evil, but God used it for good. That is true.

God does use evil to accomplish good. We read about that in Romans chapter 8, don't we? All things, good, bad, all things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

But that's not what Joseph says here. Look again. Joseph's statement is even stronger than that. Your motives, Joseph says, were impure, sinful, evil.

[5 : 11] Your motives were bad. You intended to do evil to me, but God meant it. God intended it. God purposed it.

What? Your evil for my good. And to bring about so much good to save other people from death. God doesn't just use evil perpetrated against his people for good. God purposes that the evil done to his people accomplishes good.

In the case of Joseph, God purposed that his brother's evil would lead to the saving of the world, really, at that time, from a famine.

And in the case of Jesus, God purposed to save his people from their sin. Peter says it like this in Acts chapter 2.

[6 : 16] This is verse 23. This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

You had bad intentions for Jesus. You are responsible for the death of Jesus. And yet, this evil that you have done is part of God's plan to what?

To save hopelessly lost sinners from their sin. Since God purposes that the evil done to his people accomplishes good, then we should rejoice when adversity creates gospel opportunity.

Paul is in prison in Rome. Why is he in prison? Why is he in prison? He is in prison for preaching the gospel.

He won't stop preaching the gospel. And he has been locked up there for maybe about four years. And so he writes to the Philippians because he wants to give them an update, a ministry report.

[7 : 37] This portion of the letter is kind of like when we get a letter from our missionary friends.

And it comes in the mail and they tell us the things that are happening, the things that God is doing.

And maybe we get a few pictures or whatever. I think I've even shared a couple of those with some of us on the app. So listen to what he says in verse 12. Now, I want you to know, this is how we know that it's kind of a missionary report.

He's saying some things he wants them to know. Now, I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually advanced the gospel.

What has happened to me? What has happened to Paul? He is in prison. We saw this back up in verse number seven, and he's going to say it three more times in our text.

There's no mistake what it is that has happened to him. He is in prison. Paul can't go to new places to preach the gospel. We expect Paul to report now that his adversity, his inability to move around, has somehow limited his ministry.

[8 : 52] But here's this surprising twist. Paul's imprisonment has actually led to the gospel advancing.

Don't miss this. The gospel is not advancing in spite of adversity. adversity. The gospel is advancing because of adversity.

Adversity is the very means by which God is advancing the gospel. Do you hear the difference there? It's an important difference. Paul is talking like Joseph in Egypt.

He's talking like Peter on the day of Pentecost. What God meant for evil, what you meant for evil, God meant for good.

Paul's suffering then is not merely somehow correlated with the advance of the gospel. Do you see that? The suffering that Paul is experiencing is actually causing the gospel to advance in a way that it wouldn't have advanced if he hadn't been experiencing the suffering.

[10 : 17] Think about a rocket and the fuel that it takes to make a rocket go up into space. Bennett, you know what I'm talking about when I talk about a rocket? Like a space shuttle or a SpaceX rocket?

Ask your dad to show you on YouTube later on. Okay? Adversity is like rocket fuel for the gospel to advance.

This is not how we often think about adversity, is it? Paul wouldn't merely sing the sun will come up tomorrow.

That's a lovely platitude, right? Today's bad. Tomorrow will be better. I wonder if Paul, if you'll forgive the reference, might actually sing something closer to what Garth Brooks sang when he said, I could have missed the pain but I would have had to miss the dance.

It is the pain that he is experiencing that is actually leading to the dance, the enjoyment of life. And Paul is saying something similar.

[11 : 43] This pain, sure, it might have been nice not to be in prison, but this pain, this adversity, this suffering, this hardship, is actually what is allowing ministry to happen.

Wow. Adversity creates gospel opportunity. How is the gospel advancing?

Perhaps we should answer this question first. What is the gospel? The gospel is the good news about Jesus. The good news that God sent into this world a Savior to rescue people from their sin.

How is it that this gospel is advancing? Paul gives us two ways. One, unbelievers who wouldn't normally hear the gospel, they're hearing the gospel.

And number two, preachers who wouldn't normally be preaching the gospel are preaching the gospel. Look at verse 12. Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually advanced the gospel so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is because I am in Christ.

[13 : 10] Most of the brothers have gained confidence in the Lord from my imprisonment and dare even more to speak the word fearlessly. So, here's this first group of people.

Paul talks about them as the whole imperial guard. Amy's version said the praetorium. This is the emperor's bodyguard. These people are not going to come in contact with the gospel. Not unless God works a miracle by putting his guy, Paul, in prison where these guys have to keep an eye on him and are chained up to him so that Paul can give them the gospel. Paul says the whole of them, the emperor's bodyguard, everybody who's supposed to be keeping an eye on the emperor, they're all stuck watching me taking turns guarding me in prison. I keep sharing the gospel with them. They keep hearing the gospel. And did you notice that little phrase? It almost seems like just a little add-on phrase. He says, the whole imperial guard and everyone else.

[14 : 20] There are a whole bunch of people who have heard the gospel who would not have heard the gospel had Paul not been put in prison by God. Praise the Lord. But then there's this second group of people as well.

This group of preachers in verse 14. And they have gained confidence. And he says at the end, they dare even to speak. I think what we're to understand here is that under normal circumstances, they would not be preaching.

Maybe they're too timid. Maybe they feel too afraid. Maybe they don't think they're particularly gifted for the job. And yet they recognize that Paul is locked up in prison, and God in his kindness develops and raises up a whole bunch of other people who can preach the gospel boldly, fearlessly, courageously.

People who wouldn't normally hear are hearing. People who wouldn't normally preach are preaching. Paul says this is how the gospel is advancing. Paul is enthusiastic about both new hearers and new preachers.

What has happened? Adversity has created gospel opportunity. But this is not the end of the missionary report.

[15 : 44] Paul has enemies, and so, so, so sadly, some of his enemies are fellow preachers of the gospel. And they maliciously mean to hurt Paul while he is in prison.

Look at verse number 15. To be sure, some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.

These preach out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. The others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, thinking that they will cause me trouble in my imprisonment.

So there's two now groups of preachers. One group of preachers is preaching out of love and goodwill. They understand Paul's imprisonment is because he refuses to stop preaching the gospel. They get it, that Paul's imprisonment is part of God's plan. they know that Paul is there facing persecution, languishing in prison for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17 : 06] But then there's this other group of preachers and this is sort of troubling, isn't it? There's this other group of preachers and they are preaching out of envy and rivalry and selfish ambition and they have bad intentions.

they are preaching with the intent of making Paul's chains heavier. That's the metaphor that Paul uses at the end of verse number 17.

It's as though they want to make it worse for him while he is in prison. We might say something like to add insult to injury or we might say like to kick him while he is down.

I don't know for sure what these preachers may have sounded like. But perhaps they sound something like this.

Look, Paul is in prison. He is clearly disqualified from the ministry. If God wanted to use him, God would keep him in the game, not have him sitting on the bench.

[18 : 32] Or, you know, Paul's understanding of grace, don't you think that's perhaps just a little too free? gentle?

Have you ever wondered if his Jesus is maybe a little too gentle? His preaching too humble, too gracious, too kind?

Don't you think we need a message that rallies us to a particular cause? we need to stand up and fight. Paul has good news, but I'll tell you, mine is better.

Or, aren't you concerned about being associated with Paul, the prisoner?

he has a bad reputation, you know. I've heard some talk about him. I can teach you.

[19 : 41] You should just follow me instead. These preachers are taking advantage of Paul's imprisonment to grow their own groups and to push their own agendas, and with sinful intent, they add to Paul's pain.

Isn't Paul's humility remarkable? When he describes these two groups of people, wouldn't you like to know a few more details? Wouldn't you like to know some names?

Like, if there was a place to name names, and Paul does name names on occasion, but not here.

How humble, how gracious. He doesn't ask the Philippians to pray for his own protection.

He doesn't ask them to pray that God will intervene and bring their sinful, hurtful behavior to an end.

Paul knows adversity creates gospel opportunity, and so instead of an imprecatory prayer that God smashes their teeth, Paul celebrates.

Look at verse 18. I love this. what does it matter? What does it matter?

[21 : 04] Only that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice.

so what if they ruin my reputation? So what if they make me look bad? So what if they come and steal all the disciples?

Paul doesn't care, so long as they preach the gospel about Jesus. whenever the life and death and resurrection of Jesus is proclaimed as the only hope for helpless sinners, Paul rejoices.

how might the Holy Spirit motivate us to respond to this text?

First, let's pursue a posture of personal insignificance. have you, like Paul, lost influence?

[22 : 25] Have people said hurtful and even untrue things? Has your ministry, from your perspective, been limited? This adversity is not an inconvenient detour from God's plan.

It is God's plan. God purposes that the evil done to his people accomplishes good. Who cares if they gossip?

Who cares if they slander? Who cares if they avoid us? It is not about us. It's about Jesus. He must increase and we must decrease and when that happens, we'll find joy like we sing together sometimes.

Paul models a posture of personal insignificance that is worth pursuing. Second, let's cultivate kingdom convictions.

convictions. Let's cultivate kingdom convictions. Even when Paul's circumstances change and not for the better, he recognizes unexpected gospel opportunities.

[23 : 51] He focuses on the big picture of what God is doing. He is in this, if I can use this illustration,! for the long game. He is in it to see God's kingdom, the kingdom of Jesus advancing until Jesus returns.

So Paul is not concerned so much about what is happening to him right here, right now, in the present, because his eyes are fixed on the big picture, kingdom convictions.

we're experiencing adversity, friends. What new opportunities do we have that we didn't have before?

Who are you with now that maybe you didn't spend time with previously? Have you shared the gospel with them yet? This does not require some kind of a seminary degree.

Start here. Can I tell you what Jesus has done in my life recently? Would you dare ask God for boldness to start a conversation like that this week?

[25 : 09] Let's join Paul and cultivate kingdom convictions. Third, let's outmaneuver insecurity with joy.

Paul has plenty of reasons to feel insecure, doesn't he? He is in prison while others are preaching. His reputation is damaged. His message and his methods are being questioned. He is disadvantaged while others are benefiting, and yet Paul celebrates because the gospel is advancing.

Can we rejoice when others hear the gospel even if they don't hear it here? Can we rejoice when friends choose to worship and serve at another church?

Can we rejoice when God blesses others, and we feel like perhaps we've been disadvantaged and set aside and hindered and limited?

[26 : 31] Insecurity is an insidious adversary, and you cannot stand up to it on your own, but I have good news for you.

The Holy Spirit produces joy. So even when you find yourself in adversity and suffering and hardship and pain, look around for what God is doing.

Thank him for what he's up to, and you will discover fresh reasons for joy and outmaneuver your insecurity.

Rather than insecurity dragging us around, let's outmaneuver it. Let's find so many fresh reasons to be joyful because of all that God is doing.

By the Holy Spirit's power, we must recalibrate our thinking about God and about adversity until with Paul we believe that God purposes that the evil done to his people accomplishes good.

[27 : 54] And when we have done that recalibration, when the Holy Spirit has done that recalibration in our hearts, then we will be able to rejoice when adversity creates gospel opportunity.

I wonder if you would take a few moments and bow your head and let's be before the Lord individually but together and ask the Holy Spirit to do the work that needs to be done in our hearts. perhaps there is a posture of personal insignificance to be pursued.

Maybe there are kingdom convictions to be cultivated. Maybe there is a need for joy so that you are able to outmaneuver your insecurity.

Let's pray and ask the Holy Spirit to do that kind of work in our hearts. Good Father, we love you and we are so grateful to be your children.

[29 : 15] Thank you for making us your people. Thank you for sending the Lord Jesus to the cross to suffer and to die, not for his own sins, but for ours.

would you please forgive us in your great mercy and by the blood of our Savior Jesus for the ways that we have been tempted by sin even this week and have found ourselves disobedient to this particular text, out of step with your gospel and out of step with your spirit.

Thank you for the blood of Jesus, and thank you that we can celebrate there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Would you stir up in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, by the conviction of your word, by the community of brothers and sisters that we're in, would you stir up inside of us fresh faith to believe, a new will where that's necessary to obey, give us joy in honoring you and in preaching the gospel and in seeing adversity as opportunity instead of what might otherwise create insecurity in our hearts.

Father, would you also do the work of granting new life? Some have never trusted in Jesus, forgiveness, and we so want them to know your grace, to experience your forgiveness.

We so want them to participate with us as brothers and sisters. Would you please save sinners today by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the preaching of your word, grant them life and faith so that they respond by repenting and believing this good news about our Savior Jesus.

[31 : 32] We give ourselves to you and ask that you would help us as we continue in this time of worship. Please draw near and encourage our hearts as we take time to celebrate communion together now.

It's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen. Amen. Abend Nab! Abend Nab!