CAPITOL® COMMISSION
Gospel Hope & Spiritual Strength for Government Leaders

The Letter from Prison

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Weekly Bible Study Schedule
Tuesday, January 23, 7:00-7:45 AM
SENATE LOUNGE
All Welcome!
Capitol Commission is NON-PARTISAN and NON-DENOMINATIONAL

Introduction – Paul offers a 30,000-foot overview which shifts to a field-level tangible engagement with people, circumstances, and God. Paul wants to know what is happening with the Philippians; the Philippians want to know what is happening with Paul. They communicated by letter.

1:12-14 – And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear.

Paul's update included that he is in a Roman prison, and yet keeping perspective of the bigger picture. His thoughts were filled with joy about Philippians, his fellow believers in prison, and the Praetorian Guard – think of them as elite special forces in the Italian military.

Did you ever have a friend share with you their challenging circumstances? All you can say is Wow. You might say: "I will pray for you"; "Can I give you a hug?"; "What can I do for you?" Statements such as these were told to Paul. The Philippians put action to their words; they sent Epaphroditus with a message of encouragement and financial assistance. That is what friends do, that is what partners do, that is what those in the community of faith do for each other.

Positive Results from Prison

Noted last week, the Roman prison was quite the dark place environmentally, physically, and spiritually. A dark dungeon in the lowest realms of mistreatment. For Paul, he was tethered to a Roman guard by a long chain clasped to his wrist. Where Paul moved the guard moved. Where the guard shifted Paul shifted. Judgment against Paul is not because of stealing, revolt, subversion against leaders, he did nothing wrong. Sentenced to jail because he proclaimed Jesus is the true King.

> *"And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." Romans 8:28*

From darkness came light. From the attempt to mute Paul and his message came boldness and advancement of the good news of Jesus. Inside the klink inmates bowed to authorities judgment. The tethered chains posited the guard to hear the Gospel and see its transforming power inside the hearts of inmates. Chains facilitated the magnification of Jesus. Jesus followers grew in confidence and were Spirit endowed. I can imagine the prison guard saying: "Something is different about these prisoners they are not like the past ones I guarded; the atmosphere has changed."

Paul was not crushed under his circumstances. Circumstances did not defeat him. He did not deny his reality, while not letting circumstances control his mind and emotions. What one gives attention to captivates one's mind. We will always have some people who do not like us because of faith. Some who want to block the ministry, mute your voice, limit your influence. We see this against Paul, and the Philippian church. Resistance to the work of God produces confidence in the God of the work.

1:15-19 – It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News. Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice. For I know that as you pray for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will lead to my deliverance.

Now Paul updates the Philippians about his well-being. Epaphroditus returns to Philippi with a letter given to him by Paul (the letter we are studying now).

Motivated by love

Inspired by love, one with a sincere faith, pure heart and good intentions shows up in action. Humility makes room to think of others more than oneself. Their ambition was to advance the Kingdom of God magnifying the eternal King. Paul did not make the ministry about him, rather Jesus and the end game. Ambition is neutral. What we do with ambition and why we exercise ambition determines its appreciation. For the Christ follower, ultimately our ambition is *"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain"*. Philippians 1:21

Motivated by Envy
Led with mixed motivations the envious' duplicity complicated the message. The same message is proclaimed as those motivated by love but is told with different intentions. Envious people want what you have. Cloaked with intentions to harm one's reputation, to minimize missional journey, and to make others small so to elevate their height. They care more about titles than service. Blurred by a smoke screen one might be distracted from discerning motivations. Intentional or by default elevation of one's self is a leading edge of pride. Ambition for self-gain at other's loss is the way of envy.

Conflict with Paul over Teaching
Judaizers were a group of Jesus followers who believed gentiles had to follow Jesus AND the regulations of the Law of Moses to be a Christian. Doctrinal conflict marked their relationship, character assassination was used to misrepresent him. Judaizers used Paul's imprisonment as reason to discredit him. 'His chains are evidence that Paul's ministry is not effective', so they said.

The biblical character, Job, similarly was attacked by his friends when calamity knocked at his door. Zophar, one of his so-called friends, levied the accusation that God was against Job otherwise calamity would not have struck his family. Job responded in chapter thirteen verse sixteen,

> *"But this is what will save me—I am not godless. If I were, I could not stand before him [God]."*

Debating ideology, political positions, religious views, geopolitical world events, and other perspectives can offer value. We can learn from each other without changing one's view, rather understanding and respecting differences. Assassinating character never helps anyone. What might it look like if we engage our differences with rigorous conversation without crossing the threshold of threats and misrepresentations? Perhaps you and I can help turn the tide.

Vindication
Paul brought others with him to turn the tide away from fight to focus: God handle his vindication. He was clear minded about his mission single-minded in devotion to Jesus, and chose joy over anxiety.

He depended on prayers from God's people. Seems simple, but many times our busyness, trusting in ourselves more than God, questioning if God will answer our prayers distance us from faith.

The Spirit of God comes in divine help to those that invite Him to their table. The Scripture invites us to ask, knock, and seek for the Lord to answer prayer. (Matthew 7:7-12) God's Spirit is with you; you may not feel Him or see Him, but He is there. I encourage you to call out and invite Him into your life.

1:20-26 – For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live. Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith. And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what he is doing through me.

Realities of Life and Death
One day Paul will be vindicated for what has been done to him and said about him. He's looking to the future. If he dies in prison by the hands of the Roman government he will go to be with Jesus in heaven. His death results in life where there are no more accusations, persecutions, prisons. If he lives, he continues his calling to advance the Gospel proclaiming Jesus is the eternal King. It is to the Philippians' advantage for Paul to live. He can help the Philippians and other Christ followers to grow in their faith and experience the joy of their faith.

To live is Christ to die is gain. In life I win, in death I win. Paul's perspective is that he owed his life to Jesus. He is a fully devoted follower of Christ. Christ lives through Paul as He does through all believers to testify that Jesus rose from the dead and will return one day to establish a new heaven and a new earth.

What is it saying to You?