

Yateley Baptist Church, Sunday 19 April 2020

Reading: Romans 8:18-39, ESV

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Prayer

Hymn: Praise! 723

All I once held dear, built my life upon,
all this world reveres and wars to own,
all I once thought gain I have counted loss;
spent and worthless now, compared to this.

*Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you;
there is no greater thing.
You're my all, you're the best,
you're my joy, my righteousness
and I love you, Lord.*

Graham Kendrick

2 Now my heart's desire is to know you more,
to be found in you and known as yours;
to possess by faith what I could not earn,
all-surpassing gift of righteousness.

3 O to know the power of your risen life
and to know you in your sufferings;
to become like you in your death, my Lord,
so with you to live and never die.

Reading: Philippians 1:1-18a, ESV

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

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¹²I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

¹⁵Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. ¹⁷The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Hymn: Praise! 724

All my days I will sing this song of gladness,
give my praise to the Fountain of delights;
for in my helplessness you heard my cry
and waves of mercy poured down on my life.

2 I will trust in the cross of my Redeemer,
I will sing of the blood that never fails,
of sins forgiven, of conscience cleansed,
of death defeated and life without end.

*Beautiful Saviour, Wonderful Counsellor,
clothed in majesty, Lord of history,
you're the way, the truth, the life.
Star of the morning, glorious in holiness,
you're the risen one, heaven's champion
and you reign, you reign over all!*

3 I long to be where the praise is never-ending,
yearn to dwell where the glory never fades,
where countless worshippers will share one
song
and cries of 'worthy' will honour the Lamb!

Stuart Townend

Prayer

Hymn: Praise! 788

How good is the God we adore!
our faithful unchangeable friend:
his love is as great as his power
and knows neither measure nor end.

2. For Christ is the First and the Last;
his Spirit shall guide us safe home:
we'll praise him for all that is past
and trust him for all that's to come.

Joseph Hart (1712-1768)

Sermon: Philippians 1:12-18a – As Long as Christ is Proclaimed, I Rejoice!

“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice” (18a)

Being a Christian has never been an easy path to take.

Matthew 7:13-14: “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

Matthew 16:24-28 - “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

It's often tempting to compare ourselves with others – non-Christians and Christians who seem to have it easier than us.

Such comparisons are futile and ultimately do more harm than good.

The Apostle Paul had more reason than most to compare his awful circumstances.

But he said that rather than feeling sorry for himself, he was actually glad of his sufferings because God was using them – and Paul's response to them – to bring greater glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

What he says in verse 21 wasn't just an aspirational mantra – for Paul, to live was Christ and to die would be gain.

Paul's situation was made worse by those who criticised him for making what they thought were bad decisions e.g. going to Jerusalem.

He sets them straight: “I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel” (12).

Gospel proclamation was his abiding passion – especially in this short letter. Nine times he uses the noun “gospel”, by which he means the message of Christ’s life, death and resurrection.

1. Through trouble the gospel advanced

“I want you to know brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel...”
v 12

Michael Bentley summarises Paul’s words like this: “Never mind about all the trials I have been going through; see what has happened as a result of my sufferings: the gospel is being advanced.”

He was falsely accused of bringing Gentiles into the Jewish temple at Jerusalem (Acts 21:28). He had been arrested and held fast with two chains (21:33). He had been shipped off to Rome because he appealed to be heard before Caesar (Acts 25; 26), and he barely escaped with his life when his ship was wrecked off Malta (27:15-28:1).

He was allowed to be kept in his own rented house (Acts 28:30)

He was chained to a soldier the entire time he was there (28:16; Philippians 1:13, 14). But instead of complaining about all that had befallen him, he was found rejoicing, because the Gospel was being advanced.

He had often longed to preach the gospel in Rome. He wanted to go as a preacher, but instead he ended up arriving as a prisoner. And yet, he didn’t despair!

How does this affect us in lockdown? Do we desire to still see the advance of the gospel regardless of our situation? Do we have Paul’s attitude? Will we take the opportunity to make the most of the resources we do have?

2. The gospel advanced through lockdown

V13: “so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.”

By being imprisoned, Paul was able to take the gospel to the very heart of the secular Roman Empire.

Who knows how many of them came to faith? “Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household” (4:21-22).

“And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (14). God often uses accounts of persecution to strengthen fearful Christians.

John and Betty Stam, missionaries to China at the start of the 20th century, gave up everything. (For more info: <https://omf.org/us/the-martyrdom-of-john-and-betty-stam/>)

She prayed: “Lord, I give up all my own purposes and plans, all my desires and hopes and ambitions, and accept Thy will for my life. I give myself, my life, my utterly all to Thee, to Thine forever. I hand over to Thy keeping all my friendships; all the people whom I love take a second place in my heart. Fill me and seal me with Thy Holy Spirit. Work out Thy whole will in my life, at any cost, now and forever.”

“When we consecrate ourselves to God, we think we are making a great sacrifice, and doing lots for him, when really we are only letting go some little bitsie trinkets we have been grabbing, and when our hands are empty, He fills them full of his treasures.”

God has kindly spared us from much of the worst affliction that Christians face around the world. We can think that what we face for the gospel is unacceptably hard and shy away from sharing it – how we need the boldness of men and women who have really suffered for the gospel and known God’s blessing. Will we commit to reading Christian biographies to remind ourselves of the power of the gospel?

3. The gospel advanced through envy and good will

“Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.” V15

Two factions in the church – those jealous of Paul and his God given gifts and apostleship and the majority – who preached Christ “from all good will”. “The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel” (16).

Paul’s detractors were preaching the biblical Jesus. They were anti-Paul, not anti-Jesus. They preached the gospel, but they did so out of a desire for self-promotion.

“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice” (18). Paul was so focussed on getting the gospel out that his feelings and aspirations took a backseat to the gospel.

Don Carson sums up Paul’s attitude like this: “Paul’s example is impressive and clear: Put the advance of the gospel at the centre of your aspirations. Our own comfort, our bruised feelings, our reputations, our misunderstood motives – all of these are insignificant in comparison to with the advance and splendour of the gospel. As Christians, we are called upon to put the advance of the gospel at the very centre of our aspirations.

What are your aspirations? To make money? To get married? To travel? To see your grandchildren grow up? To find a new job? To retire early? None of these is inadmissible; none is to be despised. The question is whether these aspirations become so devouring that the Christian’s central aspiration is squeezed to the periphery or squeezed out of existence entirely.”

Is the gospel first and foremost in our lives and in the life of our church? The answer will determine far more than we can possibly imagine.

We all have a calling in life – whether a teacher, a doctor or a homemaker, whatever it might be. But that is not to be the final word in what defines us. Whatever our calling in life, the gospel must always be first.

Life will have its ups and downs. There will doubtless be many twists and turns in our lives. There will be times when we feel like Paul must have done – misunderstood, misrepresented, ignored, spitefully treated. But if the gospel is first in our lives, we will be able to look at any and all circumstances and say with confidence: “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice”.

Hymn: Praise! 732

Lord, be my vision, supreme in my heart,
bid every rival give way and depart:
you my best thought in the day or the night,
waking or sleeping, your presence my light.

2 Lord, be my wisdom and be my true word,
I ever with you and you with me, Lord:
you my great Father and I your true son,
you in me living and I with you one.

3 Lord, be my shield and my sword for the
fight:
be my strong armour, for you are my might;
you are my shelter and you my high tower,
raising me heavenward, O Power of my power.

4 Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise;
you my inheritance, now and always;
all of your treasure to me you impart,
High King of heaven, the first in my heart.

5 High King of heaven, when victory is won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's
Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Traditional; translated by Mary E Byrne; edited by Eleanor Hull

Closing Prayer