

## **Adult Sunday Bible Study Lesson**

### **Paul's Letter to the Philippians**

**September 12, 2021**

#### **Paul, The Lord's Prisoner**

**Situational Context:** Paul, writing from Prison, has expressed his conviction that God is with them, will preserve them, and that Paul is thankful and full of joy for the church's support for him.

#### **Lesson Theme: Philippians 1:12-14**

**1. Imprisoned by Grace: Philippians 1:12-14 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. <sup>14</sup> And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

**Interpretation:** Paul has come to understand that his imprisonment has its purpose in God's plan to spread the gospel even to infiltrate the Roman hierarchy. Paul is not aware of the details of God's plan but trusts God to place him where God is planning to plant the seed of the gospel. Paul's only crime is preaching the gospel of God's grace to the gentiles. Some of the saints in and around Rome have been emboldened to also share the gospel with boldness. Because of Paul's imprisonment, the gospel has moved irresistibly through the palace guard and beyond.

#### **Supporting Texts:**

**Acts 28:30-31 (ESV)** <sup>30</sup> He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, <sup>31</sup> proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

**Philippians 1:7 (ESV)** <sup>7</sup> 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 defense and confirmation of the gospel.**

**2 Timothy 2:9 (ESV)** <sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. **But the word of God is not bound!**

**Genesis 50:19-20 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> **As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.**

**Discussion Starters:**

**How does Genesis 50:19-20 explain verses 12-13?**

**How did Paul’s boldness affect some fellow believers?**

**How did Paul come to understand God’s purpose in his imprisonment?**

**2. What’s Important: Philippians 1:15-18 (ESV)** <sup>15</sup> Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. <sup>16</sup> The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. <sup>17</sup> The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. <sup>18</sup> **What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,**

**Interpretation:** Those who preach with wrong, insincere motives do so out of a sense of competition with Paul and so think they are making his imprisonment more difficult to bear. not sincerely. These preachers are not to be viewed as being heretical. Their message is true, even though their motives are not pure. **The gospel has its objectivity and validity apart from those who proclaim it; the message is more than the medium.** He was under arrest, and fellow Christians sought, by their preaching, to add to his difficulties; yet he kept on rejoicing.

## **Supporting Texts:**

**Isaiah 55:10-11 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup> “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

## **Discussion Starters:**

**What extra stuff was Paul dealing with?**

**How can some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry?**

**How can God work through bad motives?**

**3. Paul’s Desire: Philippians 1:19-20 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, <sup>20</sup> as 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 honored in my body, whether by life or by death.**

**Interpretation:** Paul identifies the third Person of the Trinity as the Spirit of God and as the Spirit of Christ. Paul expects to be released from prison, but he cannot be certain of it. God will deliver him through His appointed means, both human and divine. Paul’s passion is neither to live nor to die, but to see Christ honored whatever happens.

## **Supporting Texts:**

**Galatians 4:6 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

**Romans 14:8 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.

## **Discussion Starters:**

**What was the basis for Paul's confidence?**

**What would be Paul's deliverance?**

**What did Paul mean by Christ being honored in his body?**

**4. What's Important: Philippians 1:21-26 (ESV)** <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>23</sup> I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. <sup>24</sup> But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. <sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

**Interpretation:** Christ is Paul's reason for being. Far from severing Paul's union with Christ, death will bring Paul into a deeper experience of that union. Paul wants to be with Christ but also to remain on earth for the sake of the church. This is his dilemma. However, the outcome is in God's hands, and Paul is confident that God has further work for him to do among the Philippians. Paul's language here sheds light on the character of the intermediate state (i.e., the condition of a person between the times of physical death and the resurrection).

## **Supporting Texts:**

**2 Corinthians 5:4 (ESV)** <sup>4</sup> For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

**2 Corinthians 5:8 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

## **Discussion Starters:**

**Why could Paul rejoice in either outcome?**

**What does Paul mean by “to live is Christ”?**