

October 20, 2013 by Steve Brandon



The Progress of the Gospel

Philippians 1:12-18

1. In Prison (verse 13)
2. Outside of Prison (verses 14-17)
3. Reason to Rejoice (verse 18)

I want to tell you the story of John Bunyan. I know that many of you are familiar with his life. He was born in 1628 in England. He became a believer in Christ in his early twenties. He joined up with the nonconformists and became a preacher of the gospel of Christ. He wrote some books and gained some notoriety in his preaching.

However, with notoriety comes close scrutiny by the governmental officials. In England at the time, it was illegal to preach without a license in a public place. Being a nonconformist, Bunyan didn't have a license. With more and more people coming to hear him, he drew a bit of attention. When he was 30 years old, he was arrested for preaching the first time, but was released.

A few years later, he again was arrested for preaching and imprisoned. He stood before Mr. Justice Wingate, who was inclined to release him. But, when John Bunyan said, "If you release me today, I will preach tomorrow," the judge was left with no choice. Bunyan was imprisoned. He spent the next 12 years in prison, with the exception of a few weeks in 1666, when he was released from prison, immediately went out and preached the gospel, and was re-arrested and re-imprisoned. Bunyan was finally released in 1672 when King Charles II issued the Declaration of Religious Indulgence.

He soon became pastor of St. John's Church of Bedford, and received a license to preach. His congregation grew and he was quickly preaching to crowds, who came to hear him from all around, even as far away as London, some 60 miles away. But, three years later, in 1675, Charles II withdrew the Declaration of Religious Indulgence, where he spent another six months in prison for preaching the gospel.

Things were far from easy for Bunyan in jail. Most of his difficulties were caused by the mental anguish of what was taking place outside of prison. Bunyan's first wife had born him four children, one of whom was blind. When she died, Bunyan remarried a woman named Elizabeth, who cared for these four children all alone as he was in prison. He could have been released from prison at any moment if he would simply say that he would preach no more. But, Bunyan knew the call of God upon his life; it was to preach, even if it meant great suffering.

Listen to his anguish, ...

The parting with my Wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place as the pulling of the Flesh from my bones; and that not only because I am somewhat too fond of these great Mercies, but also because I should have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries and wants that my poor Family was like to meet with should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides; O the thoughts of the hardship I thought my Blind one might go under, would break my heart to pieces.

And yet, Bunyan remained in prison. And we might easily say that his life was wasted in prison. If he was drawing large crowds in his preaching, think of the blessing that he could have been to many if he had been allowed to preach, rather than rotting away in prison. We might say that Bunyan put his wife and children through needless suffering. But God had another plan.

It was in prison that Bunyan wrote, "The Pilgrim's Progress." Next to the Bible, this is perhaps the world's best-selling book. It has been translated into over 200 languages and has been a blessing to people all over the globe for hundreds of years. Bunyan blessed far more people with this book than he was ever able to influence by his life. And could it be that the crowd that he gathered in his preaching were precisely because of his willingness to suffer imprisonment for his faith???

When you step back from his life, you begin to get a greater perspective on the life of John Bunyan's. And so it is with the apostle Paul. He, too, was imprisoned for preaching the gospel. And yet, if we would step back for a moment and gain a perspective of Paul's life, we would realize the blessing that his imprisonment has been to the church for 2,000 years!

Like John Bunyan, the apostle Paul did some writing in prison. In fact, while in prison, he wrote four letters that have become part of our Bibles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. These are known as "the prison epistles" -- written by Paul while in prison in Rome. And these letters have been translated and read by untold billions of people to their eternal blessing!

But, it wasn't merely Paul's writing that caused his imprisonment to be used of the Lord for great things long after his death. No, Paul was able to have a perspective of how the Lord was using his imprisonment during his life for good.

In our text this morning, we will look at Philippians, chapter 1, verses 12-18. Here, we see Paul explaining the good that has come from his

imprisonment. Look there at verse 12, ...

Philippians 1:12-18

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,

The good that has come from his imprisonment is simply this: the gospel has advanced -- it has progressed. One might easily think that Paul's imprisonment might be a bad thing. On the contrary, Paul writes, it has actually served to advance the gospel.

Philippians 1:12

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,

Paul wanted those in Philippi to know this. He wanted them to really grasp it. That's the point of his first few words, ...

Philippians 1:12

Now I want you to know, brethren, ...

This was one of the first things that Paul really wanted to communicate to those in Philippi. The first 11 verses were filled with Paul's greeting to those in Philippi (verses 1-2), and his affection for them (verses 7-8), which led him to pray for them (verses 3-6, 9-11). But now, right after the greeting, Paul comes to this thought.

Philippians 1:12

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,

I would suspect that there were many who were lamenting about Paul's imprisonment. I would suspect that there were many who thought that things would be far better had Paul never been arrested and far better if Paul had never been imprisoned for preaching the gospel. If he were out and about in the churches, if he had been travelling on more missionary journeys, he would be doing much better than rotting away in a Roman prison cell.

At least this was the perspective of Agabus and many who were with him. Shortly before Paul came to Jerusalem, he was in Caesarea, where he met Agabus, a prophet. In Acts 21:11, we read of how, "[Agabus] took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, 'This is what the Holy Spirit says: "In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles"' (Acts 21:11). Luke writes, "When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem" (Acts 21:12).

But, Paul's perspective was different. "Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus'" (Acts 21:13). Finally, Luke adds, "And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, 'The will of the Lord be done!'" (Acts 21:14).

And so, off he went to Jerusalem where he was quickly arrested in the Temple (Acts 21:27-40). For his own safety, he was transferred to Caesarea (Acts 23:23-35). And he spent several years in prison. Eventually, he was transferred to Rome, where he was to stand before Caesar, who would hear his case. He would spend another two years under house arrest in Rome. But, contrary to what we might think, his imprisonment actually turned out for the advance of the gospel.

Philippians 1:12

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,

My message this morning is entitled, "The Progress of the Gospel." Far from being a hindrance to the gospel, Paul's imprisonment actually served to advance the gospel. This is how it often is with God's work -- what we view as bad is actually a good thing.

Do you remember when Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers? That was an awful deed. But, decades later, Joseph was able to tell his brothers, "Do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:5). "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance" (Genesis 45:7). "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

Do you remember all of the plagues that God performed on the Egyptians? They were dreadful. And yet, God said to Pharaoh, "for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth" (Exodus 9:16). In other words, the awful plagues that came upon the Egyptians only served to bring greater glory to God as He had the opportunity to display His power.

The Psalmist says in Psalm 119:67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word." In other words, the Psalmist said that the affliction that came upon him was far from being a bad thing. It actually ended up being a good thing, as it drew him to greater obedience to the LORD.

This is why James says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1:2-4). The trials that come upon our lives are painful and difficult. But, they lead to something better. They teach us to trust in the LORD.

God's ways are not our ways. God will use the difficult things in our lives for His greater glory and for our greater good.

You may be here this morning facing some difficulties in your life. Financially. Relationally. You may be experiencing hardships, because of your sin, because of your circumstances, because of your children or your boss or your neighbors. Know the promise of Romans 8:28 -- "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

If you are a follower of Christ; if you are a lover of God; if you are one of His chosen ones, then know this: God is working in all of the circumstances of your life for good. Even if they appear bad for the moment.

For the apostle Paul, such was the case. He was under arrest by the Romans, awaiting trial. At the point of his writing the letter of Philippians, he had been in custody for at least two years. God was using his circumstances for good. Paul could see this. This is the point of verse 12, ...

Philippians 1:12

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,

In verses 13-18, Paul explains how this can be. Let's look at my first point. The gospel has advanced ...

1. In Prison (verse 13)

We see this in verse 13.

Philippians 1:13

so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,

Now, when we think of "imprisonment," we can think of dark, deep prison cells. They had plenty of those in Rome at this time. But, on this occasion, Paul wasn't in one of those prisons. Rather, Paul was under house arrest. Paul was in his own "rented quarters" (Acts 28:30). We know this from the end of the book of Acts, where we read, "When we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him." (Acts 28:16).

Those who were guarding Paul were from the Imperial Guard of Rome. This guard is translated here in the New American Standard as the "praetorian guard." The ESV translates it, "imperial guard." The NIV translates it, "palace guard." All of these words give you an idea of who these people were. They were the body guards for the Emperor, stationed in Rome, where the emperor ruled. Perhaps they were a bit like our secret service, who guards the President of the United States.

But, more than merely guards, they were also the elite of the Roman soldiers. In this way, they were a bit like our Navy Seals, who are adept and taking on various military assignments.

When it came to the apostle Paul, our best guess is that one guard was assigned to be with the apostle Paul at all times in his rented quarters. They would be chained together. When the guard's watch was over, another guard would come in and take his place. The guard would unshackle the chains from his wrist and the next guard would take the shackle the chains upon his own wrist.

This is why Paul doesn't literally say that he is in "prison." Rather he calls his captivity, "bonds" or, better, perhaps, "chains." So the New King James translates verse 13, "So that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ."

Now, from the point of view of the guards, Paul was chained to them. But, from Paul's point of view, these guards were chained to Paul. In other words, Paul had a captive audience that was changed out every 8-12 hours. What do you think that they heard from his lips? Each of these guards got a daily dose of the gospel.

I want to read a good portion of Acts 28 for you. It helps to give a good flavor of what was happening to Paul.

Acts 28:16-31

When we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.

After three days Paul called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they came together, he began saying to them, "Brethren, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there was no ground for putting me to death. But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar, not that I had any accusation against my nation. For this reason, therefore, I requested to see you and to speak

with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel." They said to him, "We have neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere."

When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying,

'Go to this people and say,
"You will keep on hearing, but will not understand;
And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;
For the heart of this people has become dull,
And with their ears they scarcely hear,
And they have closed their eyes;
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
And hear with their ears,
And understand with their heart and return,
And I would heal them."

Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen." [When he had spoken these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves.]

And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, Preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

And the Romans guards were there to hear it all! At least one of the Roman guards heard him explain to the Jews from morning to evening about Jesus, from Moses and the Prophets (28:23). All of the guards would have overheard the conversations that Paul was having with those who would visit him during those two years under house arrest.

Surely, Paul was talking to those who came of how Jesus was born in Bethlehem, of the line of David, in accordance with Micah's prophecy. How Jesus was a prophet mighty in word and deed in the sight of God and all the people (Luke 24:19). How Jesus was the Messiah, the king who was to come. Yet, Jesus was crucified as a common criminal, although Pilate said that He was innocent. This was to show how Jesus was blameless, but took our blame. We simply need to believe in Jesus, and our sins are wiped away.

After many days of such talk, Paul could rightly say, ...

Philippians 1:13
so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,

Those who were chained to him heard his message. Verse 13 seems to indicate that everyone in the guard heard his story. I don't think that it's because every single guard was bound to Paul at one time or another. I think it's because those guards who were bound to Paul began to talk.

And surely they told other guards of the strange prisoner that was living in the house near the palace. Surely, some of these guards remained skeptical. But, others believed. That's why Paul could send greetings from Caesar's household at the end of the letter.

Philippians 4:21-22
... The brethren who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

Paul was under arrest. He wasn't able to go into Caesar's household. But, through these guards, they were able to come and speak with Paul. And many of them believed.

But, it wasn't only the guards who heard. Nor was it only those of Caesar's household who heard. Paul mentions here how

Philippians 1:13
... my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known ... to everyone else,

Remember when the Jews came and spoke with Paul? "Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe." (Acts 28:24). Remember how, when the Jews departed, they were having a great dispute among themselves? (Acts 28:29). Whether they

believed or not, they certainly went out talking about what Paul said. After all, he was bringing a new teaching, that those in Rome had never heard. They would have been forced back to the Scripture to see if Paul was speaking the truth or not.

Some were saying that Paul was right. Others weren't so convinced. Surely, the conversation continued. And news of the gospel would have spread.

Paul's message was spreading all throughout Rome, even while he was In Prison (verse 13).

What, on the one hand, looked like an obvious impediment to the gospel was actually the means to spreading the gospel to many. I'm sure that there was a buzz in Rome about this Jewish prisoner who had committed no real crime, but was preaching some strange, new doctrine. And people all throughout Rome were talking about the gospel, so that Paul could say, ...

Philippians 1:12

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,

That's how God works.

There's great and obvious application here for all of us. We aren't hindered in house arrest. We can move freely about. We have complete freedom of speech. We are able to tell others about Jesus with little fear for our own lives, and little fear of imprisonment.

So, what are we telling others about Jesus? What are people talking about where you live? Do they go forth from your house having heard about the gospel? What about your workplace? Some of you men are imprisoned in your place of work, for more than 40 hours each week. Do others go forth from your presence having heard the gospel? What about your neighborhood? Do your neighbors know what you believe about Jesus?

How is it that Paul, in prison, was able to spread the gospel throughout all of Rome; but, we who can walk around free and unhindered, can speak so little of Christ? I believe, in many ways that Paul's imprisonment was the key. It created a strange enough circumstance that, providentially, his message became the talk of the entire city. Much like John's Bunyan's imprisonment helped gain him some notoriety and credibility.

You couple this with the fact of how the gospel was coming for the first time to Rome, which stirred an interest in many people talking about this teaching. And Paul could say, ...

Philippians 1:13

... that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,

Let's move on to my second point. Paul says that the gospel has advanced, In Prison (verse 13). And, secondly, it has advanced, ...

2. Outside of Prison (verses 14-17)

Verse 14, ...

Philippians 1:14

and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

Paul's captivity stirred the hearts of those outside of prison to speak more boldly than ever before.

Again, this is God's way with the church. When things get hard, and the leaders of the church are persecuted, the church flourishes. When secular governments seek to suppress the church, they go after the leaders. They imprison them. They sentence them to years of hard labor. They torture them. They kill them. And when the believers stand strong and don't back down, their courage in times of trouble is a boost to the rest of the believers to be more zealous than ever before.

In recent days at Rock Valley Bible Church, we have distributed Sabina Wormbrand's book, "The Pastors Wife," in which she tells of the persecution that she endured in prison in Romania during the days surrounding World War II. If you have read the book, you know how it was obvious that the Lord used her difficulties for the greater progress of the gospel in Romania. This is how the Lord always works.

Tertulian, the early church father, said it this way: "The blood of the martyrs is seed." By this, he meant that if you kill other believers in the church, their blood will act like seed in the church. The church will flourish and grow like never before.

The Chinese government tried this. Beginning in 1949, all foreign protestant missionaries were expelled from the country. It took until 1953 to see this fully accomplished. Now, here in the west, there was great worry about the state of the church. At that time, the estimated number of Christians in the entire country was in the ballpark of 500,000. But, with all of the missionaries leaving, what would happen to the church?

Since then, the Chinese government was far from friendly with Christians. And yet, today, the number of Christians in China is far larger than it was 60 years ago. Because of the closed nature of China, firm estimates on the number of Christians in China is difficult to obtain. I have

seen numbers from 40 million to 130 million Christians in China. [\[1\]](#) Really, only God knows. And the exact number isn't important here. Whatever the number is, it's much larger than it was 50-60 years ago.

But all to say that Religious persecution has caused the church in China to flourish in record proportions. As one man said, "Although China bans foreign missionaries and sometimes harasses and imprisons Christians, especially in rural areas, Christianity is booming in China." [\[2\]](#)

It has always been that way. We need not worry about God's plan for His church and His glory. I'm not worried in the least about the future of the church in America. Our country is facing some very difficult things. Financially, we have to deal with the tremendous problem of our mounting debt. I don't know what this will mean in the future. Worst case scenario is that it brings some financial hardship to our country and to our churches. Worst case scenario means that our missions budgets may shrink or that our buildings will get older.

But, God's church will do just fine, both here in America and worldwide. In fact, if the world is anything like China, perhaps it might do well for American missionaries to be fewer.

Our country is facing a great moral crisis. We are facing the infusion of same-sex marriage into norm of society. That which God has declared to be sin is being forced upon every American. It is penetrating deep. And those who speak up are facing some real pressure from our society. Some are being put out of business because they make a moral stand.

But, God's church will do just fine. In fact, this issue may well purify the church. Those churches willing to stand with God's truth on the matter will face some real hardships. But such will only cause the true church to flourish. I'm convinced of this.

So, I'm not worried in the least for God's plan with His church in America. If God can cause the gospel to flourish outside the prison through Paul's example inside the prison, then He can do much more beyond what we ask or think.

Now, all was not pretty outside the prison walls. We read in verse 15, ...

Philippians 1:15-17

Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.

Paul classifies those spreading the gospel into two categories. Some were preaching Christ from envy and strife (verse 15) and from selfish ambition (verse 17). Others were preaching Christ from good will (verse 15) and love (verse 16) and pure motives (verse 17).

It's easy to identify the one category. It's easy to identify those who knew and loved Paul and loved his message. These were the followers of Christ in every sense of the word. These were those who preached Christ from good will. They preached because they had the good of others in mind. They preached because they wanted others to enjoy the benefits of Christ Jesus. These were those who preached from love. They preached Christ because they loved Jesus and they loved Paul and wanted nothing more than to see Christ glorified. These were those who preached from pure motives. They weren't preaching for their own glory. They were preaching from the motive of seeing Christ glorified.

And when we hear Paul speak in verse 14 of how ...

Philippians 1:14

... most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

We think of this first category of people. We think of those who view themselves as ambassadors of Christ, who need to tell others of His saving plan.

And yet, Paul brings up this second category of people. He speaks of those who were preaching Christ from envy and strife (verse 15) and from selfish ambition (verse 17). The big question is this: who were these people?

First of all, we need to note that these people were "preaching Christ." In verse 15 and in verse 17, Paul makes this clear.

Philippians 1:15-17

Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.

These were those who were telling others about Jesus. They were telling others of His life, His death, His burial, and His resurrection. They were telling others that Jesus was the Messiah, come to save His people from their sins. They were telling others to believe in Him and the kingdom that He is coming to establish someday. In some sense, their theology is correct. These were not those of Galatia, who preached a "false gospel" (Gal. 1:6-9). Not so with these people.

Paul says that they were "preaching Christ." But, they were doing so from bad motives. They were preaching out of envy. They were

preaching out of strife (or rivalry). They were preaching out of selfish ambition.

From the best that I can tell, these are those who were preaching for their own benefit. These are those who were preaching for their own gain.

They were envious of Paul, because he had come into town and were taking people away from their own following. They viewed Paul as a rival, not as a partner. They were seeking their own reward. As a result, I'm sure that they bad-mouthed Paul. I'm sure that they sought people to follow them and their teaching. I'm sure that there was a mix of the Corinthian error in their midst.

You remember those in Corinth were followers of teachers. In the church on Corinth, some said, "I am of Paul," and others said, "I am of Apollos," and others said, "I am of Cephas," and others said, "I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12). In 1 Corinthians, Paul corrects their error by saying, "Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1:13). In other words, believers in Christ are followers of Christ. We don't need to follow our own special teachers. We need to follow Jesus.

I believe that a similar error was coming up in Rome. There were others in Rome who were preaching Christ. And to some extent, they were getting the gospel right. But, they were pulling people after their own ways. They were seeking to gather their own followers.

And here in Philippians, Paul is simply identifying them. He says, "Hey, know this. Not everyone who is preaching Christ is doing so from good motives. You need to be aware of such people."

If I would seek to bring this into the modern day, I would say that there are plenty of people like this today. There are plenty of preachers out there today who are preaching Christ. And yet, they are preaching Christ to build their own kingdom. They are preaching Christ to build their own church. They are preaching Christ to sell their own books. They are preaching Christ to bring their own fame.

We can typically think about this when churches grow big, and they have multiple campuses, and the name of their preacher is in lights for all the world to see. The ministry of the church becomes more about the man than it is about the glory of Christ. Yes, the gospel is there, but it comes with a man-centered baggage. And this is certainly present in our day.

But, this can also happen on a much smaller scale as well. I know this first-hand. Certainly, I'm a pastor of a church. Certainly, I want to see all of you grow in Christ. Certainly, I want to see our numbers grow. If nobody follows me or comes here to Rock Valley Bible Church, then, I'm back in the computer world again! Do you know what I'm saying?

In some ways, I'm a business man. What's my business? To see this church flourish. Who are my competitors? The other churches in town.

So, I can push to have a following. I can work so that you come here to our church, and not to the one down the street. Such are the feelings of all pastors, I am sure. And I just say this to you all. My heart is to be used of God to direct people to Jesus.

There is a reason why, on a consistent basis, we pray for other churches in the area. We pray for other churches in our town. Because, ultimately, it's not about us at Rock Valley Bible Church. Ultimately, it's about the glory of Christ. There is a reason why I will frequently place items in the Weekly Word promoting other churches in town. If there is some activity that I hear about that's profitable for your souls, I want you to know about it. I want you to go and have your souls fed.

Ultimately, such practice might not be the smartest thing to do to build Rock Valley Bible Church. I mean this -- when you become discontent here with me or with our church, you are going to look elsewhere. And where will you look? You will look at the places that believe the same things that we believe. You will look at the places that we have promoted. You will find yourself attending worship there. This happens. I know it does. I know of multiple instances where this has happened. I can give you examples of events at other churches that I have promoted here at our church, and people from our church have gone to these events, and they have remained at those churches. This has happened several times in the life of our church. [\[3\]](#)

What can I say? It's not about me. It's not about us. It's about Christ.

Arnold Dallimore illustrates this well in his biography of Charles Spurgeon. He writes, ...

During the 1880s a group of American ministers visited England, prompted especially by a desire to hear some of the celebrated preachers of that land.

On a Sunday morning they attended the City Temple where Dr. Joseph Parker was the pastor. Some two thousand people filled the building, and Parker's forceful personality dominated the service. His voice was commanding, his language descriptive, his imagination lively, and his manner animated. The sermon was scriptural, the congregation hung upon his words, and the Americans came away saying, "What a wonderful preacher is Joseph Parker!"

In the evening they went to hear Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. The building was much larger than the City Temple, and the congregation was more than twice the size. Spurgeon's voice was much more expressive and moving and his oratory noticeably superior. But they soon forgot all about the magnificent voice. They even overlooked their intention to compare the various features of the two preachers, and when the service was over they found themselves saying, "What a wonderful Savior is Jesus Christ!" [\[4\]](#)

Such ought to be our heart.

Now, what about those who are clearly seeking to gather a following for themselves? How are we to respond to such people? This leads us into our last point; and this is a surprise!

Paul says that the gospel is advancing, and we have ...

3. Reason to Rejoice (verse 18)

Paul writes, ...

Philippians 1:18

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will rejoice,

How are we to respond to such people? How are we to respond to those who are proclaiming Christ from poor motives? We are to rejoice! If Christ is proclaimed, we ought to rejoice.

So, when you survey the land and look at other churches and other preachers, here's a question to ask: "Are they preaching Christ?" If so, then rejoice in God, that His gospel is being proclaimed.

Now, this doesn't mean that you are obligated to endorse this work. Nor does it mean that you are not to warn others of the errors of the work. But, it does mean that you ought to rejoice that Christ is proclaimed. In other words, "Rejoice in the gospel"

When the gospel goes forth and people are saved from their sins by trusting in Jesus alone for their salvation, then rejoice! Other churches and other preachers may preach a weak gospel, as if Jesus doesn't need to make any difference in your life. Other churches and other preachers may preach a legalistic gospel, as if believing in Jesus is good, but He calls us now to keep various rules. Other churches and other preachers may preach a liberal gospel, as if we don't have to follow everything in the Bible. Other churches and other preachers may preach a personality-driven gospel -- believe in Jesus, and follow this man who brings us this good teaching. Other churches and other preachers may preach a sensational gospel, doing whatever it takes to bring people in the doors.

But, as long as the gospel is preached, let us rejoice. Let us beware of the dangers. Let us beware of the pitfalls of those ministries. We don't need to commend them. We don't need to bring attention to them. We don't need to encourage people to go to them. In fact, we can persuade people away from such churches.

But, as long as the gospel is preached, let us rejoice. Let us rejoice in the power of the gospel, that the Lord will direct those who are truly saved in those contexts. And they may well find greener pasture as they see the errors of their ways.

Surely the balance is difficult, rejoicing in works that aren't quite right at all. But, we must find reason to rejoice.

But, when the gospel is not preached, let us not rejoice. When churches and pastors promote a self-help "gospel," let us not rejoice. When churches and pastors promote a health, wealth and prosperity "gospel," let us not rejoice. When churches and pastors promote keeping of the law as means to salvation, let us not rejoice.

As Paul said in Galatians 1, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" (Gal 1:6-9).

This can be extended. Think of all the people in Acts 28 who heard Paul, but were not persuaded. And as they talked about this new teaching that Paul was bringing, people may well have been saved. I'm sure that Paul rejoiced whenever the gospel was proclaimed, even if people disagreed with it.

Mark Dever tells the story of what took place when George Whitefield was "hounded by a group of detractors who called themselves the Hell-fire Club. [This group of men] derided his work and mocked him. On one occasion, one of them, a man named Thorpe, preached a sermon in which he mimicked Whitefield to his cronies with brilliant accuracy, perfectly imitating Whitefield's tone and facial expressions. When Thorpe himself was so pierced that he sat down and was converted on the spot" ^[5]

Whenever the gospel is preached, God will work. Let us rejoice in the gospel.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 20, 2013 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] <http://asiaharvest.org/index.php/how-many-christians-china-1/how-many-christians-china-2/>

[2] Nicholas D. Kristof, New York Times, June 25, 2006 quoted in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_China

[3] In fact, the week after I preached this message, I received news of another member of our church who was leaving our church to attend

another church where I had recently promoted an event.

[4] Arnold Dallimore, Spurgeon: A New Biography, p. 216.

[5] Mark Dever, The Gospel and Personal Evangelism, p. 110.