

On January 8 **{slide 2}** 1956, Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Ed McCully, Peter Flemming, and Roger Youderian were speared to death on a sandbar called “Palm Beach” in the Kya-rear-ay River of Ecuador. They were trying to reach the whoa-rani Indians for the first time in history with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Steve Saint, son of Nate Saint, who was martyred there, wrote an article about new discoveries made about the tribal intrigue behind the slayings.

He wrote a mind-blowing piece, highlighting the sovereignty of God: **{slide 3}**

‘As [the killers] described their recollections, it occurred to me how incredibly unlikely it was that the Palm Beach killing took place at all; it is an anomaly that *I cannot explain outside of divine intervention*’.

In other words, there is only one explanation for why these five young men died. God was at work. He was at work in the midst of great, tragedy, suffering and pain. Their deaths left a legacy that has inspired thousands to share in the work of advancing the gospel cross-culturally. **{slide 4}**

Last week we heard of Paul’s deep love for the church at Philippi in Macedonia.

We heard how preaching a gospel contrary to the belief that Caesar was the Divine Lord has Paul in chains. He was awaiting trial in Rome, and he wrote this letter, brought by Epahroditus a member of their congregation to his dearly beloved friends in Philippi.

He wants their love for one another to overflow, and he prayed that they would be able to determine what is best, so that on the day of Jesus’ return they are presented to Christ as pure and blameless, having produced a harvest of righteousness - the fruit of Jesus at work in their lives.

We’ll look at this passage in three parts today, first **[slide 5]** we’ll consider how God used Paul’s trials for good, to advance the gospel in vv 12-14. As Paul describes [slide] his opponents kicking him while he is down we’ll think about how he can respond with the question “What does it matter?” In vv15-18, and finally [slide] we’ll see how Paul’s great love for Jesus means he can say the Christian life is a win win, whether he lives or dies at the hands of the Roman Empire in vv.19-26.

Let's pray [slide]

Point 1) God has used Paul's trials for Good; advancing the gospel.

Like **[slide 6]** Steve Saint; Paul can clearly see how God has used his trials for good.

Two key things have happened as a result of Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

Even in prison God's saving grace is proclaimed. The guards, spent time with Paul, and he seized the opportunity to share the gospel with his captors.

v.13 he is in prison is for Christ, and he is participating in the suffering of Christ. Paul sees this suffering as refining his faith. It's pushing him even closer to Jesus.

He encourages the Philippians by letting them know his imprisonment is having an impact.

The Philippian Christians are considered traitors, disloyal to the Empire, atheists even, because they refuse to acknowledge Caesar as Lord. And Paul reminds them of God's sovereignty. His lordship over Caesar is being felt by the guards who watch over Paul, and others within the political and administrative machine of Rome. Caesar's advisors, the Imperial staff, know of Paul's gospel because of his imprisonment. God has placed Paul where his message can slowly penetrate the very heart of the political life of the Roman Empire.

And it's not just in the palace, and in the prison, that people are hearing the good news, v.14 tells us that because of Paul's chains, the brothers and sisters have become bold in the Lord, speaking without fear.

Its the opposite of what you'd expect to happen! if I was hauled off to jail for talking about Jesus, you'd expect my friends and family, to clam up. But here we see the power of God at work, driving out fear.

God has used the testimony of Paul's proclamation and the impact of that - people coming to love Jesus at the highest levels of Roman life, to spur others on, to advance the gospel, to proclaim Jesus. It hurts. It is costly for them socially,

economically and for some even physically, but they do it without fear. Driven on by the very love of God.

Perfect love drives out fear 1 Jn 4:18

When we see people like Paul did, with the love of Jesus;, we long for their eternal future. We desperately want to see them come to know and love Jesus and to be saved. When that is our heart's desire we can get past the social stigma, potential shame or rejection.

Who do we love? Who do we love so much that you would risk your reputation to see that person saved? Child? Parent? Dear friend? Someone at a tennis club, or golf? Another resident in a village? What steps can we take to introduce these friends to Jesus? Are we bold in our approach? We have a reason to be bold:

2 Peter 3:9 'The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.'

God wants to save!

It's not easy, it doesn't feel easy to risk scorn or ridicule, possibly causing offence and and open our mouths, but if we are Jesus' followers we are to live as Christ. That means we "proclaim" or share the good news, it hurts, but don't stop - keep before you the thoughts of the joy that comes when a new brother or sister accepts Jesus as Lord. Let that love drive us, like it drove Paul, Roman and Philippian Christians.

Point 2) In the face of opposition Paul says "what does it matter?"

Many **[slide 7]** Roman Christians were sharing Jesus, but not all for the right reasons: Despite that Paul says "what does it matter?"

Paul outlines the motives of some in Rome in v.15, "some preach from love, but some preach from envy or rivalry."

Because of his imprisonment Paul's public ministry was limited. Others pick up the slack. They stepped in. They live as Christ, they proclaim, they share in the ministry. In their unity with Paul they stand up and seeing Paul's difficulty they help.

In verse 17 we see that those jealous of Paul and his ministry kick him while he is down. They seize the opportunity to push their own teaching.

There have been difficulties in Rome between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. The question of how far one group should accommodate the other is still a point of contention. Many Jewish Christians still remained unconvinced that food laws and circumcision had been nullified by Jesus. And so their leaders seized the opportunity to promote their views over those of Paul.

Despite the personal pain caused to Paul by those who oppose him verse 18 demonstrates and spotlights us his great love for the Lord Jesus he says “but what does it matter?” They may have opposed me, they may have hurt me, they might be off kilter, insisting on practices superseded by Jesus – but he is still being made known; Paul is rejoicing! Where ever Jesus is proclaimed in this city we must rejoice.

It takes hard work. To view other churches who are growing or thriving, as partners in the gospel, when we are struggling: that can be difficult.

It takes heart work - work in us by the Spirit of God. We need to respond like Paul who says that being in prison is okay, that having adversaries kick him while he's down is okay, what is his response? He says “but what does it matter?” Christ is preached. Paul is looking to the eternal future, not the reality of the here and now

How can he respond like this? Look at verse 19 “for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will result in my deliverance.” Paul receives the power to think this way from God's Spirit. It is the work of Christ in his heart. It's not a natural reaction but the supernatural work of Jesus Christ, in the heart of a sinner. There's hope for me yet!

We must be on our guard that we don't fall into the trap of preaching from envy or rivalry. We all desire growth, we all wish to see this place full, why? Not to fill rosters, not to fill the bank account, not to see our Sunday School classes bursting, but because we love our city and want to see men, women and children come to know and love Jesus Christ. To see their lives shaped and conformed to the likeness of the Son, so that on the day of his

return, they may be presented as pure and blameless and God glorified.
This is the future image that Paul has before him.

Point 3) Paul knows that the Christian life is a win/win

Even **[slide 8]** though his earthly future is so uncertain:, even though he is suffering and being hurt by Christians out of envy and rivalry, even though he faces great uncertainty and possible execution for sharing the Gospel, Paul knows that the Christian life is a win/win whether we live or die.

In verse 20 we see Paul's great hope that no matter what happens to him he will have courage so that Christ will be exulted in his body. Whether Paul lives or dies he wants God's message of salvation to be known above all.

Whether he lives or dies Paul's love for Jesus is evident "for me to live is Christ and to die is gain." While he hopes to live and to continue to encourage and strengthen the Christian church, particularly those at Philippi, we see his great desire to be united with Christ in the ultimate sense; which Paul knows can only come about at the time of his death. We see the tension Paul faces: he is torn or between living and dying.

His maturity as a believer, his deep trust and faith in Jesus, his love for his heavenly Lord, is breathtaking.

He longs to be with Jesus. He longs to experience the fullness of that relationship that awaits Christian people when they die and see him face to face. The reality where everything will be made right and new, where all brokenness is undone, where we live face to face in a direct relationship with God.

It's a glorious hope, and Paul is so certain of it, so sold out for it, that he longs to experience it now. This isn't unattainable. As we stop and see God's continued faithfulness in every situation. As we meditate on his word, allowing it to soak our lives, as we come to him in prayer and see his amazing responses, we can love and trust Jesus like Paul.

But we can get in the way of ourselves.

When faced with the real tough stuff of life, the rubber meets the road. The depth of our faith and trust in Jesus is demonstrated. Paul doesn't turn his back on God, he doesn't cry out and blame God. He trusts. He loves.

To live is Christ, to die is gain. When we have Paul's view - when we live as those who have been forgiven much, and see Jesus and love him much.

We can love him and obey his commands, not just in terms of our personal piety, but in all the real life issues we face each day. Struggles with finances, our unmet hopes and dreams, desires for a husband or wife, or family or children that haven't panned out, hopes to be living a better or different life. We can push against the overriding narratives of life today because the Christian life is a win/win, whether we live or die. Jesus is worthy of our full trust.

I read these words this week: **{slide 9}**

'Paul's singular passion, and this is surely what he wants his beloved Philippians to hear, is that even though he expects a favourable outcome in the courts, he wants Christ to be glorified as he stands trial, and beyond, even if it were to result in death.'

To live is Christ and to die is gain. **{slide 10}** We see here Paul's unshakeable hope, the absolute certainty that he has of the future. He believes with every fibre of his being that there is a Lord in heaven waiting to receive him, giving him eternal hope in an eternal home and so Paul can say "what could possibly go wrong whether I live or die - I am confident of this that the one who began a good work in you, in us, will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ (1:6)"

What could give the Philippians or us any more confidence to share the Good news of the Lord Jesus than knowing that on the day of judgement we will be counted as right before God?

Like Paul, we can see God at work in our trials, taking them and using them for the advance of the gospel. When we are slandered or hurt by others we can confidently say "so what does it matter?" So long as the gospel is being preached, and we can see how whether we face life or death, this life as a Christian means what is so frightening for so many, is a win/win situation.

These aren't just ancient ideas, they are true today, so that like Steve Saint whose own father was killed for Jesus, Like Christians at Philippi suffering for their sharing

the Good News, like Paul in prison for Jesus; we can see the hand of God at work in and through the toughest parts of our lives. With this confidence we can live as Christ, proclaim in unity and although it hurts we can follow the imperative “don't stop!”

Why don't we pray and ask God to help us have such a vision of Jesus that our heart's desire, come what may, would always be to advance the gospel.

Let's Pray. **[slide 11]**