What Then?

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Let's go together to Philippians chapter 1.

! In my research, I think I've tracked that back to early 1900s to a Jesuit priest, but Harry Truman gets credited with saying that.
It's amazing what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit. There's truth to that. Whether it is an organization, a church, a ball team, whatever it may be, if people are concerned about their name, if people are concerned about their recognition, then things will quickly break down.
But when people care more about the mission than they do their own recognition, great things can happen. And when we think about the circumstances in Philippians 1, here is Paul who is the world's, by God's grace, the world's most influential preacher, most influential missionary, church planter.
And he finds himself under house arrest. And Paul could look at his circumstances and say, this is so unfair.
[1:48] And this is so illogical. And why would God do this and allow this? And couldn't I do more for the kingdom if I was free and traveling?

Why in the world would God do this? And yet, Paul's main concern is not his name or his recognition. His concern is just that the gospel goes forth.
Not about prestige. Not about accolades. He just wants the mission to go forth. And that heart that we see here in Philippians 1 is the same heart that I see in our congregation and pray we never lose.
It's not about this one ministry in our church getting recognized or this one leader getting recognized or this one volunteer getting recognized. Our thought has to just be, we just want the gospel to go forth.
And whatever happens and whoever gets honored, so be it. That's in the Lord's hands. We just want to do our part in spreading the gospel message.
[3:02] And that's what we see here in verses 12 to 18. The advance of the gospel, even though Paul finds himself limited in his freedom.

He's under house arrest, chained to a guard at all times. The way it would work is by custom, you would have a soldier who would be chained to Paul under house arrest.
And those soldiers would change about every six hours. And so that meant Paul never had any escape. Paul never had any privacy.
Imagine being chained to somebody 24 hours a day. And that's awful. This isn't just about loss of freedom.
This is about loss of everything essentially. And yet the Lord was with him. He's endured a couple of years in jail.
[4:03] He's endured a shipwreck. And here he is now again under house arrest. This church at Philippi sends a gift to Paul via Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus is going to give a gift to Paul.

He's going to encourage him. And he's going to bring a report to him about the church and how they are doing. And here in verses 12 to 18, we find this amazing paradox.
If you were God, I don't know that it would ever dawn on our minds if we were making these kinds of decisions to say, let's take the most bold, courageous, influential person on planet earth and let's limit his freedom.
That seems so strange to us, doesn't it? I mean, Paul is willing to risk it all and he's willing to go and confront error. He is willing to go and invest in leaders.

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He is willing to go and plant churches. And yet, here he is in some ways sidelined. Now, in a greater sense, never sidelined because God is always doing more than we know.
[5:14] So, just know this. That when you go through something and you say, this doesn't make sense to me, or this isn't even fair, or this doesn't seem logical, or I don't understand what God is doing, or I don't know why God is allowing this, all those kinds of things, just be reminded of Paul's life and know, God is always at work.

And it's not your name that should be on the forefront of your mind. The question is just this, is the gospel message going forward?
And even if you don't understand how God can use this trial or this season in your life, just be reminded this is always what God does. He's always at work in ways beyond our comprehension.
That's the first thing I want you to notice here is look at the text. God is always working in more ways than you can see. Verse 12, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.
So it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.
[6:41] God is always working in more ways than you can see. Paul longs to see his friends, but more than that, he longs for the gospel message to go forward.

Paul was hindered, but the gospel was not. Paul was in chains, but the gospel message was not.
In fact, somehow in God's providence, in spite of what's happening to Paul, the gospel is advancing.
That's the word in verse 12. What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.
That word advance is an interesting word. In the original text, it's a compound word.
So it's made up of two parts, and that word translated as advance comes from two words. It means before and to cut. It was a picture of an army that was trying to advance and make their way against their enemy, and they came across some kind of a thick place that they had to cut a path.
[7:54] It's the idea of looking in front of you, before you, and having to cut or to chop a path.
That's the word translated here. That what has happened to me has served to advance the gospel.

We're chopping, we're cutting a path where there seems to be no path. Which tells us, church, that we should expect that ministry work is going to be hard.
We should expect it's going to take our greatest effort. We should expect there's going to be opposition. But we don't use any of those realities as an excuse to quit.
We keep working. We keep laboring. We keep studying. We keep discipling. And you may sometimes, in the ministry you're doing, feel like, man, I feel like I'm just out here trying to cut and hack a path to take one step forward.
Well, that's exactly how the gospel goes forth. But no matter our circumstances, God is always doing more than we can see. Paul's life and his ministry itself is not the focus.
[9:05] The focus is on the gospel because Paul is extendable, expendable, but not extendable, he's expendable. But the gospel goes forth.

And we have to serve with such a mentality that says, we love what we do, we appreciate every day, every opportunity, but our name is not the most important.
It's his name. And our lives are expendable because here's the reality, whenever a faithful believer in Christ dies and goes to glory, whenever a faithful pastor dies and goes to glory, the ministry does not stop.
The gospel does not stop. It goes forward. And that doesn't mean that the individuals aren't important. We ought to care and love and support and respect each other.
What it does mean, though, is there is no human circumstance that ever stops the advance of the gospel. And so with great joy and with great fervency, we press on.
[10:16] And we've got to make sure that we care about the right things and that we don't grow weary in doing what is right. I want to encourage those of you who have been serving for years and years and years, and maybe now because of health, maybe because of family responsibilities, maybe because of any kinds of struggles, maybe you can't do exactly what you used to do, and you may struggle with that, and you may think to yourself that you're just not as valuable to the kingdom as you used to be, and you may be frustrated that you can't physically do all that you used to could do.

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Listen, Paul isn't free in Philippians 1 to do everything physically he wanted to do either. But through him, the gospel goes forth. And the same is true for you.
The gospel goes forth. So don't be discouraged because of things in your life that maybe aren't exactly how you wish they were.
Don't be discouraged when circumstances are such that you feel limited from what you would love to do. Just know and trust the Lord is always at work doing more than you know.
Now specifically, how is that happening? Verse 13, So that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.
[11:45] So Paul says that here I am under house arrest, and yet in spite of those circumstances, the gospel goes forth. Now how is it going forth?

And he says it's happening because the whole imperial guard is hearing about Christ. Who's the imperial guard? Well, it's a group that originally started about three decades before the birth of Christ by Caesar Augustus.
And in time, that group of soldiers grew to about 10,000 hand-picked troops. And their job was to provide strength and to protect against opposition.
That number increased through the years. It got as many as 16,000 who were a part of that. In time, this group became the security and the bodyguard, so to speak, for the emperor.
These were men who had great power, men who had great influence, and these are the ones who are there chained to Paul. How would Paul ever get access to these influential men?
[13:05] They wouldn't have wanted to come here and preach. They wouldn't have signed up for his Bible study. They wouldn't have agreed to come to a discipleship group.

And so, in God's providence, he has Paul put under house arrest where every day through a rotation, these men would be chained to Paul.
And true, Paul has no freedom or escape. Also true, these men can't get away from him either. They're hearing every prayer.
Paul was able to have visitors and talk with them. They're hearing those gospel conversations. And while it's true, Paul can't leave.
It's also true when Paul starts evangelizing to them, they have nowhere to flee. And Paul said the gospel goes forth. He said, I have access to a congregation I would have never had access to before.
[14:11] the imperial guard is coming to me. They're chaining themselves to me. And so, in six hour shifts, I can teach them the gospel.

And they're going to hear me pray. And they're going to hear me dictate the letters I'm writing that are going out. And they're going to be a captive audience to his preaching. In God's providence, the work goes forward.
The gospel marches on. And who would have ever thought that by putting Paul under house arrest, that it was going to actually serve to advance the gospel.
But that's exactly what is happening. In fact, just turn to the right at the very end of the letter, chapter 4, this one little sentence that may seem to be of no consequence.
I actually find quite interesting. Verse 21, greet every saint in Christ Jesus. the brothers who are with me greet you. Look at verse 22. And all the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.
[15:18] How did he get access to them? How did he get a chance to build a friendship with them? How did they ever know to find out about the church of Philippi?

Here's why. Because while under house arrest, God was doing more than anybody else could imagine or see. And that's true for you as well.
He says back to chapter 1, verse 13, my imprisonment is for Christ. That speaks in both that he is under house arrest because of what he's preaching, but he's also in prison for Christ.
He's in prison for Christ's glory. Even the circumstance that's come upon him is for Christ. And can I just remind you, congregation, everything you go through, everything you endure is an opportunity for you to be a light for Christ.
And it may not be the circumstance you would have wished for, and it may not be the situation that you expected to be in, but wherever you find yourself, you're there for Christ.
[16:29] Be a light for Christ. Be a spokesman for Christ. Be an example of Christ for the people who are around you. Paul has been taken captive, and yet, because of the mercy and providence of

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God, he is living in true freedom.

We know some of Paul's circumstances, but you know what you don't see here? You don't see complaining. You don't see arguing. you see joyful ministry.
And I want to challenge and encourage every one of you this morning, whatever your life circumstance, be faithful in joyful ministry. You've really got two choices in life.
You can look at your circumstances and say, this is hard, this is hurtful, this is unfair, they're getting these blessings, they're getting these opportunities, whatever it may be.
You can go through life looking that way, living like that, or you can say, you know what, whatever circumstance I find myself in, this is under the providence of God, and I'm going to joyfully serve right where I am.
[17:48] God is always working in more ways than we can see. The second thing I want you to see from verse 14 is that others are always benefiting from your ministry in more ways than you can see.

Not only is God working in more ways than you can see, others are benefiting from what's happening in more ways than you can see. Verse 14, Paul says that his suffering is making others courageous.
His circumstances are emboldening the hearts and the minds of other people. And what Paul has to understand and what we have to learn from his example is that what's happening to Paul is not just about him.
It's about how the Lord is using him in the lives of other people. Then when we focus only on our circumstances, we will inevitably be focused on ourselves.
But when we focus on the opportunities that exist, we're going to be focused on serving and blessing others. And that's what we have to learn from this. Others are benefiting from what Paul is enduring because Paul is not focused on himself, he's focused on Christ and how he can serve others.
[19:21] So even in the midst of house arrest, the word goes forth and other people see what Paul is facing without fear, then they say, that's how I want to live.

And so look, I know every one of us in this church, in this room this morning, we'd rather be a faithful example of how do you handle great success?
How do you handle great riches? How do you handle everything working out for you? How could you be a good example of how to handle everything being great? We'd rather have that. Here's the reality though.
The things that are going to strengthen the faith of those around you will be this. How do you handle adversity? How do you handle things that are hard? How do you handle persecution?
How do you handle things that come at you that are difficult? How do you handle things that come at you that are unjust or cruel or unfair? Can you retain your joy in Christ? Can you make much of Christ, whatever you're facing, whatever the season is, and if you can do that, people will see how you're living and who you're trusting and it's going to give them strength and it's going to make their faith grow.
[20:33] And that's how the gospel goes forth. So if you find yourself in a hard situation, you ought to train your brain and train your heart to think, you know what, I'll bet God's using this, not just for me, I bet He's using this for other people.

I bet the Lord is putting me through this trial by design and on purpose because He's doing more than I can see so that I can help other people more than I can know.
Church, let's be faithful. Too many times we see life as, you know, we're doing ministry, we're doing kingdom work, and now here comes the trial and now we kind of are on the sidelines or on the trial and once we get this all sorted out, then we reenter the game and we go back into kingdom work. friends, that trial, that season of suffering, that season of persecution, that season of loss, whatever it may be in your life, that is your ministry. God's doing more than you can see.
And He's strengthening the faith of people more than you can know. People are benefiting from Paul's struggles. They're watching how He suffers.
[21:53] They're watching His joy increase even while His freedoms go away. They're watching His trust in the Lord continue to grow even while He's not in the circumstances He would most prefer.

And through it all, they're watching God faithfully at work in all things for His glory.

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What I want us to understand is that we have to come to the place where our only concern is the name of Christ and the advancement of the gospel.
We'll look at the next paragraph next week, but just follow along with me in verse 15. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.
The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. Verse 18. What then?
[23:09] What a great question. He says, I've lost my freedom. So what? What then?

He says there's people over here who are, what they're doing is they're saying that he is suffering because he's being punished by God. There are people who are looking at what Paul's going through and trying to take advantage of what's happened to lie about him, to make up things about him that aren't true, to try to hurt his reputation and Paul says, what then?
So what? The only thing he's worried about and concerned with is as the gospel goes forth. He knows he's expendable. It's not his life. It's not his name. That's not what this all hinges on.
This is all about the gospel going forward. So he says, what then? So what? You take away my freedom? So what? People over here are trying to injure me?
So what? Group over here is lying about me? So what? He says, what then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.
[24:23] So if you wonder, how can Paul be so trusting in the providence of God when circumstances seem so bad, it's because his joy is found in seeing the gospel go forth.

no matter what happens to him. We'll look at verses 15 to 18 next, Lord's Day. But would you consider with me, could you say, no matter your circumstances, what then?
doesn't mean we don't hurt, doesn't mean we don't grieve, doesn't mean we don't care, it just means that nothing distracts us from the most important thing in the world, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ going forward.
Other churches abandon the gospel, people will preach the gospel. People defect and leave and abandon the faith, we'll grieve and mourn and weep over that, but we'll stay faithful.
The world turns against us, what then? We'll be faithful. That's not the question of or the sentiment of someone who doesn't care.
[25:56] You read the gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and you'll see Jesus cares deeply about what's happening to people around him, but it doesn't deter him from being faithful.

You read the epistles and Paul feels deep affection, we've talked about that already in chapter 1, deep affection for the people he's serving, but the people he's serving are not the ultimate audience.
Christ is. So what then? You're at school and you're staying for Christ, somebody mocks you, so what?
You're dating someone and you love Christ so much they don't want to be a part of it and they break up? So what? People at your office don't talk to you and don't include you because they know that you stand for Christ and they want to ignore you?
What then? It doesn't mean those things don't hurt. It just means these things are never excuses to stop being faithful faithful. Because the only reason those kinds of things would stop us from being faithful is if we were so consumed with ourselves that if we lost some standing in somebody's eyes then we would lose our joy and if that's the case it's because our name was the preeminent thought in our mind but if it's the name of Christ and if it's the advancement of the gospel we say what verse 18 says what then only that in every way whether in pretense or in truth Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice Lord may you give us a heart that longs to be faithful Lord I pray this morning for every believer in this sanctuary that they would love your word care for your gospel and seek to faithfully proclaim it
[28:18] I pray Lord for anyone in this sanctuary who is not a believer that as they came here this morning could not honestly say that they belong to you and knew you or loved you that could not honestly say that the things of Christ is their greatest joy that even today to the proclamation of your word that you would soften their heart break down their barriers and show them how glorious your son is grace I pray Lord that anyone in this sanctuary this morning who does not know Christ as savior even this moment would repent confessing their sin and find salvation granted to them by the Holy Spirit I pray as a church that we would be faithful no matter what and we would not be discouraged or deterred from anything you have called us to do and given us to do but with joy and

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with a love for Christ we would do over and over and over what you called us to do even if hacking away through the brush that we would be found faithful to do what you've given to us we love you and thank you for this church the sweet place you've given to us to do the work that you've called us to do in Christ's name amen

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