

Sermon preached by Rev Tom Halls at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral,
Sydney on Wednesday 29th November 2006. Reading: Phil:1:12-18
Topic: "The Good News is Getting Out"

12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. 15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice

The "Brethren" (v12) addressed here are "the saints [followers of Jesus]...in Christ...in Philippi..." (v1)

Paul was especially thankful to God (v3) for their "fellowship in the gospel" (v5) and their confidence in God concerning the future (v6)

He takes up the challenge of his imprisonment in Rome and its effects on the believers in Philippi.

"I want you to know" (v12), that God is not limited by man's restriction. Such knowledge about God and each other is the basis of spiritual progress. He looks for a deepening relationship with the Lord, the Life-giver and with those to whom he imparts life.

1 MOVING FORWARD IS WHAT MATTERS (1:12 - 14)

The first startling claim Paul makes about his imprisonment is that "My circumstances have driven forward the cause of the Gospel." (v12). Such progress is not what might be expected from the restriction of a prison cell. Prison walls and bars cannot restrain the Gospel.

(i) "I am seen to be imprisoned for Christ" (v13)

Throughout the garrison all the Roman soldiers know that Paul, a Roman citizen born in Tarsus, is there because of his preaching and the resultant upheaval it caused in the empire. The Capital was buzzing with the news. An apostle [sent one] of Jesus Christ, the crucified Galilean preacher had been arrested for proclaiming that Jesus had risen to life again and would soon return to rule the world. The whole matter would take time to unravel because Paul had exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar.

Clare and I have a friend whom we call Peggy. She has always had a burden to take the Gospel to China, but the doors have been shut to that activity since the communist take-over in 1947. Peggy used her skills as a doctor to undertake research within a special field of interest, and having qualified in the West, applied to continue her studies in China. She was only permitted to stay for a maximum of six weeks at a time in accommodation shared with other students, so the Lord gave her a new set of students every six weeks; ample opportunity to share the Gospel with new contacts!

Courage in his convictions and acceptance of the cost of discipleship ensured that Paul's message about the risen, coming Jesus would ascend from the depths of his prison cell and echo around the capital.

(ii) "Most of the brethren have taken encouragement from my imprisonment." (v14)

A second benefit of Paul's being arrested and held in detention for preaching was that Christians in the city began "to speak the Word of God fearlessly". This was no flash in the pan. They were proclaiming with "growing boldness". Paul's physical restriction in chains released the believers' courage causing "most" of them to speak up; not occasionally, but more often.

This is a clear example of the principle enshrined in Romans chapter 8 and verse 28.

"All things [good and bad, comfortable and painful...] work together for good to them that love God, because they are called according to his purpose".

2 MOTIVATION IS NOT EVERYTHING (1:15 - 17)

Paul discerned that some preaching was not undertaken for the highest motives.

"Some preach Christ" ["the Gospel" (v5); "the Word of God" (v14)] out of envy

(i) "Out of envy, because they like to quarrel " (v15)

Men of Paul's reputation gain enemies as well as friends. Envy of his supposed importance blinded these enemies to the discernment love gives. They were proclaiming Christ not out of concern for the lost, but in the hope of stirring up trouble for Paul during his imprisonment . (v17)

Blinded by envy they did not know that God had chained up his servant with a definite purpose. Far from being defeated, the man they opposed was acting in the centre of God's will for his life. The apostle's imprisonment guaranteed that every citizen would hear of his presence in the Empire's capital. (v13) It had the added effect of encouraging "most brethren" to proclaim the Gospel with growing boldness. (v14)

(ii) "Others do it with good will." (v15)

Men motivated by love " know I am here for the defence of the Gospel." (v16) Love discerns truth. Imprisonment is not defeat.

We all know the name of that valiant lady Aung San Suu, who was elected to lead the nation of Burma, but has remained under house arrest for years, having never been allowed by military dictators to take Office. Pioneer missionary to Burma, Adoniram Judson suffered similarly. Consigned to a vermin-ridden cell in chains for years he experienced indescribably evil punishment for preaching the Gospel. When rescued by the British army he refused to leave the country to which God had brought him as a "prisoner of Christ". He rejoiced that people could hear Good News.

3 MEN ARE HEARING ABOUT CHRIST (1:18)

Paul wrote to the Philippians to encourage them about his situation. They needed to understand that whether rightly motivated or otherwise, believers were proclaiming the Risen Jesus - "in every way" [v18] This was yet another cause of joy in Paul's life.

The apostle proclaims the Gospel with joy, just as he prays with joy, because of his thankful remembrance of the Philippians' loyal fellowship in the Gospel. Circumstances, even the confines of a prison cannot diminish his rejoicing or take away his resolve to preach Christ at all times.