

Phil 1:15-18

Intro:

We have spent some time getting started in the book of Philippians, and this week, I want us to look at a passage that has, honestly, given me a lot of trouble in terms of sermon writing. The book of Philippians is a theologically dense book, and while Paul opens this letter with such positive affirmation, and encouragement for those who are suffering, the passage for today seems to me to come a bit out of right field.

It's been a very difficult passage for me to prepare for, but I really want to preach here because I identify many of my own struggles here, and as a pastor, I want to challenge you to not only struggle with this text, but to take on Paul's attitude when it comes to ministry, other people in ministry, and even when it comes to your own desire for ministry.

Tran:

If you remember, Paul was in prison when he wrote this book, not for any crime he has committed, but because he confesses Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Lord of all. He knew that his imprisonment was "for Christ." But, there were people who were perhaps jealous of the success of Paul's ministry. There were evidently bad feelings that people had towards Paul; perhaps people tearing apart at the work he had done in ministry to the Gentiles, or for the Church in general.

The truth is, we don't know exactly who Paul was writing about when he wrote this section of the book, but his vagueness didn't matter. We don't necessarily need to know, but we understand that criticism was thick towards Paul. I do find it interesting that Paul did not mention names, but I would speculate he knew who was hurting him. After all, Paul had written specifically about people in the past, in other letters. But not this time. Perhaps that was truly revealing the grace and compassion in his heart.

Well, let's go to the text, and see what it is that Paul is saying to the church at Philippi.

PHILIPPIANS 1:15-18

I. Christ is being preached! (v.15)

It's interesting to me that the first part of this statement is not that some are misrepresenting Christ, or teaching a false Gospel, but that Christ is being preached! It is setting the tone for what is to come, the particular critique he gives, but he makes it clear on the front end that Christ is being preached!!!

That is so important to remember, and to be thankful for! The Gospel of Jesus, the Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 4 – Jesus went about Galilee preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God), the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus was being proclaimed, and Paul made sure that that reality was at the forefront!

Think about our criticisms, we always want to critique what people do and rarely first listen to what they say! We can't hear that James River is preaching Jesus because we're busy criticizing their building and their fireworks. We can't hear that New Life is

preaching Jesus because it's easier to take offense that they gave away \$1,000, "making other churches look bad."

I love the way Paul begins this address, recognizing that Christ is being preached, that Christ's Kingdom shall prevail, in spite of the heart of man, the Gospel is being preached!

II. Paul reveals two types of people. (v.16-17)

a. Good Hearted

b. Envious

He describes the heart behind the different types of people that he knows are preaching the Gospel of Jesus, specifically as it relates to his ministry and his imprisonment. If you notice, he mentions them both twice, then qualifies them a little. Those that preach from good will, they preach out of love, and knowing that Paul is in prison – it's as if they sense the urgency of the mission and are compelled to partner with Paul in that mission. They love Paul, they love the ministry, they love Jesus. So, not to make Paul look good or bad, they preach because of their love of God and others. Remember also, that Paul said in v. 14 that his imprisonment has served to embolden some of the brothers.

But the heart of those who are envious, he goes on to say that they preach Christ (again, remember that he affirms them at least for that) without sincerity and wanting to afflict Paul! Why on Earth would anyone want to afflict Paul, a laborer for the Gospel who is in prison (while they obviously aren't) for the ministry of the Gospel... I just don't get that! Craig Keener notes that Jewish teachers allowed that serving God from impure motives was better than not serving him at all. Even still, it makes the work of ministry really tough when your worst critics are your partners in ministry!!!

But we do that too, don't we? We like to qualify our own opinions and our own ministries, sometimes by preaching Christ through the lens of degrading others! It was true in the music scene when I was studying music. We applaud one another's efforts, but we judge and critiqued them based on why we can do certain things better, rather than applauding progress or good work!

It never ceases to amaze me how often Christian ministers, particularly Pentecostals take jabs at other ministers, or other denominations. You may get it in a side comment from the pulpit or in a staff meeting like, "We have the best thing going in town!" or "We have the moving of the Spirit, unlike the Baptists..." (There always seems to be room to diss the Baptists., isn't there?)

I recently listened to an audio book called "Christianity in Crisis" by Hank Hanegraff, and the book is laden with sharp criticism against many of the TV preachers we all have come to love to hate. And while some of the theology put out by some of these guys is flat out heresy, there is an element of Jesus being preached, and in that Paul said he would rejoice. I think Paul would have honored that they are preaching Christ (to some degree anyway).

So the 2 types of hearts are revealed by Paul in this passage, but he doesn't rail on either one, he just puts it out there that both types of people are preaching Christ.

III. Rejoice that Christ is Preached! (v.18)

It's so great how Paul bookends this brief passage with the same idea as at the beginning, CHRIST IS PREACHED – that is the ultimate goal, because God uses the preaching and proclamation of Jesus to change the lives of the everyone, to save the world! I am so encouraged by the grace of God to use all types of people, all variances of theology, and even the ignorant among us to proclaim his Gospel and change the world! We need to rejoice in that, not criticize it!

Story: Trinidad, Missions Trip, prayer for healing for guy with a bad tooth... I didn't know anything about the theology of healing, or the Theodicy of why God does and doesn't heal at various times, but Christ was preached and that kid was healed and converted to faith in Jesus, leaving his crew! I was as ignorant as they come, but God used me, and I REJOICE IN THAT!!!

Conclusion:

So what do we do with this text in our personal lives? How does this passage affect us as students preparing for the ministry, as professionals in various fields, and even as pastors and leaders in the Church?

1. Assess and guard our heart – Are we of the opinion of Paul that we are to Rejoice that Christ is being preached? Are we envious of others, other ministries, etc? Do we look critically and jealously at the work of Jesus through others, because we've attained a level of understanding and knowledge that excuses our arrogance?

We have to guard our heart! In this passage, we see Paul addressing the heart of various people, himself, the envious, and the good-hearted. Which of the three best describes you?

I want so badly to model the heart of Paul, that rejoices in the preaching of Jesus, and doesn't look for weaknesses for the sake of building myself up. I want to celebrate the things that other churches are doing, and the Baptists, and not look through my own insecurities as a way of criticizing them!

So, we need to assess and guard our heart, particularly from negativity!

2. Preach Christ! Share Jesus with others, in spite of your inadequacies!

Recently, a lady had a question about the Spirit-baptism and she prefaced her question with, "I don't have a doctorate in theology, but..." You know what? God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise! We don't have to know all the answers, or know all of the theology to tell someone that Jesus is alive! And to tell someone that Jesus is the savior of the world and desires to be the Lord of everyone!

Sometimes we get the sense that we don't know enough or have it all together, but preach Jesus – in your job, in your home, in your neighborhood, in your church! When there are questions or challenges, walk through the challenges with someone! But don't disqualify yourself from sharing because you feel inadequate, or because you have a negative heart! Preach Jesus, and in that the apostle Paul would take joy, and I believe God will too!!