

WE CAN'T LOSE
Philippians 1:12-26

Intro: It was called David against Goliath. The Hillsdale Falcons senior players had never won a single game when they were in Junior High but on December 6, in the bitter cold in Canton, they were meeting the Marion Local Flyers for the Division VII (7) State Championship. It was a huge honor for the Hillsdale boys – they had been awesome all through the season. But people didn't give them much hope against Marion Local – you see, Marion had won their last 63 games. Marion couldn't lose. And then, the game started and Marion won 74-0 – which, in my humble opinion showed a definite lack of class on their part. Now Marion Local's record stands at 64 victories in a row and four straight state championships. It would appear that, indeed, as long as they play in Division VI, at least, they can't lose.

But they will. They will lose sometime. Sooner or later.

The same cannot be said for Christ Followers. We can't lose!

Our text points this out. Listen:

(Read Philippians 1:12-26)

Paul was a loser – in the eyes of the world. He was in a jail awaiting a meeting with Caesar, which he had asked for, had a right to, and it would happen eventually. Until then he was imprisoned by an elite guard – which he describes in verse 13 as “the imperial guard.” These were no slouches. Paul's prison was probably a house he rented with his own funds. From the viewpoint of the world, Paul was a loser.

But the truth was, Paul was on a winning track and he couldn't lose.

Let's see how. First . . .

God never wastes time

- Paul was literally in chains. Yes, he rented the house, and yet he was chained to a Roman soldier. But this was a good thing – for Paul anyway. In Williams Barclay's words, “*The bonds destroyed the barriers.*” Paul may have been a prisoner, but the soldiers guarding him, especially the one handcuffed to him, were a captive audience – they had to listen to Paul ALL. THE. TIME.
- Yes, it was always true about Paul and now it was truer than ever, everybody around Paul knew about Jesus. It was unavoidable, they were hearing about Jesus all the time.
- Paul had almost certainly heard from his friends in the Philippian Church that they were concerned about his situation. After all they had seen him and Silas escape from prison by the power of God, so they were no doubt surprised to see that Paul was imprisoned in Rome. But Paul didn't want them to think that it was a setback, instead, it was a furtherance of the Gospel – in his words, *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel* Philippians 1:12
- Paul doesn't dwell on his problems and his sufferings and he doesn't want his friends to either. He assures them that God didn't waste Paul's time during his Roman imprisonment and for that reason, Paul wasn't going to waste God's time while he's in his imprisonment either.
- David Guzik points out that “*Paul didn't need everything to be easy and set in order to be fruitful.*” Instead he was confident, even in his chains. This proves you can't keep a good man down – that is if you're a Christ-Following man like Paul – you can't lose.
- And then Paul points out that . . .

The Gospel is not a contest

- Paul was only concerned that Christ was preached and in that he rejoiced. But for other preachers, it seems not so much – they wanted the glory. In verses 15-17, it becomes very apparent that others, because of rivalry and selfish ambition, like the fact that Paul was imprisoned because it would help their reputation to grow. They are pressing the “advantage” and perhaps the Philippians have heard about it or at least Paul has received word of it, but he says it doesn't matter what their motivation is, just so the gospel is preached. Just so it is the true gospel, that is.
- For Paul, all that mattered was that Christ was preached. Archibald Hunter says that “*It's better to have an imperfect gospel than none at all.*” FB Meyer writes, “*It was a matter of comparative indifference to Paul. What happened to himself didn't matter so long as the gospel progressed. Because the extension of the Gospel meant the growing glory of Christ.*” For Paul it was all about God's glory!

- And besides, God will sort it out. Guzik gives this warning that I believe would resonate with Saint Paul, *"If you preach the true gospel, I don't care what your motives are. If your motives are bad, God will deal with you—but at least the gospel was preached. But if you preach a false gospel, I don't care how good your motives are. You're dangerous and must stop preaching your false gospel."* And then he adds, *"Good motives don't excuse your false message."*
- The Good News is not a competition – if it that were true it wouldn't be Good news. So Paul's thinking is that being in prison was not hindering the gospel, so neither could be the wrong motives of some opportunistic preachers. Is God's work still getting done? Than that is cause for rejoicing.
- Paul's only motivation is . . .

Christ be magnified in my life or in my death

- . . . *for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.* Philippians 1:19-20. Paul was never too big a man to remember that he needed the prayers of his friends. He needed them praying and he wanted them to pray that he never brought shame to the Gospel.
- He would not be cowed by his circumstances. Barclay points out that *"Paul's hope was that he would never be shamed into silence, either by cowardice or a feelings of ineffectiveness."* To speak the truth with boldness is not only the privilege of the Christ Follower; it is also his/her duty.
- Charles Ellicott wrote of this passage, that Paul is saying *"My body will be the theater in which Christ's glory is displayed."* To which Barclay responds, *"Once we have chosen Christ, by our life and conduct, we bring either glory or shame to him."* It was Paul's privilege to suffer on Christ's behalf – not because he was a masochist but because he was prevailing with the Good News of Jesus Christ.
- F. B. Meyer writes, *"Clearly, then our dress, accent, and behavior should betray us as strangers and pilgrims who can well endure the discomfort of the inn or the troublous experiences of the place of our sojourn."* Being a Christ Follower is not a cushy experience.
- It's like this, even though he is in prison awaiting trial before Caesar, as he had requested, Paul had confidence that he was in the center of God's will. He knew God was not punishing him through the adversity he had experienced. As I said earlier, God doesn't waste time, he uses us wherever we are.
- Learn from Paul. His message was not to promote himself or even to protect himself, all he wanted to do was glorify Jesus Christ not matter what the outcome – he knew he couldn't lose. I like how Guzik puts it, *"It is easy for us to dictate to God how he can and cannot glorify himself in our lives. Paul wisely left all that up to God."*
- Finally, Paul asks . . .

Should I go or should I stay?

- Actually he said this, *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.* Philippians 1:21-24
- It's like this, Christ is the beginning of life, that is, eternal life, Christ is living life as we walk through it, which is what Paul was doing. He was imprisoned, yet he was still living for Jesus. And Jesus was the end of life too. He's the beginning and the end.
- We can't lose. This is the promise here in Paul's words
 - Death is simply moving on to the next place – which is the best place – I mean beyond our imagination!
 - Death is casting off the ropes and sailing away to eternity. The language here is actually of a ship leaving port. In verse 23 Paul tells the Philippians that he's torn. It is his desire to depart and be with Christ, because that's far better. The picture here is of a ship being untied and cast off from its mooring and moving out to sea. The sea captain has been at sea for a long voyage and he's ready to get home he was so eager to depart. But unlike the sea captain our voyage won't be long. Spurgeon put it into poetic form,

*“The sail is spread; the soul is launched upon the deep.
 How long will be its voyage?
 How many wearying winds must beat upon the sail ere it shall be reefed in the port of peace?
 How often shall that soul be tossed upon the waves before it comes to the sea that knows no storm.
 Oh tell it, tell it everywhere; yon ship that has just departed is already at its haven.
 It did but spread its sail and it was there.”*

- We will be here, and then we will be there (Tell about Howard, “I’m kind of looking forward to that.”)
- Death is the solution to all our problems. Think about it! My friend, mentor and boss when I was Associate Pastor at our Manheim, PA church absolutely loved the old hymn *Oh That Will Be Glory*. He was almost rapturous as he sang it. The first verse of that song addresses the fact that we will be trouble free in heaven. Listen:

*When all my labors and trials are o’er,
 And I am safe on that beautiful shore,
 Just to be near the dear Lord I adore
 Will through the ages be glory for me.
 O that will be glory for me,
 Glory for me, glory for me;
 When by His grace I shall look at His face,
 That will be glory, be glory for me.*

Conclusion: It was glory for Paul! In verse 20 he talked about the eager expectations he has to be with Jesus. He can't lose. It's a win – win! He knew, and so should we, that death is not a defeat to the Christ follower—it's merely graduation to glory, a net gain for the Christian. In other words, you can't lose.

- Paul's death for the cause of Christ would glorify Jesus, and that was gain
- Paul's death meant that he would be in the immediate presence of the Lord and that was gain.
- Paul was confident that God intended him to be fruitful, regardless of where he was free or imprisoned. It was no doubt in Paul's mind that this was God's plan for him. So if he lived, his life would be fruitful. If he died, he would be with God. That's our promise too!!!! WE CAN'T LOSE!!! Amen.

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