

The Good News Goes On

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[0 : 00] This is a sermon from King's Church West, William. So guys, we're going to be continuing our series, the early stages of our series in Philippians.

! And we are looking today at what happens to Paul when he is imprisoned and when he is set back. And how on earth does he cope with that? And what's his vision in the middle of that, of what God is doing?

Now, just before we start that, let me tell you something. I love to mess a little bit with the students that I teach in high school, right? So casually, usually in the first kind of lesson or two of meeting them, I will just casually say this phrase, which is, and when I was in prison, and honestly, probably about three quarters, they're teenagers, so about a quarter usually, half asleep, but about three quarters of them will be like, what?

And they'll sit there and they'll have this kind of quiet conversation about, like, what do you think he did? Like, what, what, like, how long do you think he was in for? And there's usually, there's usually about a quarter of them that are like, nah, he's messing with us.

Like, and they can spot it pretty quickly. But, but at least half the class by this point are thinking, is he like an axe murderer or something? And so I've, I have been in prison, three different prisons, at least five times.

[1 : 21] I can tell you I've never been arrested in my entire life. I'm, you know, I didn't do anything illegal to get me there. It's just that I've had the privilege of visiting people in prison, and I've visited some family, my nephew in prison, at least on one occasion.

And, and, I have to tell you, I find it pretty miserable, actually. Every time, every time I've been in, I've often gone in with a sense of the hope of God in me, and calling me to go and visit someone, or to be with someone in that situation.

And there is not a single time that I've been in where I've thought, oh, this is all right. I mean, I have thought, could God call me to prison chaplaincy? And I'm really grateful he hasn't, if I'm totally honest with you. But, but I have, I have usually the bit that gets me is the moment the doors start to shut behind you.

Okay. And there's that sense of being properly not in control. Like, because, and actually, every time I've been in, even when I've had to kind of sort of a chaplain's past to kind of wander around a bit, or on one occasion had this really dodderly old guy with this massive bunch of ancient looking keys guiding me through Balini prison, which I think was probably the scariest time.

So, like, they've trusted you with the keys to the prison? What's going on? And even then, there's a sense in which you're not, I wasn't free to leave. Even if he'd wanted to, he, he wasn't free to go where he wanted. He was rigidly timed where we could go in the prison at what time.

[2 : 38] And, and, and for me, it just brought up, even in a modern prison, none of them were horrendous at all. Even in modern prison, there was a real sense of, man, my rights are not usual.

They're not, I'm not totally free right now. And I'm not one of these guys that's locked up. But there's a sense of restriction. And it doesn't compare at all to what you hear of Paul.

So in his lifetime, he's imprisoned multiple times, sometimes under house arrest, at least on one occasion in, as Mike described last week, a dungeon, a miserable kind of, even the very light that he could use, restricted.

It is, it can be a, it is a miserable place. And particularly when we hear from Paul, that sense of restriction of where he can go, what he can do, who he's allowed to see.

At best, it's really limited. At worst, it's completely taken away until he ultimately is killed. So what we're going to do is we're going to look at Paul in prison. We're going to look over the sort of, we're going to set the scene and understand that a bit as to what's going on for him.

[3 : 41] And then we're going to see that, weirdly, what's going on for Paul is actually a theme we see time and time again in the kingdom of God, which is that when we're set back, we see God move forwards.

And we're going to see that in a few different situations. But particularly, Paul's very, very aware of it, that when we're set back, the Lord is often moving his kingdom forwards and often actually using us when we're most restricted.

So we're going to set the scene. We're going to see that pattern in the kingdom. And we're going to, if you're someone who likes alliteration, we're going to savour three different promises the Lord makes. And then I'm going to say, so what for us?

What does it mean for us? So let's have a look at the passage. So we're in Philippians 1, and we're reading from verse 12, and I'm going to read down to 18. I'm going to major on the first half, but we'll read the first, 12 to 18.

And I'll give you a second to find that if you want to. So it says this in verse 12.

[4 : 48] It says, It's true that some preach Christ out of envy or rivalry.

And ours, ours goodwill. We'll have to do something from love, knowing that I'm put here to defend the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely supposing they can stir up trouble for me when I'm in chains.

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.

I kind of imagine, just looking back to the lyrics of that song that Luke led us in, When I call on your name, you answer. When I fall, you're there by my side.

You delivered me out of darkness. I stand in the hope in your life. And having read these verses, I could kind of imagine Paul standing in prison, however dark, however restricted, able to sing that song.

[6 : 10] But he's not free. And ultimately, he's not rescued from imprisonment. He seems to be for a bit. And then he's imprisoned again. But I think he's able to sing, by grace I'm free, you've rescued me, all I am is yours.

Now, obviously, you can't sing this song because it wasn't around. But he does say some very similar things. He's got a real sense of the freedom of the gospel. And he's got a real sense of his purpose because later he'll say things like, It doesn't really matter if I stay here alive or if I die to go to be with the Lord.

But Paul has got real perspective on what is going on. And what you can see that is if you look at verse 12, he says, I want you to know, brothers and sisters, what has happened has really served to advance the gospel.

Because Paul cares that people know the truth, the gospel, which is the good news announced to us that God saves sinners. That our sin doesn't have to separate us from the Lord.

That we can live with him eternally. That we can know his hope now. That we can live with purpose as Paul does in this life and for eternity. And he's able to say, I want you to know what's going on with me.

[7 : 24] I might be in chains. But actually, the whole palace guard are talking about Jesus. Like, they know that I'm locked up for Jesus. They know that the gossip out there is, yeah, he's not just another criminal who's locked up.

He's doing this. This is for Jesus. Like, Jesus is involved. I mean, how mad is that, by the way? If it's as bad as we think it could be, he's in a dungeon underground and people are gossiping.

The person they're talking about is not him locked up. It's Jesus. So there's the first thing. He's imprisoned. He's curtailed. He's stuck.

But the gospel, the good news about Jesus, it's moving around. It's freer. It's actually reaching people that probably would never have heard the gospel if he wasn't in prison. Like, who's, who's, I'm pretty certain no one's going into a prison at this point in time to say, let me go in there and tell people about Jesus.

I think they're probably saying, please don't arrest me just because I follow Jesus. But Paul's there. People are talking about Jesus. Soldiers are hearing it. Jesus is the gossip amongst the guard.

[8 : 30] And the other thing is that believers are becoming more confident in the good news. I don't know, if Mike was arrested tomorrow, how many of you are going to be like, because he talked about Jesus to a crowd of people, not for any other reason.

Okay, how many of you are going to be like, I know, I'll share Jesus even more now because look what happened to Mike. Wasn't that cute? That's not normal. That's clearly something the Holy Spirit is doing. The gospel is spreading.

His spirit's at work. And the believers see Paul locked up. And they become bolder. And they become more willing. I think they've got what Paul's got, which is a sense of the big picture of God. That his setback can in fact be the Lord moving forwards. This is a pattern we see elsewhere in Scripture.

Right? So Paul is set back. Paul has, actually just before we do that, I reckon Paul has travelled maybe somewhere in the region of 10,000 miles. Seems to be a reasonable estimate. Like, you look at his missionary journeys.

[9 : 30] You see where he went. He was not normal on the amount he travelled for a man and his time. Okay? If you, I don't know these in great length, but I did a wee bit of research and saw that we reckon he's probably got about 10,000 miles under his belt.

And at best, if he's not in a dungeon, because it's entirely possible it's an underground dungeon that he's stuck in and it's, you know, absolutely miserable. At best, it's he's under a kind of house arrest with a senior official.

He'll be now in the realm of meters. Like, he'll have a room maybe. He'll have no food provided for him, but other people having to come and help him.

Paul has gone from a man of many thousands of miles to a man of being in tiny, tiny space. And yet he knows this setback can be that the Lord is at work.

I think that's really amazing. And we see that pattern time and time again. We're seeing that briefly in Paul's life, that his imprisonment means the gospel goes further and people's confidence gets bigger.

[10 : 33] That's exactly what he's describing there. He's saying it's growth. It's growth in confidence. It's growth in number of people gossiping about Jesus. And it's not just Paul. If you think for a minute about Jesus, the cross must have looked to some like the greatest setback possible.

Jesus is announcing a new kingdom, a new future, a new hope. And here he is, betrayed. He's tried unfairly.

And he's executed. He's executed. Like there is a, you could see that and think, man, look at what happened. This guy had such promise.

He was going to change the world. And then he does exactly that. His death at a spiritual level means that we can be forgiven. We can know God. But also after that, this little bunch of people who I'm not sure we would trust much to start talking about him.

And the gospel spreads like wildfire. Now, I understand there are something like 2.6. Let's have a look at this. 2.6 billion Christians. About a third of the world's population now know Jesus.

[11 : 53] Or at least are in a kind of church that follows Jesus. Or a guy called Eric Johnson reckons. Oh, I've forgotten to write down who he works for.

He works for some American university. You have a department set aside to how the gospel has grown over the years. And who has, how many people have followed Jesus. And he reckons that we're somewhere in the realm of 10 to 15 billion people that have lived for Jesus.

It's like mind-blowing that this one guy dying on a cross could have been the end. The snuffing out of this new hope. But it's a kingdom principle that at moments that look like setback, the Lord often is doing something amazing.

Jesus is set back from some perspective. God's moved forwards. God's advanced. So we see it in Paul. I'm in prison, but the gospel is spreading. We see it in Jesus.

He is dying, but new life is available. And then we see it in this guy, Jim Elliott. Give me a hands up. Do you know Jim Elliott? Has anyone heard of this guy? This always reassures me when I know someone that you guys don't. Okay.

[13 : 00] So Jim Elliott was a missionary in the 50s. And I find his story absolutely mesmerizing. And I'm doing the very, very miniature version of it. Right. But he was a missionary to the Huarani people.

I've practiced that so many times and I still can't do it. Huarani people in Ecuador. Okay. And in the kind of late 50s. He has the most, I think, most miserable story in some ways.

Because he and his four friends, they fly in to this Ecuadorian people. They get off the plane. They go to share the gospel. And they're immediately killed.

That's it. They've trained in Bible college for many years. They have a real sense of people must know the good news of Jesus. My whole life, Jim Elliott says, is devoted to telling people about him. And he gets on a plane and it ends. That's it. You kind of think, gosh, what? I mean, talk about setback.

[14:05] There's not really a greater setback, is there? Than you've trained at Bible college and then you go and you're killed. You're not, well, unless Jesus does some unbelievable miracle, you're not coming back.

And at that point, anyway. And yet, here's the deal. Is this guy, Jim Elliott, spurred on a whole new movement of missionaries. Because people saw his sense of perspective that this life is about telling people about Jesus.

And it's a high calling and an amazing thing. And he gets off the plane. He's killed. And when this news spreads, the number of missionaries that want to go and do likewise massively increases. In fact, it turns out, I mean, his letters, his journals continue to encourage believers to trust God in the face of big, massive fear and great human sacrifice.

But again, he shows this principle that when we face, you know, he faced death. The kingdom continues to expand. There's more people feel that they want to go and tell people about Jesus.

[15:12] It turns out that eventually, a question I'd never really answered was, are these Ecuadorian, is this Ecuadorian tribe ever reached? And it turns out they were. They're the Christian movement out there now and who are following Jesus.

So his life work in that moment was done in the longer term has happened. There's a man who knew what it meant to follow Jesus.

His setback, his death, actually was used for gospel advance for more missionaries telling more people about the goodness of Jesus. Apparent defeat turned into a move forward.

I don't know about you, but in the light of someone like Jim Elliot, you think, man, that is, I mean, I think sacrifice is important, but I'm not totally sure that's how I want my life to go, do you know? But it does make me think, when my smaller plans collapse, when I'm thinking, that thing I thought would be possible hasn't happened, or that hope I had has been dashed, or that job I was applying for has fallen apart, or illness strikes, or doors close.

[16:24] Can we believe that God is still at work? Our natural perspective is that setback is failure. Paul's teaching helps us see that our restriction can be a moment for kingdom advance.

I do just want to tell you, there is absolutely zero planning in the timing between this meeting on Monday night and this preach today, just in case this seems like I'm giving us up for a disaster of meeting, and I'm like, oh well, at least we got you, at least we preloaded this.

There's no human planning in this, as far as I know. Anyway, I'm really hopeful that that's an advanced movement for us on Monday, a moment for us, sorry, on Monday, when we talk with the community again about the building here and working together to make it something really useful for us and the local community.

But see if it doesn't. What a great thing that we see here in the life of Paul. Even this restriction beyond his control, he has nothing he can do about it, is something the Lord can use for his kingdom purposes.

Now we don't get to know all those details, and mostly in the moment we don't know those things. If I think of my life in a time where something has not happened that I've wanted, or someone that I've been talking to about Jesus has just given up, I often don't get to see the great detail of that.

[17:51] But we do see this kingdom principle in Paul, in Jesus, in people like Jim Elliot, that our setbacks can be moments of a real gospel advance forward.

That's amazing. Here's three things that I think we can hold on to when we face setback. Whatever it is, however huge we're feeling that, however real it is in front of us, however real the door is that shuts, or the part of our hopes or our dreams come to an end and we don't know what God is doing. I just want to talk to you about a few promises, a few things that we can hold on to, sorry. And one of them is, the promises of God are big. The second is, our perspective is small.

And the third thing is, that he is a God who keeps his promises and we can trust him. And as I thought and prayed about this, here are some of the promises that came to mind.

Matthew, and maybe as I read these, why don't you just let them sink in a little bit and just, and in your hearts kind of think, either wow or yes, amen.

[19:02] Matthew 28, 19. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.

He's not a God who gives up on you. He's not a God who gives up on his great purpose, that people would know Jesus. He's with us. He's with us not till tomorrow.

Not just for another week or two, not even, not even a lifetime. But to the very end of the age, when it all comes together and everything is sorted, he's with us.

And I love this from Philippians 1, 6. Now, Paul is able to say this. Amazing. This guy in prison is able to say, I am confident of this.

He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ, the Christ Jesus. He promises he's with us.

[20:01] He promises he's going to continue to work in your life and through you. And in fact, that we can't really understand all that that is. You know, 1 Corinthians 2, 9.

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor the heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love him. How cool is that? You can't even, I can't even imagine.

We're kind of designed like that because his promises are big, but our perspective is small. I wonder if you've noticed how small our perspective really is, because that's my second point there, is our perspective is small.

We experience something, we have no idea how it will work out, and suddenly it feels really huge. My own heart position regularly reminds me of our children when they were tiny.

Because I often think this, when I see a kid wailing, like we were at Carlton Hill yesterday, and these poor two children were sitting in their buggy, and it looked like their dad had decided to climb the monument, and the two of them were screaming.

[21:05] Like, I mean, they were like, I think they basically thought their dad had left them forever. You know, there wasn't even a little bit of drama in terms of, it didn't feel fake, it felt like, ah, he's gone, how will it ever be okay ever again?

I mean, it just sounded like screaming, but that's what I was imagining was going on. And I remember our kids being a bit like that. The first time they experience something new that's bad, they have no perspective on, is this it forever?

Like, how bad is this problem? You know, like, you leave a, remember when they go through that, those of you who are parents, remember when you leave, they go through this weird phase where they suddenly discover there's a third dimension in the world around them, and every time you leave the room, they're like, flipping heck, they've left, oh my goodness!

You know, and it's a massive developmental stage when they realise you can leave them, and they have never realised that has been possible before. And so they have no measure for it. It's not like, this will be okay, they're just like, ah!

You know, I mean, is it just me? Are we all a bit like that? When something new and difficult happens to us, we're kind of like, how will it ever work out? I don't know. Our perspective is incredibly small.

[22:11] And, I mean, I once dabbled in investments, another thing on small perspective. I mean, by investments, I mean like a fiver, just so you know. But I logged into this kind of trend of, you know, you get these little graphs of how a fund is doing, and I opened it up, and I looked back at the last month, and it was just down all the way.

And I remember thinking, I am not putting my £5 into that investment fund. Oh my goodness. And then I zoomed out, and I was like, this fund had been on the up for years, consistently going in the right direction.

But my perspective had been, you know, this tiny bit. I've got a little example. I mean, it's exactly that, to be honest. But if I, in fact, Regan, I might get you to grab that in for me, if that's okay. If you could, our perspective's a bit like this, I think.

We tend to, yeah, hold for a sec. We just tend to see things and go, okay, I've got full vision of this. This line is kind of inconsistent. In fact, it's going down a bit. Things are not good.

And I think when it comes to the things of God, if I were Paul, I might be saying, ah, it's all really bad. But in fact, we know the Lord is, you guys, how are they, I mean, we know the truth is more like this.

[23 : 22] Oops, round mic. We know the truth is a lot more like this, that, in fact, our lives go up and down and all over the place. And in the kingdom of God, we absolutely know, if we get to the end, Mike, keep going, keep going.

We know that, okay, yeah, you can go. But ultimately, it ends really well for us, for Jesus, right?

Ultimately, one day, Revelation tells us we're going to be in glory with him.

And it is going to be, well, no, I can imagine. I know he has heard, no one can imagine how great it's going to be. It's going to be epic. But what I tend to do, and I suspect you do as well, is go for a window like this big.

The swing of history is good for you and me if we follow Jesus. Our perspective is not just tiny. If you think that the Lord, Jesus, sorry, God, three in one, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, they've been around for eternity.

So this is a rubbish demonstration. Mike should carry on going as far as he can possibly go because God's perspective is infinitely big, which means that you and my perspective is infinitely tiny.

[24 : 28] So when we face suffering, when we face setback, it's really helpful to remember he knows the beginning from the end, and he's been here so much. Pop it down. Thank you, guys. He's been here so much, he has so much greater perspective than we can possibly have.

Scripture defines it like this. It says in 1 Corinthians 13, 12, For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror. Then when the end comes, we shall see face to face.

Now I know in part, but I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. Here's the thing, when we face setback, his promises are big.

Our perspective is incredibly small. And we can trust him. We live at this beautiful moment where we get to see, we get to see what the Lord has done in Jesus on the cross, which is turning death into life, not just for Jesus.

That would be amazing in itself. But we get to be included in that. I wanted to say something like, you know, the cross is a deposit of what the Lord's able to do, but it's not. It's the greatest thing he could ever possibly do for you is send his own son to the cross so that we might be included in the good news of God.

[25 : 56] That's how we can know we can trust him. He's already paid the biggest amount he can possibly pay for your good and for my good and for his glory.

Romans 8, 32 says this, he who did not spare his own son, will he not also graciously give us all things?

His promises are big, our perspective is small, but we can trust him in our setbacks that he's able to move forward, that he's able to do what he wants to do and he's able to do good to us.

However big the setback, he sent his son as a promise that he loves us, that he'd pay the price for us to know him. He wants to give us all things.

He wants us to be caught up in his plans, giving us the greatest thing he could so that we could know in whatever happens, even into prison, that we can trust that he's able to move forward.

[27 : 07] I wonder if there are areas in which you feel chained just now or if you feel like what plans have kind of stopped or what hope you had.

Maybe it's someone you're sharing about Jesus with that's not bothered anymore. Maybe it's a future you'd hoped for that's not happening. But our role, I think, is to not just pray, Lord, get me out of here, but to say, would you use this?

God, would you use this for your advance? Use me where you've put me. Use me in the bits I don't understand. Not get me out of here, but Lord, get in here. Like, be with me in this.

See, see when we're struggling, because sometimes it's really hard to take a moment and to put it in the big picture.

I think, I think Paul does it amazingly. He's able to take his moment in prison and frame it in, look what's happening and look what the Lord might do. I might be in chains, but the gospel is free and growing.

[28 : 07] It's so exciting. He's able to do the small bit and understand it in the big purposes of God. We don't find that as easy, I suspect. And I'm just going to steal a bit of an idea from some of the Practicing the Way material for this, because I find this the most powerful prayer and I use it probably every couple of weeks, to be honest.

And what I'd like us to be able to do is to see how Jesus prayed in Gethsemane just before he went to the cross and see how healthy and good it was and how he moved from the momentary grief of seeing his death coming to the submission to the big picture of what his father God was doing. So I just want to show you that. It's really, really simple. But honestly, if I could give you one gift in prayer, well, this is it. This is one I'd love for you to have because I think it's, we regularly, I think, we regularly probably find ourselves in positions where we're going, oh my goodness, what's even happening here?

And the temptation is to kind of just shut ourselves down from the Lord and be like, I'll be faithful but I'll be kind of just not relate to him about this or I'll just find it hard to do this.

So I think what Jesus prays in Gethsemane is so, so powerful and I've forgotten to write my Bible reference now but I think it's Matthew 26 if you want to look it up. I'll just check I'm right on that.

[29 : 32] So here's what Jesus does. I'll just read you the text actually to get it for you. Yeah, there you go. So Matthew 26 we're around verses 36 and oh there you go 26, 30, ooh, 36, 28, 29, somewhere around there.

Forgive me if I've lost you, it's in fact 38 to 39. Let's finally get there. It is from Scripture, honest, so there you go. So it says this, Jesus is basically in the garden and he knows that the cross is coming. He says in 38, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow and to the point of death. How mad is that? Jesus is not just saying this is hard, he's saying I am totally overwhelmed by this and he's really honest about it and I think the first thing for us is when we find it hard to put what's going on now in the big picture of God is just to tell him and just to be really straight up with him.

Jesus is actually telling his disciples but a great principle is to be open about it and to say actually this is what it's like for me right now. If I were Paul I'd be going ah this is awful I'm in prison I'm overwhelmed with frustration.

[30 : 53] If Jesus is allowed to do it I think we are too. And the second step is this he then says my father if it's possible may this cup be taken from me.

He expresses what he wants in a situation or what he at least partly wants in a situation. He says this is really hard if it's your will would you would you take it away?

And the third thing he does is this this amazing phrase not my will but yours be done.

And honestly I think this is one of the most powerful ways of us praying because it recalibrates us to the big picture of God because in the middle of our grief or our frustration or our anger or just our confusion as to how the Lord is going to do something we thought he was going to do or we hoped for it gets us to the point of saying but I want what you want father and I've found time and time again in my life this has been a very simple but massively powerful thing to use and we see the process with Jesus practicing the way he also expressed it very well and kind of shared the idea with us.

the gospel isn't ever changed our setbacks can be God's advance but we have a job to do there of connecting with him on it and trusting him because as I said before his promises are huge our perspective is very small but we can trust him.

[32 : 38] Paul in prison Jesus on the cross Jim Elliot in Ecuador each looked like a loss but God was able to turn them into a moment or in fact they were part of a moment of his kingdom advance which will only continue it's his great plan you know that great Christmas verse of the increase of his governance there will be no end that's what Jesus is doing bit by bit he's being shared more and more and more he's advancing the good news is going further but it can look like real loss he's able to move it forward so when you face your own setback there's a key tag from today is my setback the Lord is able to move forward or God's advance I'd love to pray for us that we'd be people who are able to see the big picture of him but more than that wherever he puts you whatever this next season looks like for you personally for us together that we're able to be a people who are able to see that he is moving forward and often our setbacks are moments where he wants to use us and grow us in confidence and grow his gospel in how it spreads so let me pray for us and then we'll come into land

Father God I thank you that you can be trusted thank you that you have been generous beyond measure in your son on the cross opening a future for us and bring us into your plans to be known further and further and more and more and thank you but God when things don't go the way we're expecting when we find it hard to understand where you've put us when we get frustrated or just a bit unsure of what you're doing would you help us to be a people who turn to you who trust you afresh who continue to imagine how you might use us wherever you've put us we love you Lord

would you continue to guide us lead us into all your good things in Jesus name
Amen Amen Thank you.