

Did you ever see the movie Thor: Ragnarok, it opens with line, “I know what you are thinking: Oh, no, Thor’s in a cage how did this happen?” It’s a rather humorous opening that gets directs us into the larger narrative.

We are in the book of Philippians and Badveli Nerses has already mentioned that Paul is writing this letter from prison. Most likely in Rome, and we might be inclined to echo the opening of Ragnarok, “Oh no Paul’s in prison, how did this happen?”

Here’s how that happened — if we turn back to Acts, chapter 20 Paul tells the leaders of the church in Ephesus that the Spirit of God is moving him to return to Jerusalem, and off he goes. Chapter 21, he arrives in Tyre, and the disciples in Tyre warn him not to go to Jerusalem, that he’d be endangering his life.

Further in chapter 21 he arrives in Caesarea, and the prophet Agabus ties him up with a belt and says, this is how you’re going to be delivered over to the gentiles if you go to Jerusalem.

A day after arriving Jerusalem, Paul goes to the temple, and begins a purification ritual — on the seventh day, when the ritual is almost complete, some Jews from Asia see Paul, stir up the crowd against him and he is arrested. Skipping what happens under Felix.

We move forward to chapter 25 where Paul is on trial before Festus. And it’s a rather complicated situation — he’s being accused of breaking religious law, but it’s a civil trial. At some point Paul realizes he’s not going to get justice, so he makes an appeal to Caesar. Quite simply, Paul is asking for Caesar to hear his case, and make the decision. Festus confers with the council and grants his appeal.

At the end of chapter 25 King Agrippa enters the narrative, Festus tells him what’s going on, and some scholars believe that Festus is discussing this with Agrippa because he was well versed in jewish law.

Now, standing before King Agrippa, Paul presents his defense, and at the end of chapter 26, King Agrippa says to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.” Almost seems like Paul didn’t “have to” end up in prison.

I think that background is important because it helps us get under what is going on as we approach Philippians 1:12. Let's read. And while it's going to be up on the screen, please have your bible open and follow along.

"I want you to know" that's his opening remark — and what he wants us to know is that everything that has happened, all the events that got him arrested and landed him in prison — has served to advance the Gospel.

There are probably multiple things that this statement reveals about Paul, but let's just focus on this one: *Paul's primary concern is not for his own comfort, his primary concern is the advance of the gospel.*

This is why Paul goes to Jerusalem, despite multiple warnings that it could mean his life or his arrest. The Spirit had moved him to go — so he went, even if it meant the loss of freedom — because, though he may be in prison, his spirit is able to run free, because *his primary concern is not for his own comfort but for the progress of the gospel.*

It would be my argument, that all those people who warned Paul not to go, what they were saying was from God, and that Paul knew what they were saying was true — but he wasn't about his own creature comforts — he wasn't about his own needs and wants — he was about the advancement of the gospel, even if it meant jail. And I think he wanted others to understand that!

"Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel." Interestingly, here's no self pity, no woe is me, no "if I had to do it all over again..." No, and there is no self pity because, *he gauges success based on the advancement of the gospel.*

So, what about us? Is the progress of the gospel our primary concern? Let's forget primary, secondary? Tertiary? When we reflect on our own life circumstances — good or bad — is our

barometer how it has served to advance the gospel? And if you're under the age of 22, I'm especially talking to you.

If you ended up in jail because of your faith, would you be bitter, angry, cynical? "God I did what I was supposed to, and I end up in here? Thanks a lot God." Or would you be seeking to discern how the situation is moving the gospel forward? Is our concern for our own comfort, and needs, or is it gospel advancement?

Paul goes on to tell us that the gospel is advancing in two ways.

The **first** way it is advancing is that the whole palace guard, and everyone else knows that he's sitting in prison because of Jesus.

That's fairly significant! At its high end the whole palace guard is about 9000 soldiers. To be fair, he might be using hyperbolic language, hence the "everyone else" language. And there's a possibility that he's talking about a smaller detachment of the 9000, set to watch over him.

But I'm not sure if that matters — Because what I think he's getting at is, first, that his situation isn't hindering him from talking about Jesus to whomever is present — palace guard, "Why you in here?" Paul, "Well let me tell you." And that conversation probably spread to the other guards, "Hey you know why that prisoner Paul's in there, he thinks some Jewish Rabbi that we crucified rose from the dead." And off it goes amongst the palace guard. We get that, we're Armenian, we know people talk. Additionally, if Paul's imprisonment with Silas is any reflection of this imprisonment, he's probably singing psalms and praising God all the time.

In other words, the Spirit of God moved him so, that you couldn't shut Paul up about Jesus, and it wasn't in an artificial or mechanical way either. So powerful was his Damascus road experience — that nothing was ever the same for him after that — and so wherever he was, in chains or set free, he's singing songs and telling everyone about Christ, his concern was the advancement of the gospel.

But also: because the gospel is advancing takes place among the Imperial guards, for Paul it meant — as one of my old professors once said, that the gospel was “making itself felt... in the heart of Roman political life.”

In what spheres of our lives is the gospel advancing? And I’m not even saying that we’re always talking about Jesus to everyone, and saying “Praise Jesus” to people as they approach us. What I am talking about is, do we look and listen for opportunities to talk about Christ, because our primary concern is for the advancement of the gospel? And I want to suggest that if it’s not, we need to adjust our bearings.

The **second** way his imprisonment has served to advance the gospel (verse 14) is that some Christians have become more confident and fearless about preaching the gospel. And that is something to celebrate — anytime people are overcoming the internal obstacle of fear to get the gospel out, let’s rejoice.

Admittedly, the situation is a bit more complicated, in verses 15-17, Paul breaks down those who’ve become more confident and fearless into two categories:

Saying some preach out of envy, while others preach out of goodwill.

Now the goodwill, that is easy to understand — this, Paul says, comes from a place of love, because they care about him and get why Paul is imprisoned. They get that what is taking place still serves as witness for the gospel.

It’s those who preach out of envy and selfish ambition. That causes us to scratch our heads — why would anybody do that and cause Paul trouble?

But maybe it’s not that hard to understand — people are creatures of mixed motives — how many times have we torn down others, in order to build ourselves up. Kids do it, adults do it, what makes us think first century Christians wouldn’t do it?

Thus, you could hear someone saying something like, “Eh, that Paul got himself thrown in jail again. And now he’s in Rome? If he would have just done \_\_\_\_\_” And if it was known what King Agrippa had said about if he had not appealed to Caesar he could have been set free, well that just gives weight to their criticisms — thus, as another preacher put it, “The more they speak, the more their ways are justified and the more Paul looks foolish.”

Paul’s response, verse 18, “Who cares, as long as Christ is preached.” My paraphrase is maybe a tad to flippant, but because Paul’s primary concern was not for his own comfort but for the advancement of the gospel, he doesn’t need to worry about how others perceive him, or how others portray him — his vision and path is clear. For him, one simply needs to answer the question, is Christ preached? If one can affirm that — then rejoice.

And that is how Paul responds — he is almost unconcerned about motive, and he’s definitely not concerned talk badly about him or causes him distress — If Christ is preached, he will rejoice. How many of us can say that?

If our reputation, and being liked is more important than the advancement of the gospel, we may have some things backward, or worse upside down.

When I was a kid and I’d smart off to my dad, he’d tell me I needed an attitude adjustment — to me this whole passage is an attitude adjustment. The question is will we listen with our ears, see with our eyes and make our primary concern the advancement of the gospel?

Pray!