Speaking of Jesus (Philippians 1:12-26) Scripture Reading: John 14:1-14

August 17th, 2025 Memory Verse: Philippians 1:21

**[SLIDE 1]**

Imagine for a moment that you heard about some unfortunate event that had befallen a good friend of yours, a friend who had previously moved out of state and lived far away. Upon hearing the news, you might grab your phone and give them a call **[SLIDE 2]** to see what is going on. After a few rings, they pick up and you begin to inquire, “What happened? Are you okay?” Now imagine this good friend of yours responded by going on about the weather, about their neighbors, about a funny joke they heard. They fill you in on how their garden is doing, how much the price of gas has fluctuated and the strange noise their car is making. Meanwhile, your brain is screaming, **[SLIDE 3]** “Enough! I want to know about you! I don’t care about these other topics; I am interested in your well-being.”

Well, it’s one thing to have a conversation like that on the phone, but what if you had to read it all in a letter? **[SLIDE 4]** How frustrating to finally hear from your friend and yet not be able to know how they are doing personally! That’s a little like the scenario we find in Philippians. The church knew something bad had happened to their good friend Paul. They knew he was in jail, but they did not know any of the details. We don’t either, but we do know that the church in Philippi supported Paul’s work financially in the past and we know that they actually sent a worker to go and serve alongside Paul. **[SLIDE 5]** Money, manpower and prayer support were all ways in which Philippi supported Paul. Now, Paul was in jail and now finally the church had received word from him! Everyone is eager to hear if Paul is alright. Everyone has been praying for him and is anxious for some information.

**[SLIDE 6]** Last week, we saw that Paul opened his letter by expressing a great affection for the church in Philippi. He rejoices in his relationship with them. He acknowledges the role that they have played in his ministry. They are his partners, and he is grateful. He loves them the gut-level affection of Christ himself! He goes on to share with them a prayer; that they might become both loving and knowledgeable. He desires that they be filled with the fruit of righteousness. That they would be able to stand blameless on the day when Christ returns. But I hope you can feel the tension here. Remember, Paul’s words would have been read aloud as the people gathered together. You can imagine the reader of these words feeling a little impatient as everyone is thinking, “Enough about us Paul! Get on with it! We know you love us. We know you pray for us, but tell us already: how are you doing? What is going on where you are? Give us an update! Fill us in!”

Well, here in verse 12 it seems that Paul is finally going to answer everyone’s burning questions. **[SLIDE 7]** “Brothers and sisters,” he says, “I want you to know that the things that have happened to me…” There is sort of a shared sigh here. “Finally, we get to know about our friend.” Everyone listening leans in to hear better. “Brothers and sisters, I want you to know that the things that have happened to me **[SLIDE 8]** have actually advanced the gospel.” “Aaah Paul! What are you doing? You were so close! We want to know about you!” Well, he goes on. **[SLIDE 9]** (READ 1:12-14)

Well, it’s still not a word about his well-being, but those listening to this letter should know by now that Paul is not interested in his own well-being. He cares about the gospel. He cares about people coming to faith in Jesus Christ. So, forget about how Paul is doing…if the gospel is being shared, than Paul is elated. The gospel being shared is a context for joy.

In the next verse Paul talks about the Praetorian Guard **[SLIDE 10]**. These would have been the emperor’s personal regiment. Because Paul was a Roman citizen and he was waiting to be put on trial, he had a bit more privilege in his imprisonment. He was not held in a cell as we might imagine, but rather he was placed under house arrest in a small dwelling. He was able to have visitors, he was able to send and receive messages. Most historians would say that Paul’s incarceration included one aspect in particular that we would never see today. Most likely, Paul would have been literally chained wrist to wrist to a soldier of the Praetorian Guard **[SLIDE 11]**. So shift after shift, man after man, one on one for hours at a time, Paul had a personal guard. Even though he was the prisoner, Paul is the one who had a captive audience! These Roman soldiers would hear about the gospel endlessly. They would hear Paul’s discussions with his visitors, they would hear how Paul prayed, they would see his care and concern for his churches, they would see his dedication to the gospel. Surely Paul would strike up conversations with these men. These soldiers would know first-hand all about Paul’s personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

So Paul rejoices! “Yes, I am incarcerated, but the gospel is being advanced all the same!” The Emperor’s own soldiers are hearing about Jesus all day every day and in verse 14 Paul reports that other Christians, out in the streets have been emboldened by Paul’s situation. If he can do it, so can they! Paul even rejoices in those who preach with questionable motives. **[SLIDE 12]** (READ 15-20) If they are spreading the good news of Jesus, if they are proclaiming the truth, then Paul rejoices. Let these preachers make their money, let them form a fan-base, let them even speak ill of Paul….but let Christ be known!

But, such passion and commitment to the gospel does not make things easier. Paul admits that he is torn. **[SLIDE 13]** (READ 21-26) He declares boldly in verse 21, “Living serves Christ and dying is even better.” I am more familiar with the words of the NIV. It’s the version we are using for our memory verse. It’s the sort of line you shout when you raise up your sword and march into battle: **[SLIDE 14]** “To live is Christ and to die is gain!” Paul says, “I want to leave this life and be with Christ which is far better.” But Paul is resigned to stay and serve his churches. Verse 25 lays out his goal: “I will stay alive and remain with all of you to help your progress and the joy of your faith.” He also sounds pretty sure that, at some point, he will be able to come and visit again.

((Think again of these folks in Phillipi **[SLIDE 15]**. They are gathered to hear Paul’s letter. They just want an update on how their friend is doing. They want to know how they can help. They are concerned; they are worried about what might happen. But Paul simply will not go there. What he presents here is an update, not about himself, but about the transmission and reception of the **[SLIDE 16]** gospel of Jesus Christ. To Paul, that is all that matters. He has a one-track mind and, jail time or not, shackles or not, Roman imperial guard or not, Christ will be preached! The only personal update that we see here from Paul gives some insight into the state of his heart. He is dying to be with Jesus, ‘to live is Christ and to die is gain.’ But he knows he still has work to do. He speaks nothing of his physical well-being, nothing about the food, nothing about how he is sleeping at night. There is no note about the weather or any update on what had been happening in the neighborhood. Paul is obsessed! He only has thought for Christ and his gospel)).

**[SLIDE 17]** In this section that we are looking at today, Paul makes mention of the good news at least four different times. He speaks the name of “Jesus” or “Christ” or “Lord” ten times in 14 verses! Let’s remember as well, that Paul is writing a personal letter to personal friends. He is not setting out to be included in the canon of God’s word. He is not trying to be impressive or over compensating here. He is expressing the truth of who he is to close friends and partners. And the truth is **Jesus is in his heart, Jesus is on his mind, and so Jesus is constantly coming out of his mouth.**

I read this and I think, how do I get to become like that? Why don’t I live so insistent on the gospel and so persistent to make Christ known? I’m a pastor and it’s hard for me. A little later in Philippians 3:17, Paul says very plainly, **[SLIDE 18]** “Become imitators of me.” The term Paul uses is based on the word **[SLIDE 19]** *mimeomai,* it’s where we get words like “mime” or “mimic”. Some could see that verse and conclude that Paul was so egotistical that he demanded everyone be just like him. 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul says the same thing but he adds a bit more clarity. He tells the church to be like him, to imitate him as he imitates Christ. But, if we, the church, could be even a fraction as obsessed with Jesus as Paul was, we might see the gospel progressing. I dare say, at the same time, we might see more trouble brewing as well **[SLIDE 20]**. Paul had a full plate of both. Even in his service to Jesus he was met with all manner of trouble: imprisoned, stoned numerous time, run out of town, shipwrecked. And even under lock and key, Paul can communicate words of joy and elation when it comes to his obsession with Jesus Christ.

So how can we, how can I, be like Paul? I’ll wager that if we were to ask Paul himself that question, he would not be able to go five words without mentioning the name of Jesus. Paul constantly pointed to Jesus. **[SLIDE 21]** Whether people were asking or not, whether the timing felt right or not, whether there was present the threat of punishment or not. Paul would point you to Jesus before catching up, before small talk, before chit-chat. Christ was first, Christ was primary. One of the ways I can imitate Paul is to simply speak more about Jesus. If I say more words about Jesus, if I am able to bring him into my daily conversations, then everyone involved is thinking more about Jesus. Through everyday conversations we can point others to Jesus.

Now, don’t get me wrong. As simple as this might be to do, it is not easy. If I am going to constantly talk about Jesus like Paul does, I will very easily be seen as annoying. **[SLIDE 22]** Take my 13-year-old son as an example. For whatever reason Ezra has been hyper-focused lately on the idea of forging his own knives. **[SLIDE 23]** He wants his mother and I to furnish a shop in our garage that would accommodate molten metal. He needs an angle grinder, a special hammer and an anvil. He is not interested in cost or permission or whether or not any of his ideas are possible. Ezra is obsessed with the idea of forging and will not shut up about it. His persistence, honestly, got so bad that Tracy and I literally banned him from using the word “forge.” We were so sick of hearing about it.

Speaking about Jesus can possibly have the same affect. **[SLIDE 24]** Some people are bound to be annoyed. But I think Paul might ask, “What else should I talk about? What else is there to talk about? To live is Christ! Christ is my life! As long as I am alive, I will speak about Jesus Christ.” Paul would say, “Yes, they might be annoyed, but at least they have heard about Jesus! Yes, they might talk about me behind my back, but even when they talk about me, they are going to be talking about Jesus. Yes, they might walk away shaking their heads, but they will not be able to deny the one thing that characterizes my life….Jesus Christ himself.”

Sharing the gospel of Jesus was, for Paul, a context for joy. Now I assume we would all be up for adding joy to our lives. As good as life might be, it could always be better. I don’t want to live beholden to whether or not the people around me are annoyed with me. I want experience the joy of letting Jesus shine through me, including the words that I say. I want to encourage you all to speak of Jesus more often. Speak aloud words about Jesus, traits of Jesus, what you admire about Jesus, why you love him, why you are grateful to him. Declare his goodness aloud. Use his name as a blessing spoken over others. Pray aloud in Jesus’ name. This might sound like a daunting challenge, but that’s okay. Take it a step at a time. Start at home. Start with your family, your spouse, your kids. Strat with fellow church people. Bring the name of Christ to bear on the conversations that occur within your domain. It might seem strange or feel a bit forced, but we have to do something on purpose before we can make it a habit. We have to practice something before it becomes “natural.” How can you speak the name of Jesus aloud into your life? How can you talk more often about the gospel?

One way is to take certain phrases that we say everyday and adjust them – **[SLIDE 25]** sanctify them if you will. Instead of saying, “Good luck!” try, “The Lord Jesus bless you!” Instead of “drive safely,” try, “May Jesus keep you safe on the road.” Instead “oaky-dokey”, how about “We are blessed in Christ.” When trouble comes, instead of asking, “Are you alright?” simply offer up a prayer in Jesus’ name. We could go on and on but you get the idea. It seems clunky at first but soon enough our mouths won’t hesitate to speak the name of Jesus in the grocery store, or at the park or while we run errands, or even at work. They say you can determine what a person values by looking at their bank account and how they spend money. But what about how we spend our words? What do we find ourselves talking about the most? Whose name is most often on our lips? Does what we say reflect what we value? As Jesus himself said in John 14:14, when we ask for anything in his name, he will do it.

Knowing Jesus and being able to talk about Jesus is Paul’s context for joy. **[SLIDE 26]** He can talk about Jesus as a free man or as a prisoner. He will talk about Jesus with old friends or brand-new acquaintances. He will talk about Jesus in times of hardship or ease. Either way, the result is joy and it is something we can add to our own lives. The good news of Jesus Christ is what makes for a joy filled life. Amen.