

What Does It Matter?

Philippians

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So some of you know I grew up in this area. I grew up in Catonsville, not so far away. And one of the things that I always knew about but never really enjoyed was the Patapsco River that runs through Old Ellicott City. We went to other parts of Patapsco State Park, but I never experienced the part that runs through Old Ellicott City. I drove past it a lot. But it wasn't until my daughters were in middle school that I ever actually went down to that part of the river. And I want to show you a picture that we took when we first visited the river there, partly because—you know, my daughters are in college now. You don't get to meet them because they're not with us. But I want you to know who they are anyway. So the slide that's going up, hopefully, is a picture of my daughter Jody. There it is. And this is a picture that we took when she was in middle school. And it was right around the time, you know, when camera phones were getting really good. And people loved to take these kinds of pictures, you know, where you mess with perspective, right?

And part of the reason I'm showing you this is because this connects with what's going on in our passage. The way you take these pictures is, you know, you pile up a pile of little stones. And then Jody went and stood way in the background. And we lined up the perspective just right with the camera. So it looks like either she's standing on a giant pile of stones, or else, you know, she's shrunk down to the size of a chipmunk.

Now, this is fun. It's fun to mess with perspective when we do it in photography. But when we mess with perspective in our life, it's not as fun, and the results aren't as pleasant. When we lose perspective in our life, when we lose sight of what matters, it's not nearly as fun. We end up with either a distorted view of ourselves or a distorted view of our problems. We either start thinking that we're much bigger, much more important than we actually are, and we end up hurting those around us or set ourselves up for a big fall. Or else we think we're actually smaller than we really are, and we lose out on the important role that God has called us to because we don't really believe that He could love somebody like us. Or when we lose perspective, we start to see our problems as bigger than they actually are. We give them more power than they should have, and we start to get into a spiral of fear and worry that we can't seem to shake. The only way to correct those issues of perspective is to have our perspective reoriented by the gospel. It's to have a correct gospel perspective restored.

Now, Paul is writing in the Book of Philippians to this church that he has helped to start. And he's writing from prison. So he has very real problems in his life. But as he offers his perspective, he gives us a corrective, a way to adjust our own perspective when things get out of whack.

Our title for the message this morning is, "What Does It Matter?" And that's taken from something Paul says in the passage. In Paul's view, the thing that matters, the thing that restores our perspective is the gospel of Jesus, the good news that Jesus is Lord.

So let's listen now to God's word. This is Philippians 1 starting in verse 15.

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray.

Father, as we come to your word this morning, we're thankful that you didn't leave us to stumble around and try to figure out who you are on our own, but you came to us. You gave us your word. You revealed yourself to us. You revealed yourself to us in Jesus, and you spoke your word to point us to Him. I pray, Father, that if there's anything in me, in my message, in us as a community that would prevent us from seeing Jesus clearly this morning that you would break through, Spirit, that you would warm our hearts. Give us ears to hear and hearts to receive your message and the will to put it into practice because we need it all from you. We pray in Jesus's name. Amen.

So we're picking up in Philippians, where we left off a couple of weeks ago. Paul is reporting to the church in Philippi how it's going with him. He helped to found that church. And now they've become partners with him in his mission of proclaiming the good news of Jesus. But Paul has been thrown in prison, and that would seem to have thrown a bit of a wrench into the works. How can the message go forward? How can Paul's mission continue if he's in prison? But last time, a couple weeks ago, we saw that far from limiting the gospel message, Paul's imprisonment has actually turned out to powerfully push it forward. It helps both those outside the church see Jesus and those inside the church become more bold to preach the message about Him.

And now in verse 15, Paul turns to share with the Philippians the mixed motives that are evident in the preaching about Jesus. "Some," he says, "preach Jesus out of envy and rivalry." And some preach Him out of genuine good will. There's both authentic and inauthentic preaching. And what I want to do is look at both types of announcing the message, the authentic and the inauthentic in verses 15 through 17, and then turn to Paul's conclusion of the matter, which is where he really adjusts our perspective by saying that what matters most is that Jesus is proclaimed. The good news of Jesus is the most important thing. But I do think there's something to be gained for us as we look at both motivations behind the announcing of Jesus that's happening. In both the genuine and the inauthentic preaching of Jesus, we can see ways that the gospel is the most important thing and how that impacts our perspective on life.

So as we get into it, the way that Paul structures his argument in verses 15 to 17 is that he puts the most important parts at the beginning and the end. If you notice the order, he says there's two kinds of people who talk about Jesus. There are those who do it first out of envy and then out of good will. And then he unpacks their motives, but he switches the order. He says, "Those who preach out of good will do it with love in their hearts, and those who preach out of envy are motivated by selfish ambition." By putting the inauthentic preachers first and last in that order, he emphasizes them. So we're going to focus on them first, but we'll also look at the ones who genuinely speak about Jesus with love. We'll do that second.

So last week—first of all, the inauthentic preachers. Last week, I heard about a story that was published in the *MIT Technology Review*, and it detailed some internal research that Facebook had done regarding the influence of inauthentic Facebook pages. And during the year 2019, what it discovered was that of the 20 most viewed Christian pages, how many of them do you think were inauthentic? Somebody said 10. Not even close. 19 out of the 20 came from what they call troll farms, people outside the United States who are basically posting content just to stir up dissension to drive more traffic to their sites so that they can make more money. They were preaching Jesus for their own selfish gain. The most popular authentic Christian site only came in at number 17.

Now, that may be disturbing for many of us. Now, I realize some of the younger people in here are probably like, Facebook, does anybody even look at that anymore? But yes, they do. 75 million people per month in this country are reached by the inauthentic preaching of those Facebook trolls of those troll farms. Fascinating.

Now, what are we to do with that? What is Paul's response? Well, Paul is actually talking about something—I mean, that's bad enough that—I forgot to read this to you. There's a quote from the guy who wrote that report. He said, "Our platform has given the largest voice in the Christian American community to a handful of bad actors who, based on their media production practices, have never been to church." That's Facebook that recognizes that.

It's bad enough when people who aren't Christians use Jesus for their personal gain. But what if it's actually real Christians, people in the church, who are preaching Jesus out of wrong motives? Because it's easy for us to say, "Oh, those troll farms. That's them." But what about us? We need to look at our own motives because Paul—when he says, "Some," "Some preach out of envy," some of what? Who's the "some of" that he's talking about? Well, if you go back one verse into verse 14, he has said that some brothers in Christ—"Most of the brothers have been made bold," he says in verse 14. So when he says "some," he's talking about some of the brothers and sisters who have been made bold. Some of them are made bold to preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, and some of them preach out of good will. If that's the case, it's actually Paul's own brothers and sisters who are preaching for their own selfish gain.

And that kind of brings it home to us a little bit. Paul says, "They do it thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment." Literally, "supposing to increase the affliction of my chains." Imagine, you know, Paul sort of bound in chains and somebody there tightening the chains a little tighter on him. If these are Paul's brothers and sisters in Christ, why are they doing this? Because they've lost perspective. They have an inflated view of themselves. They're acting from selfish ambition. They see Paul as a big man, and they want to be big people, too. Here's an opportunity for them to take some of his influence for themselves. He's in prison. He can't proclaim Jesus. And if they do, then they can increase the size of their following, get more people listening to them, maybe shape the direction of the church for their preferences instead of Paul's.

Notice Paul doesn't say they preach a different gospel. Elsewhere, he has pretty strong words against people who preach a different message, but here, he doesn't say that. In fact, he says Christ is being preached. So the issue is their heart motivation not the message that they're preaching. And that's a warning to us. Because listen, you can say all the right things, and you can do all the right things. But if you're harboring a self-serving attitude, you've missed the point. Don't deceive yourself into thinking that you're okay because you know the right words to say, because you pray the right prayers, and even because you tell other people about Jesus. You know, Jesus warned His followers that some will think they are His because they say all the right things and do all the right things, but the reality is their hearts are not His. They're acting out of selfish ambition. And a gospel perspective calls us to examine our motives.

But the good news of a gospel perspective is not just that we have to examine our motives. It's that the gospel overcomes even our bad motives. Even our wrong motives cannot stop the message of Jesus from having its way in others and in ourselves. Paul's conclusion is that even if Jesus is preached in pretense, He rejoices. Why? Because the perspective of the gospel is that Jesus the most important thing. His death on the cross is not just for the sins that you and I commit before we put our trust in Him. It was for everything that we would do after coming to Him as well. Even for the envy and the bitterness and the selfish ambition that we might harbor towards our brothers and sisters sitting next to us, Jesus died even for that. And that sin put Him to death, but it wasn't enough to keep Him in the ground. He rose up in victory over it. He is Lord. He is Lord in spite of your and my attempts to adjust the perspective so that we might appear to be Lord. That frees us to examine our motives. And if we've been deceiving ourselves into thinking we're okay because we say the right things or do the right things all the while harboring that envy against a brother and sister, well then we're free to confess it because Jesus already

knows about it anyway. He's died for it, and He has already forgiven us. We need to examine our motives and our hearts in light of the gospel.

And at the same time, we can't be paralyzed by our mixed motives. Have you ever been frozen in a decision because you couldn't sort out your own motives? You know. Am I being selfish in pursuing this promotion? Am I being a good steward by saving for college? Should I be giving more to those in need? Am I doing this out of love or because, you know, I want something from my friend or my spouse? The gospel frees us to act even when we can't completely sort out our motives. It's not to ignore the bad motives, but at the same time, you can't let yourself be paralyzed by fear of not having pure motives. The gospel is more powerful than your mixed motives.

If it turns out that you are acting with a mixed heart, which is true for all of us all the time until we meet Jesus in glory, we will always have mixed motives. And when that's true, then the Spirit will convict us. It might even be exposed by others. Paul exposes it here in his letter. But we can't let the fear of our motives being exposed drive us to inaction. Instead, let the perspective of the gospel drive us to admit those mixed motives, to own them, and to put them on Jesus, because He's dealt with them.

Paul says that not only are there some who announce the message about Jesus out of wrong motives, but there are some who do it from good will as well. In verse 16, he says they do it out of love, presumably love for Paul, knowing that Paul has been put in prison for the sake of the gospel. It's interesting that these people know that Paul has been put in prison for the sake of the gospel while those who preach inauthentically, they just suppose or think that they can increase Paul's troubles. But in reality, they can't. But these people know, they are certain, that Paul has been put in prison for the sake of the gospel. And the gospel motivates these brothers and sisters in love to pick up the slack for Paul, not to point out his weakness, not to be repulsed by it like, "Oh, we can't be associated with that guy because he's in prison now." No. They don't take advantage of it for self-promotion. They are filled with love because a gospel perspective is one that allows us to see rightly, to know that we are not more important than we imagine but also that we are not less than what we might imagine either, that everything we do is connected to Jesus in His life. And every word that we speak and every act that we take points to Him. That's what motivated these brothers and sisters to come behind Paul and pick up the slack. They knew they had a role to play because they were a part of the gospel family, the family of the church.

You know, that gospel perspective allows us to move into the weakness of our brothers and sisters knowing that there's a bigger story. Jesus loved us at our weakest, at our most vulnerable. And He loves the people who are right in front of us, whoever they might be. Maybe you have a friend who's struggling with mental illness. A gospel perspective allows you to sit with them without having to fix them because Jesus came to be with the brokenhearted. Maybe you have a fellow student who's sick and can't do their share of work for a school project. Can you tell I've got two daughters in college? A gospel perspective allows you to pick up the slack because Jesus loves to give freely to you when you haven't done what you needed to do and give you what you don't deserve. Maybe a spouse who can't seem to remember where they left their keys, ever. A gospel perspective moves you with compassion to help look for the keys again because Jesus came to find you when you were lost by your own fault.

I want to give you an example of what this has looked like in my life. This past summer, my wife Somer demonstrated that kind of gospel perspective that isn't put off by my weakness, but she moved to help pick up the slack. This past summer, we scheduled several events with our seminary students. I help lead Metro Baltimore Seminary. So we've got a bunch of students that had been online all year and hadn't seen each other in person. So we scheduled a couple of afternoon get-togethers at our home. The thing is that I forgot to tell Somer about one of the events, and I also forgot to get anything for it. So like

an hour or two before, I called her. I was like, "Hey, so I forgot to get drinks and snacks." And listen. It would've been so easy for her to be like, "Well, you're on your own. I'm at work. Have fun." But she didn't. She had a gospel perspective that had mercy on me in my weakness. She grabbed a few things from Wegman's, where she worked, came home. And within half an hour, we had this amazing spread of food and, like, amazing drinks for our students. It was a really good time.

Now, you might think, "Well, Dan, you know, now you're the one with an inflated view of yourself. You know, you forgetting to prepare for guests is not the same as Paul being in prison." And on the one hand that's true. But on the other hand, in the context of the gospel, we cannot have too small a view of ourselves and the importance that we play in the gospel. The reality is that whenever you or I see somebody in need even through their own fault through their own forgetfulness, we're seeing Jesus in need. And when Somer acted to bail me out, she was acting out of the gospel. And because of that, it has eternal significance. So don't underplay—don't downplay your importance. Just because you're not thrown into prison or you're not helping out a famous preacher who's been restricted doesn't mean what you do isn't vitally important in the kingdom of God. It all carries weight. When we act out of love, we are proclaiming Jesus, whether we're overlooking a fault, forgiving a sin, or helping out those who are brought low, we're pointing to the one who did all of that on a grand scale, who became nothing taking the form of a servant. I'm getting a little ahead of myself. That's Philippians 2. We'll get there eventually.

But in the meantime, Paul says, "Some preach Christ from envy, some from good will," and in verse 18, he says, "What then?" "What then?" Some translations say, "What does it matter?" It's literally he just says, "For what? What's the important thing? What matters?" "Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice." The good news of Jesus is what matters to Paul. The good news of Jesus is that big picture perspective that adjusts everything else that we experience. Jesus is Lord. He is ruling over all things according to God's plan. Whether big or small, Jesus is the end of the story. That's why Paul could rejoice. He's not saying, like, "Hey, these chains are great. Like, they make me look tough." No. He's rejoicing that even though he's in prison, while he is in prison, the gospel is going forward. For Paul, both sincerity and insincerity find their meaning in relationship to Christ. He's able to say that he rejoices even when people are taking advantage of his situation even when his reputation may be diminishing and his influence is being taken away because he kept sight of what matters, that Jesus is the Lord, and His name is proclaimed.

When we lose sight of what matters and begin to think that our reputation, or our success, or our happiness is the most important thing, we rob ourselves of joy. We begin to let slights build up and weigh us down. We get defensive. Paul's being taken advantage of by those who are supposed to be his brothers and sisters. How can you let those go? The gospel frees us to see ourselves honestly, not as too big to be insulted or taken advantage of, not as too important to lay down our reputation. When it comes to our own reputation or rights, the gospel is all that matters. Jesus secures your reputation. He secures your rights. He is your success. So you don't need to defend yourself.

I'll end with this. This kind of circles back to something we touched on a couple weeks ago in the previous section of the letter. It wasn't a little thing for Paul to be in prison. A gospel perspective is not that you ignore your pain or the slights that people put on you. Instead, the gospel allows you to see those things in the big-picture story of what God is doing in the world through Jesus to make everything new, to see them in the perspective that one day, God will wipe away all tears from our eyes. The insults you receive, the rejection that you feel, the hurt of being taken advantage of, all of it's real. It all matters. But the full significance of how others treat us and of the pain that we feel, it can't be found in what they do or how it makes us feel. It can only be found in the context of Jesus and His story in the world.

You know, you can bear a lot of things if you know the story is going to turn out well in the end.

Think of a mother who gives birth to her first child. She goes through a lot of pain to deliver that baby. She knows what it costs to give birth to a child, but then she willingly has a second anyway. Why? Not because she thinks it's not going to hurt this time, but because she knows the joy that comes after. And that doesn't make in the moment giving birth to the child any less painful. But it puts that pain into perspective. The joy of the child outweighs the pain. She knows how the story unfolds. She has perspective.

Here is how the gospel story unfolds. Hebrews 12:2 says, "Jesus endured the shame of the cross for the hope set before him." The hope of life, not just life for Himself being risen from the dead but life for all in Him, the hope of a people who are weak, defenseless, prone to losing perspective on their own, but in Jesus a glorious people that God chose to love for His own possession. This is the gospel that Paul preached. It's the gospel he rejoiced to see proclaimed no matter what. And it's the gospel that we believed. If you believe in Jesus, He is the end of your story. What does it matter? What matters is that you are His. This is our gospel perspective. Let's pray.

Father, thank you that you entered into our world, that you didn't tell us to just get over it, to fix ourselves. But you came into our world. You lived our pain. Jesus, you perfectly obeyed the Father, and you gave your life in exchange for us so that the end of our story—however hard it is now in the moment, the end of our story is that you will wipe our tears away, and we will live with you. We look forward to that. We ask you to give us that perspective now in the moment, and whatever you're going to take us through in the future, we ask you to keep our eyes fixed on you living with that gospel perspective. We pray in Jesus's name. Amen.