

The Unstoppable Gospel

For the sceptics and theorists in the group, I know what you are thinking: “The unstoppable gospel? Seriously?!” From a purely theoretical perspective there is no such thing as an unstoppable force, since it will inevitably collide with an “immovable object”. However, divine reality reaches beyond theoretical limitations and brings us into the throne room of God who rules over all things with sovereignty and might. This supernatural, sovereign God is present and functions inside and outside of time and space. He has a plan that is for His glory and for creation’s ultimate good. It would not be inaccurate to say that His redemptive plan for this broken world can succinctly be described as *good news* - the gospel. This redemptive plan **fulfills** God’s promises, **provides** atonement for sin, **restores** our severed relationship with Him and will one day **make all things new**. Since the sovereign King of the universe accomplishes this plan from beginning to end with unrivaled authority, **the gospel is unstoppable**.

As Paul thoughtfully pens an update on his personal circumstances to his Christian brothers and sisters in Philippians 1:12-20, the resulting text contains surprisingly little about himself. There are likely two reasons for this. First, Paul knows that Epaphroditus, the carrier of the letter, will surely fill them in on the details of his condition and answer any further questions and concerns that his friends might have. Second, Paul’s personal life is so fully engrossed by his calling, that to speak of how his circumstances have furthered the gospel *is* to inform them of his life. The two are virtually inseparable. The gospel *is* Paul’s life!

The Philippians knew of Paul’s imprisonment in Rome. They were fully aware of the prospect of never seeing their dear friend again. They overheard the whispers of Paul’s envious coworkers who gleefully saw Paul’s plight as an opportunity to seize the limelight for themselves and discredit this “criminal”. Most bleak, however, was that death cast a long shadow from the imperial capital of Rome to the military colony of Philippi. Paul’s execution was a distinct possibility. Collectively, it wouldn’t be at all surprising for the Philippian church to think the worst; to think that Paul’s gospel efforts had finally collided with the inevitable immovable object.

Surprisingly, however, as the Philippians opened Paul’s letter and read past his introductory greetings, expressions of gratitude and love, and prayers for their continued growth, the eager readers discovered their dear friend enthusiastically celebrated the advancement of the gospel while he gripped tightly to the undauntedness of God’s sovereign plan. Paul told them that what had happened to

him “really served to advance the gospel” (Phil 1:12)! God was using Paul’s chains to blaze new trails into uncharted territories and instilling confidence in other believers to speak the gospel more boldly as well (Phil 1:14). But there was more! Strangely, those who had enviously seized the limelight in Paul’s absence and preached the gospel out of selfish ambition brought Paul joy (Phil 1:15-18)! Yes, it’s true! While Paul certainly desired for his readers to have their motive match their message, his greatest passion was for Christ to be proclaimed. For, if the gospel message remains unaltered and true, God’s sovereign plan is undeterred by the ill intentions of sinful people. But there is one final, seemingly immovable object that weighed heavily on the hearts of the Philippians: death. The likelihood of Paul losing his life at the hands of a Roman executioner was a real possibility. It is hard not to think that the eyes of the Philippians didn’t fill with tears at the thought of Paul’s death. Even so, Paul rejoices. Shockingly, though Paul expects to see his Philippian friends again, he is certain that God’s sovereign plan uses even death. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of the saints” (Ps 116:15) and so Paul views dying as a means of honoring Christ and a vehicle through which to make Him known. His words are rich with anticipation and courage as he shares these words in Philippians 1:18-20:

“... Yes, and I will rejoice, 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.**”

What a God! What good news! The gospel is simply unstoppable! Paul has experienced more than his share of opposition to his gospel efforts. He is so captivated by the gospel that it is worth living, suffering, and dying for. The good news and his very existence are fully intertwined; one and the same. His present and his future are securely held in God’s gracious, almighty hands.

So, brother and sister, like Paul, let us rejoice in all circumstances. Let us live well and die well. Honoring Christ involves our entire existence. May we pray for one another and trust in Him (Phil 1:19), knowing that our hope is sure in our risen Savior (1 Cor 15:20-22).

Galatians 2:20 (ESV) - “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”