**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

**How Do I Proclaim Christ?**

**Philippians 1: 15-18**

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

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 We are continuing our series in what is commonly called the “Prison Epistles”, meaning the New Testament Books of Ephesian, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. . .which Paul wrote from his house arrest in Rome, awaiting trial by Caesar in about 61-62 A.D. We begin today in Philippians 1:12 to set the context to the following verses.

**12** Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,

**13** so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,

 **14** and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

From reading Paul’s letter, we see that to be an Apostle of God/Jesus Christ with God’s Holy Spirit at work in you. . .will challenge the culture in which you live. History chronicles countless saints who carried the Gospel Message to their communities in the face of life-threatening opposition. With this biblical reality, it is hard for me to see that Christianity is presented in our times as being an avenue to gain wealth and be healthy in light of Paul’s imprisonment. It is true that the life to which God calls us can produce an economic and physical stability but there is not any promise to become wealthy or not to be affected by this fallen world’s health challenges. In fact, if we look at the lives of all the apostles, they were all martyred and not wealthy. The Apostle John is the only one of the twelve not to be martyred. And John was not wealthy. Like Paul, John was arrested several times. At one point, John was sentenced to exile to the island of Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation.

Therefore, we receive Paul’s words, describing his condition from his Roman house arrest. . . to be par for the course in the life of a Christian. Paul’s imprisonment actually shows that he performed the mission that God had called him. Is this a surprise? No. Remember, Paul met the resurrected Lord on the road to Damascus in a startling fashion. No doubt, this encounter impressed Paul for the rest of his life.

**Acts 9:15** Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine,

to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

 Some might say that Paul was an over-achiever, meaning that even in the face of immense opposition, he continued. . . he persevered through physical and mental persecution. Paul achieved goals where most people would have given up. Why? v. 18 **Christ is proclaimed;** and in this I rejoice. Paul fulfilled his commission from the resurrected Jesus Christ.

 I see that every Christian is to live life seeking an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of God by word or by deed. I know we are challenged by our culture not to talk about our faith. However, we observe that God’s witnesses in the Bible, almost all . . . without fail, had a hard time. With this witnessing history, we too shall not be surprised when we are rebuffed by the fallen world and particularly by those who identify themselves as opposed to God and His Gospel Message.

**How can we, on daily basis, proclaim the Gospel?**

The Gospel Message works through the hearts and minds of Believers and, therefore, is on display for others to see. At the core of the Gospel Message is that Christ died for our sins (substitutionary atonement) and rose from the grave (1 Corinthians 15). This is a victory statement. Victory over what? Sin and death. How is this witnessed without us going around telling everyone we meet. . . *that God became flesh and lived with us to go die on a cross for a substitutionary atonement for our sins?* We do not want to sound like a broken record. I am aware that many people do not see any difference in life just because they agree with a statement. I know people want to see what difference this Gospel Message makes in their life right now. I see that the preeminent goal beyond eternal life is. . . *How can a person be at peace*? I mean, to be at peace with their neighbor and God. We Believers witness the peace of God daily.

**Living the Peaceful Life – Our Witness**

To accomplish this witness of peace, my personal goal is to keep God’s spiritual fruits in mind. With a focus on God’s indwelling Spirit guiding our lives. . . we should have the practice in life to do so. And, yes, I desire for others to be *loving, joyous, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled* (Galatians 5:22-23). This is the way I want to be treated. I see that these attributes are foundational for a civilized society. For these spiritual fruits to be at work in us. . . means that God is at work in us. This is our victory statement. . . that we have surrendered to the Cross of Christ, and His Spirit is at work in us. . . and, therefore, we witness the Gospel.

With this witnessing of God’s spiritual fruits at work in us, someone may ask what makes us the way we are. Here is our opportunity.

In addition to living God’s spiritual attributes, we need to take the opportunity to pray for others. What do I mean by this? Many people will confide in us when they are having problems in life. This is when we need to take the opportunity to *ask them for their permission to pray for them.* By asking their permission, and them granting us permission, they are opening the spiritual door to their heart and mind to be reached by God. We then can build upon their permission to introduce them to God’s Word and the truth about God’s plan for their life.

So, we see that Paul takes every opportunity to witness the Gospel regardless of his life circumstances. We also see others observing Paul’s hardship who are encouraged by his circumstances and others who might take advantage of his imprisonment for their personal gain. But in Paul’s mind, none of the distractions discouraged him.

Note, Paul talks about others witnessing and refers to himself as an encouraging catalyst (v. 14). Paul sees his “situation-in-life” to be where he needs to be in order to be that Light for the Gospel (v. 13). Two things took place because of Paul’s imprisonment.

**1**. The Gospel spread throughout the praetorian guard

**2.** Encouraged others to witness

 With all this witnessing on-going, Paul is concerned about the accuracy of the Message and the motives of some who are preaching Christ.

**15** Some, to be sure,

are **preaching Christ** even from envy and strife,

This is not any surprise. We see this in our time with charlatan T.V. preachers soaking the elderly, ill and desperate people for money through their slick marketing programs. When you hear the words “seed money” or “you need to invest in God for Him to invest in you”, you know there is a con-game happening.

 To understand verse 15, we must consider the overall context of Paul’s situation. It is well-known that Paul is under arrest in Rome. From the statements Paul makes, we gather he is concerned his detention and inability to travel and be present with congregations may give others the opportunity to have a voice who have wrong motives and teach incorrectly or not in the right spirit. Unfortunately, within the Church, there are always those present who have the wrong motives to do ministry. There are those that are jealous of Paul and envious of his Apostleship being appointed by Jesus Christ. These people may try to create strife and place themselves in prominent positions within the Church for personal gain (selfish ambition).

**The Gospel out of envy and strife?**

**15** Some, to be sure,

are **preaching Christ** even from envy and strife,

but some also from good will;

 **16** the latter do it out of love,

knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel;

 **17** the former **proclaim Christ** out of selfish ambition

rather than from pure motives,

thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.

 However, Paul sees that even through wrong motives. . .the Gospel is proclaimed. Allow me to share a true story with you to illustrate the point.

**Myrtle**

 Over 20 years ago, I received a request to go see a widowed woman who lived alone in an old farmhouse that was literally falling apart. There are many old homes in rural areas in these conditions. Families from a by-gone era have died and their descendants have moved leaving hard farm life behind. However, 80-year-old Myrtle’s family left her a life-estate, which means she can live there the rest of her life. . . then the property passes to other heirs. Myrtle’s roof was made of tin, and one piece was loose flapping in the wind. She could not sleep well at night due to the noise. I was still youthful enough to climb a ladder and fix things. So, I took my ladder to her place and secured the flapping tin roof section. Obviously, I learned roof repair in seminary, “House Repair 101”.

Through this meeting, I saw that Myrtle lived an unusual life compared to modern standards. Myrtle’s appearance gave her that 19th century farm look. And, unfortunately for her, she smelled like farm animals, because she lived with. . . and I mean lived with…the farm animals. The house was literally falling apart. There was not any front door. She lived in an interior room with a door. As I entered the front room, I could see a make-shift hot water heater stand. The hot water heater stand had rotted, allowing the hot water heater to sink, thus breaking the rusted pipes above. It was obvious this had happened long ago. There was not any running water in the house. Myrtle got water from a well on the property. While I was there, I noticed the farm animals freely entered and walked around the house, because there was not any front door, and Myrtle treated the animals like family. There were chickens, ducks, turkeys and many others. While I was trying to navigate around the debris farm animals deposit around the dirt yard, Myrtle told me she wanted to introduce me to Tom that she kept on the back side of the barn. I can take care of myself, but my experience as a Houston Street cop called for my police antenna to go up. I could not help but to think of some poor soul she had preserved in an animal pen in the barn. I followed her to the back side of the barn, and she pointed to the biggest red-colored turkey I had ever seen. Myrtle was most proud of Tom, with whom she also talked. In addition to talking to Tom, she also constantly talked with several  donkeys while I was there. I have to say. . .the donkeys seemed to understand her. They were very tame and gentle. With all this animal environment, it appeared that Myrtle was healthy. I figured that she lived with the animals and had developed an immune system that was somewhat bullet-proof.

When I left Myrtle that day, I told her if she needed anything to give me a call. Understand, she did not have a phone. The neighbor checked on her often. It was through the neighbor’s relationship that had come the request for me to assist Myrtle. Needless to say, I was soon in conversation with Adult Protective Services, who knew Myrtle well.

A few months later, Adult Protective Service called me to assist Myrtle. She needed transportation to a court appearance in Austin to take care of a civil matter. I went to see Myrtle a few days prior to our drive to Austin. Remembering that Myrtle lived with farm animals and smelled like one, I offered to take her to a friend’s house to get a hot shower. She told me she had made arrangements to go to a friend’s house in LaGrange. So, when I arrived to pick her up a few days later. . . Myrtle had on a full-length dress and had greatly improved her appearance to go to court. However, and God bless Myrtle, but she still had a bit of that farm animal smell. So, I told her that I liked fresh air (which I do), and we drove to Austin (hour and half drive) with the windows partially down. She took care of her business in the court, and I drove her home.

During our drive, I had an opportunity to talk to Myrtle about her life. She had already told me she was a Christian and deeply believed in God. She told me that life on the farm was hard and she had hurt her back several years ago. However, she got healed from her injury. I asked how she healed her back. She said it was getting better and was almost back to normal when she was watching a television preacher who was praying for people to be healed. This preacher called for people to put their hand on the TV screen where his hand was pictured, and he would pray for them to be healed. Myrtle said that she figured it would not hurt anything, and she needed the additional healing even though her back was almost healed. So, she put her hand on the TV, and she said she prayed with the preacher, and she believed that her back got better. She then told me that she mailed some money to the TV preacher, who was in Oklahoma, thanking him for his prayers. But the story did not end there. Myrtle then told me that a few weeks later the TV preacher’s office called her (she had a phone in those years) and invited her to come to their church, where they broadcast, to tell her faith healing story. They sent her a bus ticket, and she went. Myrtle said that when she walked off the bus, the preacher’s staff was there to meet her. She said they asked her to sit in a wheelchair so they could transport her to their church. Once arrived at the church, they wheeled Myrtle upfront to tell her story. However, the TV preacher wanted to pray over her again while she was seated in the wheelchair. Once he prayed, he asked Myrtle to stand and walk. She did.

Obviously, Myrtle was healed before she took the bus ride to Oklahoma. I do not have any doubt that her faithful prayer had a healing effect on her a few weeks prior to her bus trip. So, like Paul wrote two thousand years ago, some preach the Gospel for the wrong motives, but the Gospel is still spread despite their abuses.

**Philippians 1: 18**

 What then?

Only that in every way,

whether in pretense or in truth,

 **Christ is proclaimed;**

and in this I rejoice.

 **AMEN**