

TRUTHS WORTH KNOWING (Philippians 1:12-18)

In 1979 an enterprising Canadian by the name of Chris Haney invented a board game. The game was first sold in 1981. In 1988 Parker Brothers purchased the board game. Eventually, Parker Brothers became a division of Hasbro, and in 2008, Hasbro paid \$80 million to obtain the full rights to this board game.

Some of you have probably played it. Over the years, many other editions of the game have been released. There is The Genius Edition, The Junior Edition, The All-Star Edition, The Baby Boomer Edition, All about the 80's, the 90's, and many more. There are even special editions dedicated to Star Wars, Saturday Night Live, and the Lord of the Rings movies. In all, there are over 100 different editions, and well over 100 million board games have been sold.

Players are asked questions regarding different subjects that include Geography, Entertainment, History, Literature, Science and Nature, as well as Sports and Leisure. To do well, a competitor has to have a broad range of knowledge about many things including pop culture.

The game is appropriately titled, *Trivial Pursuit*.

As I look at our culture and the kinds of things that we are dedicating our time to—spending excessive amounts of time on social media, watching news programs that run 24/7, playing games on our smart phones or tablets—it occurs to me that our lives have become a trivial pursuit. We are pursuing the trivial. The definition of *trivial* is “of very little importance or value; insignificant.”

Several years back pastor and author John Piper wrote a book called, *Don't Waste Your Life*. Wasting our lives is exactly what we will do if we continue chasing after the trivial. Instead, we need to give ourselves to knowing and doing big things, things that are far bigger than us and will long outlive us. That is why Jesus told His disciples, “Seek first the kingdom of God.” We need to become Kingdom people—people who live kingdom lives and who pursue kingdom priorities.

Turn with me to Philippians 1:12-18. Paul begins this passage with the words: “I want you to know.” He didn't tell the believers in Philippi, “There are some things I want you to consider, or think about, or ponder.” He says, “Here are some truths I want you to know.” These are things I want you to get and things I want to capture your attention.

One person said that an opinion is something you hold, but a conviction is something that holds you. Here in vv. 12-18 of Philippians, Paul communicates some truths that need to capture us. They are “Truths Worth Knowing.”

It Is Worth Knowing That Our Struggles Advance the Gospel

Look at v. 12. We have to ask the question, “What happened to Paul?” Paul doesn't state specifically, but he does give us hints in the text. The word *imprisonment* is found four times in Philippians, and all four times are in the first chapter (vv. 7, 13, 14, and 17). So, three of those four uses of that word occur in today's text.

Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus was written about the same time as this letter. In Ephesians 6: 20, Paul writes of himself, "I am an ambassador in chains." In Colossians 4:18, the very last verse of Colossians, which was also written at roughly the same time as this letter, Paul asked the believers in Colossae, "Remember my chains."

The last chapter of Acts tells us that Paul was under house arrest in Rome awaiting trial. The Emperor himself, would decide what was to be done with Paul. The last verse of Acts tells us, "He lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance."

All the while, Paul was chained to a Roman guard, and there was changing of the guard every six hours. More about that later.

How did Paul get to be where he was? Back in Acts 21, we are told that Paul visited the temple in Jerusalem one day, and he took with him four Jewish men who were believers in Jesus. While he was there, Jews from Asia recognized Paul. They spread the false rumor that Paul had brought Gentiles into the temple, which was not allowed by Jewish law. Acts 21:30 reads, "Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple." They began to beat him.

This mob was about to kill Paul when Romans soldiers showed up. Paul was rescued but also arrested. The Roman authorities mistook Paul for an Egyptian agitator, and suspected he had done something unlawful to incite the Jews.

To make a long story short, the Romans kept Paul in their company to protect him from Jews who had vowed to kill him. They also took him out of Jerusalem to Caesarea, a safer location.

The Romans governor Felix kept Paul in custody for two years. He kept hoping that Paul's friends would offer him a bribe to let Paul go.

After two years, Felix was succeeded by a man named Festus. Soon after arriving Festus held a hearing to determine what was to be done with Paul. Jews from Jerusalem came to make their case against Paul, and Paul spoke in his own defense. Festus wanted to take Paul back to Jerusalem to be tried. Paul believed that if he went back to Jerusalem, he would never leave the city alive. He spoke the words, "I appeal to Caesar."

Being a Roman citizen, Paul had the right for his case to be heard the Emperor. Eventually, he was transported to Rome by ship. On the way, the ship encountered a terrific storm. They came close to a small island. The ship struck a reef and ran aground. As the waves beat against the ship, the ship began to break apart. All on board had to swim to the island, but in the end, all were saved.

After several months, another ship arrived and took them to the Italian coast. They made their way by land to Rome. Paul found lodging, but he was chained to a Roman guard 24-hours a day as he awaited his appearance before the Emperor of Rome. Luke concluded the book of Acts before Paul's trial was ever held. Luke tells us that two years had passed, and Paul was still waiting, but he stayed active while he waited—preaching, teaching, writing, and no doubt witnessing to those many guards who were chained to Paul for hours at a time.

When you add up the Caesarean imprisonment along with the Roman one, we see that

Paul had been incarcerated for four years and counting. That is what had happened to Paul. He was falsely accused and wrongfully held.

Up until that time, Paul was used to traveling, starting churches, and preaching the gospel in places where there was no Christian witness. Then, suddenly, Paul's forward momentum was stopped. People were able to go see Paul, but Paul was unable to move about freely. You would think that would keep God from being able to use Paul in a significant way. Paul said, "No, God is using this adversity I am facing to advance the gospel."

God not only knows our struggles and ministers to us in our struggles, He also uses our struggles to achieve His purposes. This truth is illustrated time and again in the Bible.

You remember the story of Joseph. His older brothers sold him to slave traders. He was taken to Egypt and sold to an important Egyptian official. He had to learn the language and learn the customs of a foreign culture. Instead of being the favored son of an important man in the land of his birth, He is the slave of an important man in a foreign place.

Still, yet, Joseph did well and earned the favor of his master until the wife of his master falsely accused Joseph of a foul deed that he did not commit. He lost the favor of his master and was sent to prison. Years passed until God acted on Joseph's behalf. He was released and entrusted with a high position in the Egyptian government. Only Pharaoh had more power than Joseph. From his position, God used Joseph to preserve His people in a time of great need and peril.

Were we to take the time, we could look at person after person in the Bible who was mistreated, misunderstood, misused, and yet, God used the person and their difficult circumstances to accomplish what God wanted to do.

What struggles do you face? Are they financial, medical, relational? Was their trauma in your childhood? Is their terrible heartache in your present? Whatever it is, God can use that and will use that to advance the message and mission of the gospel.

How was God advancing the gospel through Paul's imprisonment? Look at v. 13. Look also at the second to last verse of this letter—Philippians 4:22. The soldiers who guarded Paul were taken from an elite force who were the Emperor's own body guards. They protected the Emperor, and his family, and his high officials, and even guarded some of those who would stand trial before the Emperor. They were considered to be part of the Emperor's household.

It is almost certainly true that some of those soldiers who guarded became believers in Jesus because of the witness of Paul. As far as Paul was concerned, he wasn't chained to them; they were chained to him. He had a captive audience. No doubt, he evangelized those soldiers. They received the message of the gospel. Then, they began to share the gospel with others. When these elite soldiers concluded their service, many of them went on to hold responsible places in business and government. The gospel was being heard in the higher echelons of Roman society because Paul was a prisoner in Rome. The gospel message was going into places that it would not have reached if Paul had been a free man.

Paul would not have voluntarily chosen imprisonment on his own, but God used it.

Likewise, you might not have chosen your circumstances and your struggles, but God will use them for His glory and the progress of the gospel.

There is another truth worth knowing.

It Is Worth Knowing That Christ Must Remain Central

What did those in the imperial guard conclude? Look again at v. 13. They came to realize that Paul's imprisonment was for Christ. We are not told that Paul preached against the pagan government and the immoral society of Rome. He preached Jesus. They knew what he was for and what he suffered for—it was Christ.

Do people know us by what we are for or by what we are against? Regrettably, I think most people know Christians for what we are against.

I grew up in the Baptist church. We were viewed as being against dancing, against drinking, against gambling, against play cards, against divorce, and against pre-marital sex. We are known, today, for being against homosexuality, against abortion, against transgender issues, and many other things. I am not saying that it is wrong to be against such things.

My hope is that one day, people will begin to associate us for what we are for. I want them to say, "Oh, those people are for forgiveness. They are for grace. They are for mercy. They are for helping those in need. And most of all, those people are for Jesus."

We read in Micah 6:8, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you? But to join the Republican Party and preach against the cultural sins of your day." Is that what it says? No, but we act like it does. The text says, "But to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."

Are Christians known by the world as justice pursuing, kindness loving, and humble living people? Not really. But we should be because that is what God wants.

Let's make Jesus the focus. Let's talk about Him.

The late 1960's and the early 1970's saw the rise of a counter-cultural movement in American. One such expression of that era was the hippies. These were mostly young people who wore their hair long, wore different clothing. They embraced drugs, sex, and roll and roll music. They jettisoned the values of their parents and did not conform to the expectations of society.

At the same time, however, was the rise of the Jesus People Movement. These were young people who were also rather counter-cultural, but they embraced Jesus and His message. They were evangelistic. They spread the gospel through various means—coffee houses, concerts, and Christian t-shirts, and conversations with other young people. They were so pro-Jesus that they were called Jesus People.

Our world, our culture, and our churches need a need a new generation of Jesus people. Let's be a Jesus Church.

It Is Worth Knowing the Source of Fearless Witness

Look at v. 14. There were many Christians who were inspired by the example of Paul.

His example emboldened them “to speak the word without fear.”

Have you ever been inspired by the life and example of another Christian in some way? It could have been the prayer life of a grandparent or aged believer. Maybe it was the gentle spirit of a teacher or the perseverance of a Christian who faced pain and sickness with an uncommon peace and who never complained.

Look for inspiring examples of those who stand and speak for Christ no matter what. Read about the persecuted church. Read the biographies of great men and women of God who were faithful in fearful times.

On Monday morning, Ruth Ann, the kids, and I left the house at 6:30 in the morning, drove to OKC, and attended the *Who's Your One* workshop. We listened to inspiring teachers and preachers. I was inspired by what they are doing to reach people for Christ.

I was also inspired by something Stephen Rummage said. He is the pastor at Quail Springs Baptist Church. He told a story about he and his wife discussing a bare spot of ground in their backyard. They decided they needed to plant some grass seed there and let it grow. He went and bought some grass seed. Several weeks later, his wife asked if he had planted the seed. Suppose I told her, “Every night I go out to the garage. I reach into that sack of seed. I pick up a handful of that seed, hold it up and look at it. I study that seed in my hand. Each week, I gather with some guys and we talk about seeds and about the best way to scatter seeds, and how to get a greater yield from the seed. But no, I haven't actually planted any seed.” He asked, “Do you think she would be impressed with my answer?”

God's word is the seed. The gospel is the seed. We gather in our churches, and we talk about the seed. We study the seed. We express gratefulness to God for the seed. But what are we doing to cast the seed, to plant the seed? The seed is not going to grow until we plant it.

There is one more truth we need to know.

It Is Worth Knowing That Jesus Is Being Proclaimed

Look with me at vv. 15-18. While Paul was being held in custody, there were others who were out preaching Jesus. Some were supporters of Paul. Some were opponents of Paul. We are not told the reason for their opposition. Maybe they were jealous of that foreign Jew from Jerusalem who was getting all the attention and acclaim from fellow Christians. Maybe they disagreed with some of his theological positions.

According to the text, the preaching of these detractors of Paul was being done from envy and rivalry. There was a bit of selfishness in their preaching. They wanted to puff themselves up and put Paul down. Nevertheless, they did preach the gospel. They preached salvation through Jesus. Meanwhile, the supporters of Paul preached from good will and love.

Paul said, “Regardless, the important thing is that Jesus is being preached, and in that I rejoice.” The word rejoice is found 9 times in Philippians, and here in v. 18 is its first usage. Paul rejoiced that Jesus and the gospel were being preached. It didn't matter to him the motive behind the proclamation.

The motive, of course, would matter to God, but we are not God. It is not up to us to judge others. I don't watch much religious programming on TV because when I do, I have a tendency to get perturbed. I can get judgmental and think to myself, "Well, I don't agree with that. Well, that's not how I would have said it."

Whether it is by TV, the radio, or the Internet, if Jesus is being proclaimed and the true gospel is being preached, I should rejoice, and so should you.

We don't always react that way.

The late Ray Stedman once said:

Can you take the success of others? That's one of the hardest tests of Christian maturity, isn't it? I don't think there is a clearer mark of Christian maturity than to be able to genuinely rejoice—not just say pious words—but genuinely rejoice in the success of another. Most of us react like the Christian I heard of in the mountains of West Virginia who, when asked how things had been going that year, said, "Oh things have been terrible. We've had an awful year. Things have never been worse. Instead of having any progress in the church we've had setbacks, we've lost people." But then he smiled and said, "But thank God, the Methodists haven't done any better."

Stedman continued, "That spirit is the counterpart of what Paul reveals here. Rivalry caused him to rejoice!"

One of the speakers on Monday commented that instead of majoring on the minors, we need to get back to letting the main thing be the main thing.

As a church and as individuals, let's not pursue the trivial. Instead, let's make much of Jesus. That is worth knowing. That is worth doing.