

My Earnest Hope

Philippians 1:1-30

Key verse: 1:20

"I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death."

Philippians is a letter written by Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome at around 62 A.D., addressed to the saints at Philippi. Given that Paul wrote it in prison, we may naturally assume that it was filled with grief and doubt. However, upon careful reading, we see that it is filled with joy, gratitude, and hope. Above all, the letter shows Paul's eagerness in desiring to know Jesus, through which we can learn of his pure Gospel-centered faith. Today's passage deals with Paul's eager expectation and hope. Upon study, we find that it is this "hope" that allowed Paul to become such a great missionary. What exactly, then, is this "hope"?

I. Paul's thanksgiving and prayer (v.1-8)

Philippians begins first with thanksgiving for the saints at Philippi. The Philippian church began when Paul baptized Lydia, a dealer of purple cloth, and her family (Act ch. 16). Later, as we read Chapter 4 of Philippians and see Euodia, Syntyche, and Clement, among many other co-workers, we can infer that the church had grown considerably.

But note verses 3-5. "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." The saints at Philippi provided Paul with everything he needed even while he was imprisoned and in chains. When Paul sought to preach the gospel to world, they partook with him in grace and became his partners. (v.7). So even when confined to a cold prison cell, Paul did not feel alone because of their warm love and attention. Furthermore, Paul was more than thankful as he pondered over God's work amongst them. This explains why he was always thankful when he prayed for them.

In verse 8, Paul expresses just how much he loves them – to the extent of calling God as his witness on how much he longed for them with the affection of Christ. Paul continues by praying that they would not only abound in love but also in knowledge and depth of insight, that they may be filled with the fruit of righteousness coming through Christ.

In other words, Paul blessed them wholeheartedly . I pray that we also, like Paul, would be grateful

for our sheep's co-working and bless them with joy and thanksgiving.

II. Paul's Gospel-spirit and Earnest Hope (v.9-30)

Look at verse 12. Let's read it together. "Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel." When the saints of Philippi heard that Sh. Paul was imprisoned, they were grieved at heart. They thought to themselves, "Could this be a step backwards for the ministry of the Gospel?" But Paul, addressing their fears, said "Not so." In fact, he comforted them by telling how the Gospel continued to advance even while he was in prison.

How could this be possible? First, the Gospel was proclaimed to Roman guards. Paul was imprisoned under the watch of the Roman palace guard. Soldiers from the guard took their turns to watch over Paul. As prisoners and guard soldiers were chained to each other, Paul used the opportunity to preach the Gospel to them. "Sergeant Kim, Jesus died on the cross for our sins." The guards had no choice but to listen to the Gospel. And when their turn returned, they had to continue from where they had left off in the Gospel. Thus Paul became famous within the palace guard. And working in mysterious ways, the Gospel reached as far the Roman Emperor's palace. Paul also preached the Gospel to people visited him in prison. Although it seems impossible to do anything in prison, that was certainly not true of Paul.

Second, when Paul became imprisoned, other brothers and sisters started to preach God's word all the more boldly. Some did so with good motives, thinking, "If Sh. Paul is imprisoned, should not we preach the Gospel instead?" They went out into the world and preached the Gospel fearlessly and eagerly. But some who had been jealous of Paul, thought to themselves, "This is it. The time has come for us to show that we are better preacher than Paul." They proclaimed the Gospel eagerly, as if to prove themselves before Paul. They were preaching the Gospel to strengthen their influence in the Church and to harm Paul.

Upon hearing this, Paul could have felt bad. "How could they? Instead of praying for my release, they are preaching the Gospel to harm me..."

But look at verse 18. Let's read it together. "But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."

Here we see that for Paul, if it concerned the Gospel, his heart was wide open – open enough to overcome even personal hurts and misunderstandings. Whatever the motives, Paul was joyous for the sole reason that the Gospel was proclaimed, regardless of his own well-being. There is a saying, 'A high street has no main gate.' Indeed, there were no barriers stopping Paul from walking the

street of spreading the Gospel. And this is what the Paul's "Gospel-spirit" is all about – to preach the Gospel whatever the means, and to preach the Gospel whatever happens to him. It is with this mindset that our own missionaries, having graduated from college, went off to their mission fields. Some of them became missionaries as seamsters, While some left their jobs as prosecutors to go out into their mission filed and deliver newspapers. Some went out into the tundra without knowing anyone nor a single word in the local language, and yet managed to start, by faith alone, a big church plant. All these things were possible because they had the Gospel-spirit – doing whatever it takes to make the Gospel known. Our UBF history can be described as the history of this Gospel-spirit. This is the history of obedience and faithful resolution to Jesus' Great Commission : "Go and preach the Gospel to all creation."

Our history has been the history of thinking about the Gospel, in wake and in sleep, looking to spread the Gospel in whatever shape of form, while rejoicing in it together. Praise and thanks be to God who has saved us and called us to become missionaries and shepherds, equipped with a Gospel-spirit to preach the Gospel to all nations!

Let's read verse 20. "I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." Paul was not ashamed of being imprisoned for preaching the Gospel . This was because he had an eager expectation and hope that he was to fulfill by whatever means possible. The hope was that Christ would be exalted in his body. Paul was once a persecutor of the Church and an enemy of Christ. But Jesus, revealing himself amidst light, met Paul on his way to Damascus and forever changed him. "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Only then did he realize that Jesus was the Christ that he had so longed for, the King of kings and the King of glory who deserves eternal worship. It was from that time on that Paul began to pursue his eager hope, that Jesus might be exalted in him whether by life or by death.

Note the phrase "Now as always" in verse 20. Here we can see that Paul had, already from the past, held on to this desire to fulfill his hope, whether by life or by death. In a previous letter, we see Paul mention how much hardship he endured while preaching the Gospel. He had already been imprisoned several times, had been flogged countlessly, and almost saw death multiple times. Five times he received from fellow Jews forty lashes minus one. Three times he was beaten with a rod, once almost stoned to death in Lystra. Three times he was shipwrecked and spent day and night out in open sea. Constantly on the move, he had gone through all kinds of danger from rivers and bandits (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). We can hardly imagine how hard it was for Paul to bear all these sufferings. But Paul did not step back from such hardships; he proceeded onwards with a bold heart and continued to preach the Gospel again and again. How was Paul able to do this? "Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." This was Paul's resolution, his life purpose. It

was because of this hope that he could keep a pure love for Christ and become a great Gospel preacher. Paul goes on to summarize his life for Christ in one line.

Let's read verse 21 aloud." "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Paul says, 'Christ lives in me.' This means that he was united with Christ. He confesses the following in Romans 14:8 : "If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." In Galatians 2:20, he writes : "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." For Paul, Christ is everything - the meaning, the purpose, and the driving force of his life.

Our missionaries also went out to their mission fields, dedicating their youth to the Lord with an earnest hope to exalt Jesus alone. The past 60 years of UBF history is really the evidence of such resolution and hope. If our hearts had been enamored with things other than Jesus, we could never have been used by God in such a way. It was only by this hope of exalting Jesus that our missionaries had gone out, and overcome all difficulties – problems regarding finances, raising children, health issues, and conflicts with other missionaries, among many other hardships – to continue in their calling as missionaries. Meanwhile, the hair of our once young and energetic missionaries has turned grey. 37 missionaries, either due to illness or accidents, have passed away, leaving their family members behind. Yet one thing remains unchanged. Our expectation and hope - to exalt Christ by offering ourselves to the Lord – still remains. Hence, we chose to study Philippians during this conference that we may reaffirm and reassure ourselves of the hope that we have held for the past 60 years. A pure love and earnest hope towards Christ – this is where everything begins. We pray that God would help us to stand firmly on the hope of exalting Jesus and would continue to use us for world mission in the future.

I was once a lost person who, overtaken by a sense of emptiness, did not know what to live for. Once while I was eating, the thought of death overtook me. "If I die, why bother?" Devastated, I placed my spoon back on the table. My mother saw me and was frightened, saying "Son, what's the matter?" How could I possibly have a purpose in life? Then by God's grace, while studying Genesis, followed by the Gospel of John, I met Jesus as the Lord over life : "I am the way and the truth and the life." Suddenly, the feeling of emptiness and futility that had dominated my life for so long had disappeared. Instead, I found myself filled with the grace of life. I was absolutely amazed at how such thing could possibly happen. It was incredible – I was no longer subject to the power of emptiness. The Jesus I met became my Christ and King of glory, who is worthy of eternal praise! From that time on, proclaiming Jesus and exalting Him as Christ has become my utmost goal and priority. What on earth could be more valuable than this? Praise and thanks be to God for saving me from the darkness of futility and allowing me to serve as a shepherd and preacher of the Gospel!

Despite my many weaknesses, I pray that I may hold firmly to the word, "To live is Christ", and continue to learn Jesus everyday as I preach the Gospel of Christ.

Praise and thanks be to Jesus, who died on the cross and rose as our perfect Christ and King of glory. I pray that we may live our lives with thanksgiving as we meditate on Jesus' grace and exalt Jesus and Jesus only. In particular, I pray that this conference will teach us of Paul's sincere faith and earnest hope for Jesus, by which we can press onwards with a growing love for Christ.