

2025 ALL-AGE TALK, 13.7.25, PHILIPPIANS 1:12-30 (selections)

DARE ALL THE MORE...

Here in Philippians 1, Paul grabs the attention of his listeners. And he grabs our attention too. Because in this captivating letter, we are confronted early on by a very sobering picture. A picture of Paul in chains. A picture of the church's leading travelling missionary as a captive in prison... But Paul says: 'I am in chains for Christ'. (x2) Is this just Paul trying to apply the power of positive thinking to his situation? Paul's attempt to put a positive spin on his troubles?

Absolutely not! Because Paul has come to a glorious realisation. That the chains that slow him down every day, have actually served to advance the gospel of Jesus. In a way that only Jesus can, a negative has been turned to a positive. How so? Paul is rejoicing that he is a prisoner in chains, because it means that a whole group of people, who would not normally have heard the good news of Jesus, are getting to hear it, in a very close-up way. The palace guard are all talking about this prisoner who, despite his chains & his lack of freedom, is very animated. It's almost as if this prisoner is glad to be in prison...

Those guards are very aware that here is someone who is a Roman citizen, who is very learned & has many influential friends. And yet he is willing to sacrifice all his privileges & potential riches, just so he can tell people about this guy called Jesus. No wonder they are all talking about Paul. All trying to figure out this Jesus & this message of hope which Paul wants to tell everyone. More than that, all this has made some of Paul's fellow Christians dare all the more to share their faith too.

Here's a wonderful truth which this story of Paul teaches us: those in prison can sometimes be more free than those who hold them captive. It's all about where your mind is at. God can transform our thinking, to think differently from the usual mindset. (Read Rom 12:1&2)... We need to see our world with the faith of Paul & the hope of those other believers. Above all, we need to see our world through the lens of the love of Jesus.

There's a true story about a travelling salesman in the States. He went into this roadside café for breakfast. And the waitress was stony-faced & spilled his coffee. And he could easily have given her a piece of his mind. But by the time he finished his breakfast, he decided to leave a healthy tip for that waitress. Just as he was getting into his car to go, the waitress rushed out to speak to

him, saying he must have made a mistake. But he simply said that he realised she was having a particularly hard day, so wanted to bless her. She was very touched by this – as well as what he said about Jesus' love for her.

We all know what it's like to feel like that fed-up waitress. Perhaps even today, some of us might be feeling that you don't want to be where you are right now. And we can imagine how frustrated Paul, might have been, living in chains every day. Well here's the good news for you today, in the words of Jesus: 'If the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed!'. Alleluia ! (x2)

The power of the love of God in Jesus declares 'freedom' to our hearts, no matter what our circumstances... At the start of his ministry, Jesus declared a 'year of Jubilee' to the captives! Alleluia ! No matter how chained up you might feel, no matter how restrained you think you are, hearing the voice of Jesus can set your heart free & make your spirit sing! Is that the truth ?... Alleluia !

Even if we are in some kind of prison right now, we can know freedom 'on the inside'... I believe God is calling us in these days to 'dare all the more' in sharing our faith. We can be like Paul, who despite being confined himself, still saw the gospel of Jesus advancing. He rejoiced as he 'languished in prison' – because he heard of his fellow believers boasting in Jesus. Paul the prisoner rejoiced with great joy, because he saw others standing together & progressing in their faith.

As individuals & as a church we might feel restrained right now. Unable to realise our hopes & dreams. But we are called to make the most of the freedom we **do** have. Freedom to share the good news of Jesus. I encourage us all, in the words of Paul to: 'make the most of every opportunity'. We have a great opportunity in September to join our Alpha course, to learn more about Jesus & the Holy Spirit. And Alpha also gives us a chance to share our faith in Jesus with those we know. In the coming days, let us 'dare all the more' for the good news of Jesus... Thanks be to God.