

Group Study Outline

Launching

Do you think of yourself as ambitious?
What are you ambitious for?

Questions

Read Phils 1:12-26

Why has Paul's imprisonment in Rome not been a bad thing?
In what ways has the gospel advanced? (think thru both 13 and 14)
What matters to Paul (according to 12-14)?
And what doesn't matter much?

In 15-17 Paul talks about various motives for preaching Christ.
In your own words, why were these various groups preaching Christ?
When does the ambition to preach Christ become a selfish ambition?
If you shared Paul's ambition, how would your life be different?
What things matter to you that seem not to have mattered very much to Paul?

In 18b-26, Paul talks about his prospects for the future.
What are the possible outcomes from his present imprisonment?
What does he feel about each of them? Put 21 into your own words.
What does he want to happen to him? why?

Why does he think he *will remain* (25)?
So how will he now face the prospect of every new day he's allowed?
What was Paul's ambition here? what will he do if he is allowed to?

How does the paragraph 1:18b-26 link to the paragraph 1:12-18a?
Why do you think Paul writes all of 1:12-26 to the Philippians?
How is it relevant to them?
How then is it relevant to us?

Conclusion

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'ambitious' as 'strongly desirous for something, to be or to do something'.
What was Paul ambitious for, or to be, or to do?
What was the guiding principle of his life, from these verses?
If you were more like Paul, what would you be like? why aren't you?!
What might 1:21 mean for your ambitions (as listed at the start)?

Philippians 1:12-26

Theme Sentence

Paul's passionate ambition is that Christ should be proclaimed.

Story Board

Don't worry about me in prison here in Rome. My concern above any other is that Christ is proclaimed. The poor guard I'm chained up to has to listen to me preaching day in, day out! And the Christians in Rome have stopped fearing imprisonment, and got all brave to speak the gospel too.

I know that some of these Christians here are jealous of me ... maybe I threaten them. It makes me feel wretched that it's like this between us. But, don't you seem, the important thing is that the gospel is getting proclaimed. And that's what matters most, isn't it?

And as for my future? Well, the worst they can do to me is kill me ... but I'd love that! I'd be with Jesus straight away. And the longer I'm alive, the more I can be getting on with proclaiming him ... here with the guard, or (if I'm released) to you and others. In fact, this gospelling matters so much, I think that God will keep me alive to do it for a bit longer yet.

Application

Paul encourages the gospel-centeredness that his own life models. Are we as single-minded as him? For example ...

- if I were more like Paul, I would assess every circumstance I face not according to personal comfort, reputation or status, but according to whether Christ is proclaimed and the gospel advances.
- if I were more like Paul, I would enjoy the prospect of every new day as a God-given opportunity for me to work for Christ. Proclaiming him would be my *raison d'être*; ending my days living for him would be my aim.
- if I were more like Paul, I would forego what I personally desire/prefer for the chance to help others progress as Christians.

Verse by verse

12-14 Paul explains how his imprisonment in Rome has only served to aid the gospel:

the issue has now become clear (13)

Presumably the tabloid press in Rome would have had a field day with headlines like 'hooligan vicar put away for life' (cf Acts 16:19-21 for an example of the kind of charges Paul faced). Sure, Paul was now a captive, but that meant that his guards became his captive audience: chained to Paul for 8 hours a day certainly gave time for Paul to make it clear that he had been sent to Rome not for riot, but because he preached Christ (cf Acts 28:16-31, especially v20).

Christians have become bold (14)

We might expect that Paul's imprisonment would mean that all the other Christians in Rome would scurry back to the safety of their rabbit holes. Whereas, in fact, most of them had followed Paul's brave example, seized the advantage and now were gospelling away like mad.

15-18 Paul needed to explain all this because some people had taken advantage of his situation to try to *stir up trouble* (17 NIV). There was probably a church already in Rome before Paul arrived, possibly started by some Acts 2 converts. What would the hardworking leaders of that embryo church have felt when Paul, the superstar apostle, turns up and all the attention is on him? It's little surprise that there's a fair bit of *envy and rivalry* around. And then when he's locked up in prison, it would be difficult to resist the line 'well, that's just desserts ... it shows what God thinks of him interfering in our work'. And talk like this, from fellow Christian leaders, would certainly *increase my suffering* (17 RSV).

Paul remains so positive despite this *rivalry* because the gospel has advanced. This is his concern: that *Christ is preached*. It must be that these people really were still preaching Christ (otherwise, we'd be in a Galatians 1:8-9 situation, presumably). But given that they are true to the gospel, it is remarkable that Paul puts his reputation to one side: he's much more concerned about the gospel advancing than about building his own empire. We tend to be the reverse: blazing with rage if we're personally threatened, but sloppy over gospel accuracy!

18-26 Paul explains how this prime concern that Christ is proclaimed works out in his own life as he thinks forward to the possible outcomes of his imprisonment.

He's torn. On the one hand, if his imprisonment were to end up with his martyrdom, he'd be glad: he'd be *with Christ* straightaway and for ever. On the other hand, there's work to be done here, the *fruitful labour* of continuing Christian ministry amongst his flock (including the Philippians). Dying is clearly *gain*, but continuing alive would provide the opportunity for more Christ-proclaiming, advancing the gospel (21). Again, don't we think the other way round: life is gain ('... wouldn't it be wonderful if we could live a bit longer, see our [grand]children grow up' etc), whereas death is where the Christ-bit comes in. In fact, the more you think about this, the more challenging it is: (eg) what would it do to our careers if we believed 1:21? how would it affect what I would do tomorrow if I really believed that my life were all about Christ and his work?

19-21 *Deliverance* here may refer to Paul's release from prison, or to his ultimate *salvation* (cf NIV footnote). The latter makes more sense of Paul's *hope* to maintain the Christ-exalting, gospel-centeredness of 12-18, right to the end of his life, rather than be *ashamed* (a word which is often used in the NT of people giving up as Christians cf 2 Tim 1:8).

24-26 It is interesting to ask why Paul writes all of 1:24-26. Why tell the Philippians all about the rivalry in the church in Rome? Why tell them all about his own inner tussle as he thinks about his future prospects? I think that he's headed for 1:27 and his call there for the Philippians to stand shoulder-to-shoulder, full square behind the gospel of Christ. This gospel-centeredness is exactly what he'd commended in the Philippians' gift (1:3-8), and it's exactly the *best* that he prayed they'd *discern* and pursue (1:9-11). It's what Paul is rejoicing about in Rome, despite the rivalries, and despite being chained up. And it's what he's committed to, should be released.

In fact, he's so concerned that they do *progress in the faith* that he will forego the preferable departing-to-be-with-Christ for the chance to visit and teach them yet again. This is exactly the considering-others-better-than-yourselves which is the gospel (as he'll go on to describe in 2:3-4, 5-11).