

INTRODUCTION

Marketing is an art of science. The traditional way to promote a product is to highlight its functions and strengths. Companies spend big money on advertisement. Two Sundays from now will be the annual Super Bowl. This year it will cost 5 million dollars to show a 30 second TV commercial. That is more than many people will earn in a lifetime! Then there is a different way to promote a product completely free. It is called word-of-mouth. We do it all the time. Looking for a reliable mechanic? Ask your friends. Planning a home improvement project? Consult your neighbors. Which soy sauce or instant noodle tastes the best? Mom knows it all. Talking about cooking, many of you have this gadget in your kitchen (photo on the screen). In 2010, Robert Wang of Canada invented the Instant Pot. Mr. Wang takes pride in the fact that he has never spent a penny on advertisement. He does not need to. Users keep writing good reviews about the product. Its unofficial Facebook page has over 850,000 members. They exchange cooking ideas and recipes. If you think about it, spreading the gospel is like selling a product. We convince people to accept Christ. A major difference is that the benefits are not just for this life, but there are eternal blessings too. As we continue our study on the book of Philippians you may still remember that Paul was in prison. He used to go about like a sales representative sharing the gospel. But now he was locked up. However, God's work could not be stopped. Whether directly or indirectly, Paul continued to reach out to people. Even though we are in a very different situation than Paul, one thing remains the same: the gospel cannot be hindered regardless of the challenges we face.

EXPLANATION

Paul was separated from the Philippian church by a long distance. The church sent a brother to bring supplies to Paul. People earnestly wanted to know how Paul was doing in prison. Therefore, Paul gave them a brief report in **verse 12**: Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. Paul told the Philippian believers that despite his imprisonment the gospel continued to spread. That was why Paul could rejoice. Paul did not say anything about his health condition, how the jailers treated him or whether he had enough food or clothes. He did not even say when he would appear in court or be released. Paul only cared about God's Kingdom. As we study the rest of the passage we will focus on three words.

1. Obvious 明顯

The first word is obvious. Paul's confinement itself was an obvious testimony for the gospel. Paul said in **verse 13**: As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. It was quite obvious to the jailers and everyone else why Paul was there. Paul was "in chains for Christ." The expression means that Paul was being locked up for the sake of preaching Christ. Paul was no ordinary inmate. In movies or TV dramas prisoners are portrayed as violent guys. The guards need to protect themselves with weapons. But we can imagine that Paul was gentle and obedient to the orders from the guards.

This secular world may not care about what we believe. But we will definitely shock unbelievers when they see us respond to unjust treatments calmly. The apostle Peter said this in **1 Peter 3:14-15** – 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” 15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. Some of you know verse 15, when Peter encouraged us to always get ready to share what we believe. In the context, Peter was talking about suffering for our faith. When people hurt you but notice that you do not retaliate or react in anger or with foul language they would be curious to know why. Then it becomes a golden opportunity for you to share Christ with them. Sadly but surely, we will face some forms of persecution from the world. Last year, there was a case in the Supreme Court. A baker in Colorado was unwilling to prepare a wedding cake for a homosexual couple. The owner, Jack Phillips, is a Christian. The two men sued Phillips when he refused to take their business. A local judge ruled against Phillips. He ordered Phillips to prepare cake for all customers, or he must remove cake from his business. Subsequently, Phillips filed an appeal to the Supreme Court. The court has yet to make a decision. Phillips said: “I can trust Him and know that God is doing what he’s going to do. And if He’s chosen us to be a part of that, that’s quite an honor.” Christian owners like Phillips are forced to choose between closing their businesses or to compromise their faith. We may not be sued because of what we believe. But we may not be welcomed at school or at work if we profess that we are Christians. Let me ask you: do you say grace at lunch in front of your classmates or colleagues? Do you care more about how God sees you or how people see you? An atheist teacher or supervisor may give you a hard time if you openly express your faith. How should you react? All eyes will be on you. If you burst out in anger or seek revenge, then unbelievers will conclude that we are no different than them. But if people can connect the hardship you face, and your response based on the Bible, then the incident will be an obvious testimony for Christ. Think about it this way: Paul might never have a chance to witness to the prison guards if he was not arrested. In fact, in the book of Acts Paul asked the court to send him to Rome so that he could share his faith before Caesar. If you only focus on your misery, then most likely you will sink into self-pity. You wonder if God is being unfair to you. But if you accept that it is God who sends you to a unique circumstance to witness for Him, then you can rejoice even in your affliction like Paul did. God can turn your misery into a ministry.

2. Zealous 熱心

The gospel cannot be hindered regardless of the challenges we face. The second word we will look at from the passage is zealous. Paul’s example motivated believers to become more zealous in preaching the gospel. Paul said in **verse 14**: Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. Believers were encouraged, rather than discouraged, by what Paul went through. We see other examples like that in the Bible. In Acts chapter 7 Stephen preached a powerful message to convict the Jews of their sins for all generations. Stephen also condemned the Jews for killing Jesus. Did they confess their sins and came to the Lord? The crowd was ticked off, and so they threw stones at Stephen and killed him. How did Stephen’s death impact the church? **Acts 8:1** reads: On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. The Jews turned up the heat against the church. Believers ran for their lives. However, they did not remain silent or go low-key.

Continue to read **verse 4**: Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Those Christians carried the gospel with them. Can you see God's wisdom there? He turned something negative into positive. The religious authority thought that they could disperse the Christians and suppress the church through persecution. But God used the incident to move believers to other locations, and they seized the opportunities to reach out to people whom they would never have met otherwise. The exciting part is that God did the same thing over and over again in church history. If it was not because of religious persecution, the Pilgrims might not have left England, and North America might still be populated by the native people. Those early settlers came with the gospel. In fact, some renowned colleges in U.S. founded later were for a primary purpose to train missionaries to go into the Native American tribes. Other missionaries from the west also took the gospel to China. During major political movements western missionaries were forced to leave China. Persecution broke out, many Chinese church leaders were arrested and some of them eventually died in prisons. Churches were closed, and Bibles were seized. The government thought that Christianity would be eradicated once and for all. Decades later when religious freedom was granted again, there were many more Christians than anyone had expected. Where did they come from? When believers were forbidden to gather publicly they held meetings at homes or in remote places. Since printed Bibles were very limited, brothers and sisters simply memorized the Scripture chapter by chapter. Although their church leaders were imprisoned Christians were still zealous to share the gospel to others. One by one people were saved, and underground churches continued to grow. On separate occasions, I had the privilege to meet two sisters who are the fourth generation Christians in their families. I could not imagine how hard it was for their ancestors to preserve and pass down the Christian faith. Compared to the first century Christians, and believers who escaped persecutions in England and China we are much blessed. We enjoy religious freedom that they did not have. But where is the zeal for God's Kingdom? We are fooled by the world to fix our eyes on material comfort. We are also misled into believing that we always have opportunities to share the gospel with our family and friends. The fact is, tomorrow is not in our hands. May the Lord give us a zealous heart and always be ready to tell others what we believe.

3. Jealous 嫉妒

The gospel cannot be hindered regardless of the challenges we face. It was obvious to the people who knew Paul that he was in chains for Christ. Despite hardship, believers were zealous in sharing the gospel. Next, Paul told us that there were some jealous Christians who had a different agenda. Take a look at **verse 15**: It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. Then skip down to **verse 17**: The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. The phrase "selfish ambition" in verse 17 means a desire to put oneself forward. It has a sense of competition with a purpose to show off. But what were those people jealous about? In today's term Paul was a high-profile evangelist like Billy Graham at that time. No matter where he went he drew a large crowd. Therefore, some believers were jealous of Paul's recognition and success. Jealousy in church is worse than a dead mouse in your kitchen. It stinks, and it is toxic! Paul addressed the problem of jealousy when he wrote to the Corinthian church. **1 Corinthians 3:3-4** say: 3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men? Paul told them that it did not matter who led them to

Christ or who gave them discipleship training. Church leaders were just God's servants. Ultimately, we all follow Christ. Jealousy is detrimental to a church because it leads to pride. People who are jealous cannot tolerate others' success and they will work even harder to prove that they can do better. They say to others: "Look here. I did it!" However, Paul did not mind who took the credit. He shared in **verse 18**: 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. Paul echoed what he said at the beginning. The only thing that brought him joy was that people were saved. Paul paid no attention to the jealous Christians. There should not be any jealousy in the church. We work as a team to further God's Kingdom. Even when there are a few star-players in a sports team, they still have to rely on their teammates to win a game. In a church there may be some members who are more gifted at teaching, leadership, singing or fixing things. But they depend on others to make up for what they cannot do. When you can humbly give thanks to God for someone's contribution and sincerely tell people that they did a good job, then there will not be any jealousy. We should not be jealous when we look at other churches either. Bellevue Church is just two miles to the north of us. It has a hundred times more members than us. There are many full-time staff members and an army of laypeople to serve in many ministries. They can do a lot of things that we are unable to do because of limited manpower and resources. We need to give thanks to God for their effective ministries in this city. But actually, we can share some of their honor in that just like us, they are a Baptist church too. But God puts us in a specific niche. We are the only church in town that has a Cantonese ministry. If we stop comparing us with others, then there will be no jealousy. Instead, we should ask why God puts us in a specific location and equips us in a particular way. We should focus on serving people with the gifts, talents and opportunities God gives us. Ultimately, we give all the glory to God.

CONCLUSION

In this passage Paul told us that the gospel cannot be hindered regardless of the challenges we face. Paul did not care much about his own welfare. He was not concerned about his own reputation, or the lack of comfort and freedom. He did not mind who got the job done. Paul only cared about the name of Christ, and whether the gospel would continue to advance with or without him. What do we care about the most? We must keep in mind that no matter where we are, we are God's children. We are the "sales representatives" for the gospel. We have the most important message every person in the world should hear. Let me conclude with a true story. In 1959, Nils Bohlin, an engineer at Volvo, invented the three-point seat-belt. Later it became a standard safety feature in every car. Before that, seat-belt was a simple two-point waist restraint like those on airplanes. In the event of a car crash, it could do more harm to passengers than protecting them. Volvo could have made huge profit by selling the new device. But it did something quite unusual in the commercial world. Volvo released the patent for the new seat-belt so that any car manufacturer could freely copy the design. The managing director explained that such information was so critical in saving lives that Volvo could not keep it to itself. Suffice to say, from then on millions of lives were saved because of the new seat-belt. Christians also have a more important message to tell the world. Jesus is the only Savior and Lord. Only Jesus can save people from eternal condemnation. So why keep such good news to ourselves?