



Last Sunday we saw how Paul's opening words in his letter to the Philippians describe their *cruciform identity as people in progress being remade into the cruciform pattern of Christ*. Which means we *also* are a *people in progress, being remade into the cruciform pattern of Christ!*

This morning is the *second Sunday of Lent*, when churches all over the world are preparing for *Easter*, so we're going to be looking at *another* aspect of *cruciformity* from Paul's letter to the Philippians, this time it's *cruciform courage*.

Philippians 1:12-26 reads a bit like a *missionary progress report* from *Paul* to his *supporters*, in the church of *Philippi*.

We've been getting *missionary progress reports* from *Gary Scoggins* about the *Water4Tanna project*. The best way of following their progress (if you're on Facebook) is to "*Like*" the *Water4Tanna Facebook page* then you'll get the updates that *Charlotte Dielemen* has been doing a great job of posting just about every day.

Here's some of the latest photos from the *Water4Tanna* Facebook page.



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Gary also phoned me on Friday morning with a *progress report*.

- The container has arrived safely in *Port Villa*,
- the contents have *cleared customs*
- and been reloaded onto the boat ready to take Gary & Chris and the equipment *to Tanna*.
- But the boat's been *held-up* by *mechanical repairs* it and now isn't sailing till *this afternoon*.
- Meantime a *category 5 Hurricane* has formed in the Pacific east of Vanuatu which they are keeping a close eye on in case it starts heading west!
- The *rest of the team* arrived in Port Villa on Saturday and fly out for Tanna this afternoon, so they'll *beat* Gary & Chris and all the equipment to Tanna!

I expected Gary to be *getting very frustrated* by the *hold ups* and the possibility of a *hurricane spoiling their plans*

but he was *surprisingly upbeat* about it all, expecting everything to all work out OK in the end!

Paul's missionary progress report *also* has a *surprisingly upbeat tone*, given his circumstances which you'd think would've been spoiling his plans!

So let's read his *missionary progress report* back to the church of Philippi:

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Philippians 1:12-26

¹² Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. ¹⁵ It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

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Philippians 1:12-26

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. 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. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now

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Philippians 1:12-26

as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

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What *struck me* as I read this report was the *courage of Paul* and *positive outlook* on how everything was *working out*, even though his circumstances were *far from ideal!*

Yet it's a *special kind of courage* Paul displays in his missionary report, that I think is best described as *cruciform courage*.

What is cruciform courage?

That's what we're going to be looking at this morning. *Since cruciform courage* is found in the *cruciform pattern of Christ*, then cruciform courage is *also* available for *you and me!*

Cruciform courage: *knows God uses our difficulties to advance the gospel!*

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Cruciform Courage:

Philippians 1:12-26

- Knows God uses our difficulties to advance the gospel (v12-14)
- Is unbothered by rivalry so long as Christ is preached (v15-18)
- Rejoices that through prayer & the power of the Spirit, God will deliver us from evil (v19)
- Expects Christ will be exalted whether in life or death (v20-23)
- Chooses labouring for others over the easy option of self (v24-25)

Highly likely that *what Paul wrote* in his progress report would've been *quite a surprise* to the *Philippian church* when they read it.

After learning that Paul was *under house arrest* in Rome, they'd *sent Epaphroditus* as their *messenger* to check up on how Paul was doing and provide help for him. They've been expecting *bad news* about *how difficult* things were for Paul, *under house arrest* and *chained* to one of Caesar's palace guards, as he awaited trial for *preaching the gospel*. They realised that Paul could be facing the *death penalty!*

So it would've been *quite a surprise* to read Paul's *upbeat progress report!* That his circumstances *hadn't* prevented him from *promoting the gospel* but had actually served to *advance it!*

All of the guards he was chained to had now *heard the good news!* Although imprisonment was a shameful thing for any Roman citizen like Paul, yet *he* found it *honourable* to be *in chains for Christ!*

Cruciform courage like this is knowing that *God uses our difficulties to advance the gospel.*

One of voices in Noreen's booklet *Five Voices* that was promoted in church last Sunday is that of Inne.

I was born in a mountain village, surrounded by poverty, I grew up here, and married my next door neighbour and we had two sons. Work was hard to find so my husband joined a recruiting company to work overseas. I was quite glad when he went away as he had changed from the man I married to a harsh, angry man who was violent to me.

Through the friendship, care and prayers of a young Christian woman named Tanya who often visited our village, I became a follower of Jesus and then a while later I was baptised.

After my baptism the joy and strength unlike anything I had ever experienced gave me courage to endure the taunts and teasing from my neighbours. I had a phone call from my husband who said, "I dreamt you were having an affair with a man who wore white clothes. Is it true? I replied, "Yes! I am having an affair and his name is Jesus."

My husband returned the next month. He saw how the villagers talked about me and called me names and were rude to me and he noticed that it didn't really affect me. Then he got sick and couldn't eat. On the way home from the hospital we stayed at Tanya's house and she asked if she could pray for Jesus to heal him and my husband agreed. In the morning all the sickness had gone and he knew Jesus had healed him. When we got home I saw my husband had changed. He started saying kind words to me, he told me I was beautiful, he said I was a good mother to our sons and he smiled a lot.

Despite living surrounded by cruelty, I am rejoicing in the goodness of Jesus and it is far better!

You see, *cruciform courage* is knowing that God uses our difficulties to advance the gospel.

Courage like this is found in the *cruciform pattern of Christ*, and this kind of courage, *His courage* is available for you and me!

Cruciform courage: 10a
is unbothered by rivalry so long as Christ is preached!

Yet *being in chains* wasn't the *only thing* that could've gotten the Apostle Paul down!

With Paul sidelined in prison, *ambitious rivals* had seized the opportunity to *take over his apostolic mantle* by *spreading rumours* his evangelistic ministry was over and it was time for *others to fill his shoes!*

Now Paul wasn't known for suffering fools lightly so you'd expect he'd be quick to put these troublemakers in their place. But cruciform courage is *unbothered* by self centered, trouble making, rivalry, *so long as Christ is preached!* Which is what these rivals were doing.

Although their motives were *wrong*, Paul wrote in his progress report, that *the important thing is that Christ is preached in every way, and because of that I rejoice!*

Another of the *Five Voices* In Noreen's booklet, is that of *Maree*, a Christian convert from a Muslim village who had taken a job as a cleaner at a beautiful resort on top of a hill with views over the island. She writes, 'The other staff did not receive me well, especially when they found out I was a Christian. Actually they went out of their way to make life difficult for me, messing up the rooms I had cleaned, telling lies about me to management, not telling me about staff meetings so I never knew what was happening. However God gave me confidence that I was doing a good job. First I was promoted from cleaner to accountant, then from accountant to general manager, then quite miraculously the title deed of the property was placed in my name.

I was now the Owner, General Manager and Accountant and still the only woman and Christian on staff.

But now the rivalry became more devious as they took every opportunity to undermine my authority.

Then Tanya and her friend Hope brought a group of believers from her country and they prayed for me and walked over the property. We all agreed that there was a lifting of oppression and a new lightness rising. I know God is working here. I know that because He called me here, God will give me all I need so I can endure.

You see, *cruciform courage is unbothered by rivalry, so long as Christ is preached!*

Courage *like this* is found in the *cruciform pattern of Christ*, and *this* kind of courage, *His courage*, is available for *you and me!*

Cruciform courage: 10b
rejoices that through prayer and the power of the Spirit, God will deliver us from evil!

The *secret* to Paul's courage while chained up as rivals tarnished his reputation and usurped his authority was *quite simple*. Paul knew that *through the prayers* of the Philippian church and the *power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*, God would *deliver him from the evil* of his rivals and enemies who wanted him *out of the way or dead!*

Cruciform courage *rejoices that through prayer and the power of the Spirit, God will deliver us from evil!*

Another of the five voices in Noreen's booklet is that of Tanya who writes:

'I started teaching at a little Christian kindergarten but it was difficult because there was a lot of opposition in the community. Hope prayed for me to recognise what God had gifted to me. She thanked him that he had given me a voice of courage and that I was to use it to speak out to the voiceless.

One night at midnight I received a call from the police warning me that a protest was planned for the next day. I rang all the parents in the morning and told them not to send their children. Suddenly we heard the noise of people yelling, "Burn it! Destroy it! Pull it down! They came along the street banging and crashing and jeering. They entered the kindy and began bringing things, painting slogans on the fence and using large pieces of wood, barbed wire and chains, they barricaded the property.

But I wasn't scared, in fact I felt quite peaceful. The mob left and I went home. I was called to many meetings over the next few months and I was not afraid to speak of my faith in front of these powerful Muslim men. My voice was being heard and they listened, I knew it was God's gift operating as it was intended.

I realise the more difficult it becomes, the more strength he gives!

You see, *cruciform courage rejoices that through prayer and the power of the Spirit, God will deliver us from evil!* Courage *like this* is found in the *cruciform pattern of Christ*, and *this* kind of courage, *His courage*, is available for *you and me!*

Cruciform Courage: 10c
expects Christ will be exalted whether in life or death!

Yet although Paul *courageously rejoiced* that through prayer and the power of the Spirit he'd be *delivered from evil*, he *also* expected that *Christ would be exalted whether he was set free or sentenced to death!*

For him it was like choosing between *the better of two good outcomes!*

If he was *sentenced to death penalty*, well then he'd depart this life to be with Christ, which was *better by far* than anything else!

On the other hand if he was *released* that would mean the opportunity of *further fruitful mission and ministry for the gospel, which was a good outcome too!*

It's a *tough choice* for Paul, he's *tormented between the two*, for him *life* is all about *living for Christ*, but to *die* would mean gaining Christ in an *even more intimate way*.

Just for a moment in his *missionary progress report*, Paul *can't* seem to choose *between the two!*

Sally is another of the Fives voices in Noreen's booklet. She writes: Two months ago I and two friends were travelling to one of the health groups when we received a warning that a newly formed Muslim watch group was waiting for us. One of my friends said, "We are like lambs being led to the slaughter." I replied, "Are we ready? We do have a choice. We can keep going or we can turn around now."

We kept going. They were waiting, standing around the village under the trees. They yelled at us that we could not enter the village. So we waited and the women came to us. We had a small meeting; I was teaching on the dangers of under-age marriage, a common happening here when the older men get girls just leaving school. The group then approached us and told us we were not allowed to come back.

The harder, the more difficult it gets, the more doors that close on us, the stronger God makes us!

You see, *cruciform courage* expects *Christ will be exalted whether in life or death!*

Courage like this is found in the *cruciform pattern of Christ*, and *this kind of courage, His courage*, is available for *you and me!*

Cruciform Courage: 10d ***chooses labouring for others over the easy option of self!***

So *which* does Paul choose? *Death* which he sees as the *better option by far*, yet the *easier* of the two, or *life* which for Paul, would mean *more fruitful labour* for the gospel?

Paul concludes his missionary progress report by saying:
'Convinced of this, I know that I will *remain*, and I will *continue* with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.'

Paul chooses the *tougher* of the two options because *cruciform courage chooses labouring for others over the easy option for self!*

Sari, is the *fifth voice* of Noreen's booklet. Sari writes: Everyone knows everything in our village; the truth gets mixed up with rumours and because the evenings are spent talking, usually about each other, the gossip spreads fast and often very viciously. They began blaming me for my brothers "new religion" and said that I was dangerous and going to corrupt everyone with all my ideas and beliefs.

Suddenly the village Headman and a lot of the leading men came to my house and told me that I had 24 hours to get out of the village. I was to take nothing with me, just my clothes. I was not allowed to come back or have any contact with anyone in my village especially my mother.

I got on my motorbike and went. I knew that I had a place to stay with Tanya so I headed there. For the first few weeks I was numb with shock, but now I had Jesus with me. That was the difference and it was a huge, wonderful, amazing difference. I was so thankful that I had Him.

However I had no idea what to do, so I prayed and Jesus said, "Be still and watch."

I know *I am called to my village* but it will be in *God's time* and when *He* thinks I am ready. He is preparing me and I need to listen to His preparation and learn to be content wherever I am.

Cruciform courage chooses *labouring for others over the easy option of self.*

Courage *like this* is found in the *cruciform pattern of Christ*, and *this* kind of courage, *His courage*, is available for *you and me!*

So *what is cruciform courage?*

Cruciform courage has been *described in Paul's missionary report* to the Philippians, and is *heard in the Five Voices of Noreen's booklet*, and is *found in the cruciform pattern of Christ!*

And that means *whatever the circumstances* you or I find ourselves in, the *cruciform courage of Christ*, is also available for *you and me!*