

A Sermon Without Words

"But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way...Christ is preached."

Philippians 1:18 (NIV)

Some time ago I visited a church in southern Ontario to preach on a Sunday morning. I had preached in this church from time to time for over 35 years. Hence, I knew most of the people for decades.

One person who is faithful in attending this church has been slowly going downhill with a serious medical issue. I have watched with sadness how he gradually lost his ability to walk. Now he moves about in a wheelchair.

Because I have seen this man several times each year for so long I had a very good idea of how he handled his health issues. His capacity to handle such adversity has spoken loud and clear to all who know him. The special challenges he faces have been accepted with grace and without complaint.

It happened that the sermon I preached that morning was on the topic of walking with God as the great evidence of knowing Jesus. I told the congregation that it was not what you said, but how

you lived that really told the story of your life. People who claim to be Christians but lived for today and the toys of this life are not genuine believers.

After the service was over I took a few moments to chat with the man in the wheelchair. I assured him that his way of gently accepting the strange providence of God was a far better sermon than anything I could preach from the pulpit. I wanted him to appreciate that his presence at the church each Sunday was a wonderful demonstration of the grace of God in a believer's life. I assured him that the way he lived his life was a sermon without words.

This is the meaning of our verse today. Paul had enemies who sought ways to add to his problems in prison. However, the sovereign grace of God had used the evil efforts of Paul's enemies to make the Gospel more clearly known by the people around Paul.

Paul accepted the opposition to his ministry with

gladness because it made Jesus better known. For Paul it did not matter that he was made to endure more suffering. What was important to him was that the message of Jesus was being heard by more people through the attacks on him and his ministry.

Keep in mind that Paul is not pretending the opposition to his work did not matter. Of course the added affliction was painful to him. It is not a matter of Paul ignoring his pain, rather it is his ability to rise above what the cost is to him so that he can be happy Jesus is being made known.

Are you able to rise above your suffering today and look for strength from God to live with the problem you face? Can you ask the same question as Paul? "What does it matter?" So long as Jesus is shown to be glorious, our issues are worth the price. Today make the way you live faithfully for the Lord, in the context of pain, a sermon without words.