

A question for you, what's the worst thing that could possibly happen to you or to someone you love? What's the worst thing that could possibly happen to you or someone you love, maybe on the way home today? It could happen. Maybe later this week. You never know. Maybe a year from now. It's hard to tell. Most peoples' minds go to the same place whenever we ask that question. What's the worst thing that could possibly happen to you or to someone you love? I was reading an author this week who said this, It has often been observed that death is viewed as an awkward, uncomfortable tragedy to those of us living in modern western culture. Prior to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when extended families often lived near each other or actually with each other, it was not uncommon at all for children to observe death firsthand and to learn to cope with it from older family members around them at that time. Today, however, people die in hospitals, more frequently than homes, bodies are quickly removed from hospitals to morgues and the embalmers art rapidly restores the body of the deceased to a life-like appearance. Death is the worst possible event for those who believe they have this inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of what? Say it. Happiness. And our way of coping with death seems to be, this author said, to deny more and more its inevitability or even its existence. The Apostle Paul, however, had a much different approach to death. The Apostle Paul, you remember him from last week as we started this study of the book of Philippians, literally the letter that Paul writes to the Philippian church. He's been imprisoned because of his stand for the gospel and his commitment to the church. He finds himself in prison writing to the church at Philippi wanting to encourage and remind them of things that they desperately needed to be reminded of. He faced death, Paul did, with the same firm resolve that marked his approach to life. Listen, for both death and life to Paul resulted in one thing. Christ. For him there was no difference. Death or life for Paul equaled Christ and being with and serving Christ was his primary goal. Perhaps more than at any other time in history, my friends, the church today needs to adopt Paul's perspective on life and death. With most in our world around us refusing to even talk about death and with philosophers who do speak of it often claiming that the notion of life after death is only wishful thinking, it is tempting for the Christian to live, to think, as if there were nothing beyond the grave. This mindset can only cause us to clutch, to grab hold of, this world and our material possessions and our earthly pursuits more tightly for the security we think they can give, and in the process keep us from risking our lives in service of God. You've got to hear that again. Please listen. This notion of there being no life after death, it is tempting for the Christian to live as if there were nothing beyond the grave. This mindset can only cause us to clutch, to grab hold of, this world, our material possessions, and our earthly pursuits more tightly for the security we think they can give, and in the clutching, it keeps us from risking our lives in service to God. I read this week about what goes on in Iran among a number of places we could have zeroed in on. Many Iranian believers, there's a phrase for you, Iranian believers, have learned Paul's perspective on death and they, like him, provide an example for many of us in the West. Mehdi Dibaj. You should write it down. You should look him up. You should study him today and in the week to come. My goodness, it would probably not only enlighten your mind but stir your soul. Mehdi Dibaj was imprisoned by the government of Iran in 1984 on charges of apostasy since he had converted from Islam to Christianity. The penalty for this crime according to the Islamic rule that ruled Iran was death. Mehdi languished in prison for

ten years before his cause came to trial. When it did his written statement of defense was a simple and straightforward reaffirmation of his commitment, his personal commitment, to Jesus Christ. The last few lines of that defense contain this remarkable paragraph. He says as he goes before the judge who would most certainly send him to his death. Jesus Christ is my Savior and He is the Son of God. To know Him means to know eternal life. I, a useless sinner, have believed in His beloved person and all of His words and miracles recorded for me in the gospel and I have committed my life into His hands. Life for me is an opportunity to serve Him and death is an even better opportunity to be with Him. Therefore, I am not only satisfied to be imprisoned for the honor of His holy name but I am ready to give my life for the sake of Jesus Christ, my Lord. On December 12, 1993, the court before whom this defense was made sentenced Mehdi to execution. Then under intense pressure from people in the West who knew of the case, including the United States State Department, the Iranian government arranged Mehdi's release. In January of 1994, seven months later, he was found dead under suspicious circumstances in a Tehran park. The third Christian murdered in Iran after their release from prison. Would you stand and in honor of God's word allow me to read to you this morning from Paul's letter to the church at Philippi starting in verse 19. In referring back to what we saw last week and the reality of his imprisonment and impending doom, he says in verse 19, for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by what? Death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. I'm hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again. Now until I come to you again, he says, conduct yourselves only in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. You see he's concerned about how they were going to live, how they were going to think, how they were going to function as a body. Do it in a way, he says, that is worthy of the gospel of Christ. So that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are [listen] standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but or salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me. Oh Father in Heaven, it seems as if there is much here for us to see and learn and consider and think about, and most importantly, God, apply in the days to come. Would You and Your Spirit and Your Word, move in us this morning. Help us to see. Help us to open not only our hearts and minds but God our lives to whatever changes, whatever adjustments, might need to be made. We look forward to this as you grow us into the people God that You called us to be. And everybody agreed with the prayer and said Amen. You can be seated.

I hope you'll write this down at the top of your sheet this morning, The Gospel's Perspective. That's right. The Gospel's Perspective. Real quick. Let me say it this way. What you'll really see in our passage today is the perspective, the mindset, that is present in someone, Paul in this case, who has thoroughly embraced the gospel. Question, have you? Let's just start right here, have you thoroughly embraced the gospel? Have you come to that place in your life where you have come to an understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ and what He did and what He has made available to you through the forgiveness of sin and a relationship with Him for now and all of eternity? Have you fully embraced the gospel? Because what we're going to see this morning is a passage that shows us that someone who has thoroughly embraced the gospel, you see there is a way of living that then will come with that. There is a way of thinking, a way of valuing, that someone who has deeply and genuinely embraced Christ possesses. The gospel-Jesus followers, have a mindset about life that sets them apart. Please be reminded this morning (we've said this before) you're all following someone. You are all deeply devoted to some principle, some thought. Think about it with us this morning. Jesus followers have a mindset. There is a gospel perspective. You can watch me, you can, you can watch how I live, you can observe the choices I make, you can see how I am or how I'm not, devoted, truly to Christ. You can see that in my mindset. You can see that in my attitude. You can see that in my approach to life and I can see it in yours. A gospel perspective shows itself in three ways. I hope you'll write these down here as we start and then we're going to come back and look at each of them. Gospel mindset shows itself in three ways. Think of it this way. When consumed by the gospel, number one: Proclamation trumps safety. Proclamation trumps safety. When consumed by the gospel, you and me, labor trumps leaving. When consumed by the gospel, unified suffering trumps individual ease. Let's look at verses 19-21. When consumed by the gospel, proclamation trumps safety. For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance (he just knew it would) through your prayers and the provision of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation (Paul said) and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Someone who is consumed with a gospel mindset is primarily about one thing, my friends, and I hope you'll write this down. Yes, he or she is about God. Yes, he or she is devoted to family. Once you get past there, this person is primarily consumed with one thing and that one thing is that people in their world would hear about, that people in their world would see the gospel message. That person who is consumed with the gospel mindset wants desperately for people to see the life-changing, eternity altering message of Christ. They are passionate about the gospel being proclaimed so much so (this is so good for us to see right here) that they don't even care as much about the motives of some on the proclamation of it or the cost that it may bring to them personally. Let's start with motive. Write that down. There is a motive issue that Paul had to deal with here in Philippi. While he's in prison in Rome, he hears about some gospel proclamation going forward and not all of it was coming from folks who were on his team. Go back to 1:15. Paul says: Some, to be sure, (this is how much he loved the gospel; this is how much he was devoted to it) are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former (those

who do it out of envy and strife) proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. Did you follow that, there were some while Paul was in jail, there are others who wanted a piece of the action. There were actually those who wanted to start proclaiming the gospel. They wanted Paul's spot. They wanted to be known. They wanted to be famous. They wanted to be significant. So you've got folks with absolutely screwed up motives who are proclaiming the gospel and they're doing for a lot of wrong reasons and Paul says, what do I care? I don't care. All I care about is that it's proclaimed. All I care about is that people are hearing the life-changing, eternity altering gospel, and it's going forward despite human motive, frailty, or even sinfulness. Does that make sense? You know there are people in my line of work; I'll say it that way to you. There are folks in my ministry circles who have often said to me over the years...you see because I kind of got my cue on this honestly from Paul. This is just kind of what I got taught. There are actually people in my world who have over years and still to this day are critical of me because of certain friendships or certain alliances or certain interactions I might have with certain people in other ministries, other ministries that don't do church like we do church, other ministries that may see certain issues differently than we see those issues. There are people who are critical of me because of my association with certain ministries that maybe doctrinally, it's not like 100% right down the line. They don't see everything the same but they preach the gospel. They proclaim the truth about Christ. So there have been times where I have distanced myself from people for a number of reasons. This would be one of them. But there are times where I have stayed close and tried to be an encouragement to those because of their fundamental commitment to the truth about Jesus and that's what I hear Paul saying here and that's what I tried to live with in my life. I hope more than anything that people in my world can hear and understand the truth about Jesus Christ. I hope they can hear the gospel and wherever that can happen I'm thankful. They are passionate people who have a gospel perspective about the gospel being proclaimed. Sometimes like Paul they even overlook motive or method and sometimes like Paul they even overlook the cost. It says it right there in 20 and 21, whether by life or by death, Christ be exalted in my body. Verse 21, For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. As long as those truths are proclaimed, Paul is saying, as long as the gospel is moved forward he could live or die. Either way, he knew, verse 19, for I know (do you see that?). We've taught you that word in the past. Rod Oviatt and Carolyn have taught me about this word over the years. They've taught many of you in Logos about this word. They've taught many of you in this room about this word in the Greek and the ABF they were a part of for a number of years. *Oida*. For I know. This word means I really, really, really, know. I know deep in my soul. I'm utterly convinced is what this word means, that this will turn out for my deliverance. It didn't matter to Paul. Life or death. As long as the gospel was proclaimed.

Now before we go on, I want to say this to you. What's the gospel? I just think it's important to try to keep this as practical and real as we can. I want to make sure that I'm here talking to you this morning about you being someone who is consumed with it, so aware of it, and not only it's benefit to you but it's potential benefit and joy to others. I want to make sure you understand what is it and that would be a four-week series but let's just take a couple of minutes. Get your Bible out. These verses won't be on the

screen. Please pick up your Bible. If you don't have one and need one, let me know and we'll get you one this week. I promise. It's not a big deal. We want to make sure everybody has got the scriptures right in front of them. Go to John 3:16, everybody. Let's just real quick look at three verses that you should write down, that you should memorize, that you should meditate on, verses that your kids should know as we talk about the good news about Christ, the gospel. John 3:16: For God so loved the world (are you there?) that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever what? What's the word? Believes. Don't miss that. Whoever believes, not whoever ends up being good enough, not whoever earns it, whoever believes in one's heart. Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have what? Eternal life. That's a great gospel verse. Go to Ephesians would you, back to the letters, Galatians, Ephesians. Let me hear those pages, come one, Ephesians 2:8 & 9. Very important gospel passage here. For by grace (how have we been saved?) you have been saved, through what? Through faith. And that (the faith) not of yourself, it (the faith) is the gift of God. So by grace you have been saved through faith, not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not as a result of works (your salvation) so that no one may what? Boast. There isn't anything you can ever do to merit or earn salvation. Nothing. It isn't about you. It is about Him and His love and His unbelievable grace and mercy that draws you to Himself. He embraces you, brings you to this place of faith in Him, a faith that He even gives you. Great gospel, life changing, eternity altering truth for you to hold onto. How about Romans 5. One more. If you're still getting used to you Bible, just after the book of Acts comes Romans, Paul's letter to the church at Rome. Romans 5:6. A great gospel, redemption, salvation passage. Listen to the words that are used in these four verses. It's really, really cool; maybe underline them as we go. For while we were still helpless (there's one), at the right time Christ died for the ungodly (there's another one, the helpless and the ungodly Christ died for). For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But we weren't even good. We were what? We were helpless and ungodly. Verse 8, But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners (underline that one, while we were yet sinners). We hadn't made any movement. We hadn't cleaned our act up. Right? While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies... (underline that, enemies). Remember we were against him. You weren't sort of there and sort of...no, you were in opposition to Him in light of your sinfulness. For while we were enemies we were reconciled to God (there's the gospel) through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. Amen. That is just three verses, three passages, that's gospel truth that you need to understand and embrace, and I hope be consumed with as you and I live this life. A gospel perspective values labor over leaving. Labor over leaving. Here is what goes on in the heart, mind and life of one who is consumed with a gospel perspective. Labor trumps leaving. We saw it there back to Philippians 1 as Paul was sharing with us just the tension he felt as he's trying to wrestle with whether he wants to go to heaven or stay in prison. What a question, huh? What do I want to do? Go to heaven or stay in prison? It says there in verse 22, But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful what? Say it. Labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. My friends listen closely here. So many of you in the room know this; others of you may need just a reminder and I want to give you

that reminder this morning. If you choose, if we're all together here on this thing, if you're choosing to be one who ministers the truth about Christ to others, if you're raising your hand this morning and saying I'm interested, I'm really open to this idea of being consumed with the gospel, I'm open to being a minister of the gospel. Some of you, say wait a minute, Kelly, that's you. And I say no, no, no, no. Don't forget we've been teaching you this for years. That's you. I am a pastor-teacher. Ephesians 4 says it's my job and our job as pastor-teachers to teach you what this says so that you can be priests who go and make much of God and pass along His truth, His love, and His attributes to others. Yes, because I'm a follower of Christ, not because you pay me, because I'm a follower of Christ, I'm a minister of the gospel. If you're going to raise your hand and you should, you should raise your hand high and say I'm in. If you are willing to be a minister of the gospel, if spiritually you actually care about, have a heart for the lives of people, and you desperately desire for them to know Christ deeply and follow Him sincerely, if that's you... sorry, I'm going to get to my point eventually. Side note, I just want to make sure you understand this. You, being ministers of the gospel. You, caring deeply about people, desperately wanting them, those in your world, those in your lives, you caring so much about them that you're willing to give yourself to this kind of living that is how churches grow. There's a lot of talk about how churches grow. I should say it this way, that's the kind of church growth I want to be a part of. We could do gimmicks. We could get crowds. Believe me we could. I want you to understand that growing churches are filled with growing people, and when you are growing in your embracing of the gospel, when you are growing in your willingness to minister it in the workplace, on the city block, wherever you live with whoever it is God has brought into your realm of relationship that is how this thing goes forward. I want to be a part of something like. If you're really up for seeing people grown in the gospel then I want to be clear, it is hard work. Labor trumps leaving. He could have just said I want to go. Because let me just tell you, there isn't anything laborious about heaven. It is absolute bliss. It is easy. It is uninterrupted perfection. It is the absolute, end of the road, praise God. It is sweet. It is awesome and Paul understood and many of you in this room understand, and I tell you, I've grown to understand it over 24, 25 years of ministry. Ministry, gospel ministry, in the hearts and lives of people, it is labor. It is toilsome. It is heart-breaking. It is back-breaking. It is discouraging while it brings huge rewards and blissful gratitude at times. It's hard work. Paul said it in Colossians 1:28,29. You'll see it on the screen. Paul writing to the church at Colossi said, We proclaim Him in our ministry, like we do here, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom so that we may present every man complete in Christ. Wow. What a goal. For this purpose, no kidding. For this purpose also I labor, striving, Greek word means to the point of physical exhaustion, according to His power which mightily works within me. That's not just talking about me. He's talking about you and the level of work, the level of effort, the sleeves rolled up, mentality that you can possess if you really, really want to be used by Him to do things that really, really matter. Are your gospel proclamation sleeves rolled up? I've got to ask it. Or have you called it a day? Because let's just be honest. It sounds kind of crass but at least you're in. That's sometimes how we think. Please nod your heads. You and I both know that sometimes we just lose sight of His mindset and our own position with Him sometimes leads us to a place of complacency as it relates to the position of others. How hard are you working to minister the gospel?

A gospel perspective, a gospel mindset shows itself in a third way. You wrote it down earlier. Unified suffering trumps individual ease. Look at verses 27-30. Unified suffering. Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel, so whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear about you, I'll hear that you were standing firm in one spirit. Here comes the unified part. Standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. Together. Do you see that? You and me. Together, not divided. No living in harmony together, arm in arm, hand in hand, togetherness. In no way alarmed by our opponents which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. Here it is. For to you, everyone of you in this room this morning that has fully surrendered your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, for to you it has been granted, it says, for Christ's sake, not yours, but for His sake it has been granted or it has been appointed that not only you believe in Him, but also for you to suffer for His sake. We don't say that a lot when we're inviting you to come. I'll admit that. We've got to do a better job. I've got to do a better job with those individuals that I'm in relationship with right now. Guys, friends of mine, far from God, too many times in our conversations that we have on a pretty regular basis, I keep telling them about the great benefit and joy of this thing. I keep inviting them to a life of purpose and meaning. I keep trying to get them to wrap their arms around the idea of the fact that God loves them deeply, that He really does have a remarkable plan for their lives, that He sent His Son to die for them so they can have all of their sin forgiven and have eternal life with Him. I mean you get me going, it's really an amazing privilege to talk about the great benefits and joys of salvation. Amen. Sometimes I forget to tell them, and I need to do a better job, that it has been appointed by God for Christ's sake that in faith with Christ comes the privilege of suffering. Suffering. Suffering is a part of the gig. It's what goes on. It's what happens. We suffer. And we suffer, what does it say there? We suffer for who's sake? For His sake. Because what did He do? He suffered. What did Paul do? He suffered. He suffered for His sake, there it is, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me. I guarantee you, my friends, listen, if we allow the gospel to be the consuming priority in our lives in this place, in this ministry, if in absolute unity we follow Jesus more than our culture, did you hear that? If we follow Jesus more than this world, if we proclaim the gospel, labor in the work of the gospel, we will face hardship and suffering will be required. It'll just happen.

As Korban comes I want to ask you if you would, I want to ask you one question and then I'm going to have him share a few things and lead us in a time of prayer and closing worship. Please, just stay where you are and as he plays, would you just bow your heads, take a posture of reverence before God, and can I say as you do that what's the worst thing that could ever happen to you? I just would suggest to you, I would propose to you this morning that quite possibly having looked at what we've looked at here this morning that what might be the worst thing more than anything else maybe isn't death. Maybe it's not dying at all, my friends. Maybe the worst thing that could ever happen is that you would choose to not be a faithful steward of the gospel, that God would have gone to the great lengths that He went to, to redeem and save you, that God would have gone to the great lengths that He's gone to, to instill in you

the truth, Jesus Christ, the hope of the world, and you didn't do anything with it, could be the worst possible thing that could ever happen to you.

(music)

Amen. Hey, as Korban plays, would you stand with me this morning and would you just quietly bow your heads and just close your eyes right where you're at this morning. I want to just say this before we go: you may be here in this room this morning, you may be watching the broadcast, listening online – either way, I want to say this. You may be someone who isn't consumed with the gospel because as of yet you've never embraced Christ. Maybe you've never come to that place where you have fully surrendered your heart and life to Him, committed yourself, as we read in the letter from the gentleman in Iran, trusted Him with your life completely. And so if you would want to talk with us this morning about that, we've got elders, staff members that would be down here in the front, and they would love nothing more than to answer any questions that you might have or talk with you about entering into a life-changing eternity-altering relationship with Jesus Christ. Our Father in heaven we're grateful for the morning, so thankful for the chance to praise and sing and worship in all the ways that we have. Father I pray that we would be reminded that Your Son Himself, Jesus said "take up your cross and follow me." God, it is a difficult road at times, but praise be to God our Father, who through the work of Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ our Lord we have hope. We have a promise not only of an endurance for what we might face or experience today, but of eternal life forever with You God. We are grateful for that today and thankful for the great truth of the gospel and the privilege You give us to minister it, to pass it along in our world. Give us grace and strength to do it well. In Your Son's name we pray. Amen.