

Session 3. My Bad Circumstances for God's Good??

You Have to Be Kidding!

Have you ever been accused of something terrible you did not do? How did you respond? What is the norm as a response to this accusation?

Worse than that, all of us would be furious if we were placed in prison for committing no crime! I would scream to call my Congressman...Write to the appeals board...complain to the highest level about the extreme temperatures in our cell!

I pray that I would do that if you were in jail when I knew you did not do anything to deserve it.

Philippians 1:12-26, *"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 out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 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 God's provision of 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 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 boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.”

Facts:

1. **The book of Acts tells us that Paul was imprisoned by the Romans on three different occasions.** Not sure which time he wrote this letter (probably the last time).

2. **We know that he did write this letter while in custody of the Romans.**

3. **We also know what his thoughts were regarding being jailed.**

Paul didn't let his imprisonment devastate him like many of us would.

Instead, he reminded himself of this truth:

Rom. 8:28, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to {His} purpose.”

4. **Although Paul's circumstances were beyond difficult, he knew that God was in control, and that He was working these difficulties together for good.**

Philippians 1:12-14

Paul was a prisoner...but, this imprisonment did not end his missionary journey, it actually expanded it.

How did it expand it and see the good come from such bad circumstances?

- **Actually, the bonds destroyed the barriers.**

Paul's imprisonment did not shut the door to his mission work and gospel thrust, it opened it to new spheres of work and activity, into which he would never otherwise have penetrated.

- **Because he was in prison, the guards that watched over him had heard the gospel many times.** Can you imagine being an unbeliever chained at the wrist to an evangelist like Paul?

- **Paul's boldness to witness while in jail was contagious among the other Christians that were free. They also began to boldly proclaim their faith.**

No matter how out-of-control things seem, if you are one of God's children, you have not been abandoned. God is working it out, whether you can see that or not. Paul, sitting in prison, knew this to be true, and encouraged the Philippians of the good things already coming out of his difficult circumstances.

Paul repeatedly refers to himself as a prisoner or as being “in bonds.”

1. Delivered as a prisoner into the hands of the Romans (Acts 28:17).
2. Speaks of his ‘imprisonment’ in Philippians 1:7, 13,14.
3. States that he is “in bonds for the sake of Christ,” and bids the Colossians to “remember his bonds” (Colossians 4:3, 18).
4. Paul calls himself “a prisoner of Jesus Christ,” and speaks of “the bonds of the gospel” (Philemon 9,13).
5. “I am a prisoner for the sake of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:1).
6. Paul speaks of himself as “being bound with this chain” (Acts 28:20)...and uses the same word (halusis) in Ephesians 6:20, “I am an ambassador in chains.” (chain: short chain in which a prisoner is bound to the wrist of the soldier who was his guard. No chance of escape.)

These guards would hear every word preached by Paul. The gospel of Jesus Christ was being spread to every part of the chain of command...even to the emperor.

1:15-18 Two Motivations, One Proclamation

People were preaching the gospel as a result of Paul's imprisonment.

These people fell into two different categories.

- 1. The first group were sharing Christ with others out of good will and love.**
- 2. The second group were doing it out of envy, strife, selfish ambition, and impure motives.** These people were in it for what they could get: things like fame and notoriety, respect and honor, authority and control, money and favors. They envied Paul's popularity, the apostle's ministry.

The amazing thing to me is that Paul rejoiced at both situations. Why?

Because although he knew that God would judge their motives, he knew that the gospel was being proclaimed.

Hebrews. 4:12, "the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

The Word is alive, and when it is quoted, it accomplishes its work - to bring faith to the hearer.

Rom. 10:17, "So faith {comes} from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

There are evangelists who are dead or in jail from sin, those who have walked away from the faith, but when they preached Christ, people believed.

- Acts 2:47, "...the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."**

For this, Paul was rejoicing...because the proclamation that Jesus is alive and well and He gives eternal life to all who believe in His resurrection.

1:19-21, To Live Is Christ, To Die Is Gain

Paul knew that he was going to be delivered one way or another. Either he would be:

- Released from prison, or**
- Put to death, thus releasing him also.**

Paul says, "...for me to die would be gain."

Paul had a healthy view of life and death.

- **Every day that he lived, he would be consumed with Christ - living for God and learning more of Him, preaching the gospel and praying for others. And when death came, he would not be afraid, because he knew that death for the Christian is a promotion.**

The Bible says,

1Cor. 15:54-55, "But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?"

The worst thing in the world's eyes is to die. But for the Christian, it is the beginning of the adventure, the step into eternal glory and communion with God.

- **However, though we should not fear death, we should fear something: shame.**

Paul said, "I will not be put to shame in anything." John the apostle told us that those who do not abide in Christ will have cause for shame. He wrote,

1John 2:28, "And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming."

1:22-26 Heaven Or Earth...Torn Between the Two?

Thinking about Paul's situation, it is certainly understandable to see why he had the desire to die and be with Christ.

- *There are times that we as Christians long for death, because we know that heaven will be so much better than this earth. But it's important not to lose perspective. We should not seek death.*
- *We should have Paul's attitude of living every day exalting Christ and performing ministry. We should understand that every minute of every day is an opportunity to bless someone, to help others progress in their faith.*

Summary:

Your life is important. God has given it to you to make a difference in other people's lives.

The world's view is, "What can I get? What fun can I have? How much can I make? How can this satisfy my desires?"

But we should be living with a view towards others. "What can I do for you? How can I bless this person? How can I meet her need? What can I do to edify him?"

Even though Paul longed for heaven, he knew that his life on earth was necessary to other believers like the Philippians.

Questions for the troops (including me and thee); Session 3.

- 1. Do we feel that we have been given a little more trouble to deal with than others?*
- 2. Do we know for sure that God is always working for good in our lives?*
- 3. Do we realize that our pain might be for someone else's gain? Does it bother us when we see others prospering due to our giving and praying for their joy?*
- 4. Is it hard for us to see others prosper when we are hurting?*
- 5. Are we ready to understand that all of this is temporary and heaven is for eternity?*

NOTES: