

Women's Bible Study  
Philippians 1:12-14, March 15, 2023  
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Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

What?!! Paul is claiming that his imprisonment is for good. We have the benefit of 2000 years of hindsight, but I bet the Philippians did not believe that being a Roman prisoner was a good thing. These saints dealt with the harshness of the Roman government daily. I think they probably just wanted to not attract attention so they could avoid being a prisoner. What could possibly be good about Paul's circumstances? Paul says that the reason for him being a prisoner, the cause of Christ, has become well known throughout the praetorian guard and to everyone else. Then he says that most of the brethren have more courage to speak the word of God without fear! Praetorian is another word for palace so throughout Caesar's palace Paul's testimony was known and passed around.

Albert Barnes NT Commentary says:

*He was imprisoned because he preached Christ, and was really suffering because of his attachment to the Redeemer. It was not for crime, but for being a Christian--for had he not been a Christian, he would have escaped all this. The manner of Paul's imprisonment was, that he was suffered to occupy a house by himself, though chained to a soldier who was his guard. He was not in a dungeon indeed, but he was not at liberty, and this was a severe mode of confinement. Who would wish to be chained night and day to a living witness of all that he did; to a spy on all his movements?*

How marvelous the way God works. He turns a terrible situation in to one where the people who otherwise probably would never hear the gospel are exposed to it constantly because they are in contact with Paul. Then he also uses the situation to cause believers who have been very scared to embolden them to speak the

word of God. What was Paul's secret? Warren Wiersbe says in his book Be Joyful, "When you have the single mind, you look on your circumstances as God-given opportunities for the furtherance of the gospel, and you rejoice at what God is going to do instead of complaining about what God did not do."

- Do we ever have situations that seem hopeless or that could never be considered good?
- What is our usual response?
- What is the correct response?

We can speculate the reasons that Paul chose to disclose his feelings about what was happening to him. Possibly he:

- Wanted the Philippians to be courageous in the face of their own suffering
- Was concerned that they were worrying about him and needed to allay their fears
- Wanted to share with great joy the spreading of the gospel in the prison and allow them to rejoice with him. Remember in verse 5 he talked about them participating in the gospel with him.

Matthew Henry's Commentary says:

*We see here the care the apostle takes to prevent their being offended at his sufferings. He was now a prisoner at Rome; this might be a stumbling-block to those who had received the gospel by his ministry. They might be tempted to think, if this doctrine were indeed of God, God would not suffer one who was so active and instrumental in preaching and propagating it to be thrown by as a despised broken vessel. They might be shy of owning this doctrine, lest they should be involved in the same trouble themselves. Now to take off the offence of the cross, he expounds this dark and hard chapter of his sufferings, and makes it very easy and intelligible, and reconcilable to the wisdom and goodness of God who employed him.*

### 2 Timothy 2:8-9

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned.

### Acts 28:20

For this reason therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel.

### Galatians 1:10

For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

We can see that Paul was willing to suffer for Jesus. There are many other places in his writings that he talks about the suffering he endured. It seems counter-intuitive to us that someone so influential and faithful would have to suffer possibly more than most other believers. The good thing about this passage about suffering is that Paul also adds the reason for his suffering. There are many instances of suffering that we do not know the reason. Probably many of us have experienced suffering that seems random and of no good purpose. We can rest assured that God does not allow his children to suffer for no reason. In Paul's case he was imprisoned and many people heard the gospel who would not have. Praise God! Paul is now in Heaven and is no longer suffering. During the suffering it seems that he was able to focus on his purpose and not on the unfairness or pain of it.

### Philippians 1:18-20

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice. For I know that this shall 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 shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

### Philippians 2:16-17

Holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.

### Philippians 3:8

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.

We are not Paul and our suffering will be for the purpose of whatever it is that God wills in our lives or possibly in somebody else's life. Therefore, like Paul, we must be confident that the trials and pain and suffering are accomplishing good in our lives. We need to strive to glorify God no matter what happens.

### 1 Peter 1:6-7

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found in result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

### 1 Peter 4:12-14

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of his glory, you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

### James 1:2-4

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Oswald Chambers said about suffering:

*We are not sanctified for ourselves, we are called into the fellowship of the Gospel, and things happen which have nothing to do with us, God is getting us into fellowship with himself..... The first thing God does with us is to get us into rugged reality until we do not care what happens to us individually as long as he gets his way for the purpose of His Redemption. Why shouldn't we go through heartbreaks? Through those doorways God is opening up ways of fellowship with his Son. Most of us fall and collapse at the first grip of pain; we sit down on the threshold of God's purpose and die away of self-pity.... If through a broken heart God can bring his purpose to pass in the world, then thank Him for breaking your heart.*

- Think about the suffering you have experienced. Were you aware at some point that God had accomplished good either in your life or in someone else's?
- Have you experienced suffering and noticed that this time you didn't fall apart like possibly you had in the past?
- What scriptures do we particularly lean on when the trials come?

We need to also be aware of the love God has for us and the fact that He will never abandon us. Just knowing these two facts should give us the strength and courage we need to press on.

**Romans 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

**Romans 8:35-37**

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword? Just as it is written, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

### Romans 8:38-39

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There are stories in the Old Testament about God using seemingly terrible events to accomplish his purposes. The one that comes to mind first for me is the story of Joseph. How terrible it was for him to have been treated so horribly by his brothers. You may remember that their original intention was to kill him, but God used Reuben and an Ishmaelite caravan to spare his life. Then he probably could have been punished by death for the accusations of Potiphar's wife. Again God sovereignly spared his life and then when the time was right Pharaoh became aware of Joseph and his God-given ability to interpret dreams. He became the top man in Egypt except for Pharaoh. When his brothers arrived in Egypt, Joseph was in place to prevent the children of Israel from being wiped out by starvation.

### Genesis 50:20

And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

Other Old Testament saints who suffered greatly and we actually know the outcome of the suffering are Jeremiah, Elijah, Daniel, Naomi, Abraham and I'm sure many others. These stories are written to show us that God never lost control of the situation.

Let us take our eyes off ourselves and our pain and trust that God is working out his marvelous divine purpose.