

# Unchained

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**Bible Verse:** Philippians 1:12-14  
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Our salvation came at the price of a gracious Lord and a gracious Christ who suffered for us. His suffering came in the midst of a perfectly righteous life, that his suffering for us was at the hands of the will of God for him, you might say, because God appointed him to suffer before the foundation of the world and it was a suffering that he undertook voluntarily and yet it was a suffering that he went through without sin. Sin was not the cause of the suffering of Christ in the sense that it was not his personal sin for he was without sin, and so as we follow a righteous Lord who suffered in our place, we learn something about the nature of the Christian life that is important for us to remember, that sometimes following Christ will come with adversity, it will come with opposition, it will come with difficulty, and the important thing for us to do in those times is to understand how to interpret it properly, how to think about adversity in a way that furthers our sanctification, that exercises our faith in Christ rather than falling under the weight of it or somehow thinking that the God who graciously saved us has somehow now turned against us, and I think that those thoughts help frame our thinking as we come to our passage this morning in Philippians 1. As we return to the book of Philippians 1 this morning, we're going to look at verses 12 through 14 as our text and I invite you to return there with me. The adversity that the Apostle Paul was under did not crush his spirit but rather acted as wind under his wings to raise him to even higher heights.

Philippians 1, beginning in verse 12. Paul says,

12 Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, 13 so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, 14 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.

Paul is emphasizing the fact that he is in prison as he writes this section of Scripture, and yet you find in him no claims to woe or discouragement, rather he sees it in the positive light, he interprets it in light of the purposes of God that are being carried out even in the midst of his adversity. So what Paul is doing here in Philippians 1, beginning in verse 12, is he is writing to this supportive church to report to them on his circumstances.

The Philippian church was concerned about him because they knew that he was in prison and they knew that there was suffering that was going on and perhaps concerned even that there was a hindrance to the Gospel message now that the apostle to the Gentiles was under house arrest in Rome, and so there is a lot at stake in what Paul is writing. As Paul writes to them, there is a lot at stake and what we find here is that Paul is writing to assure them that the Gospel is moving forward despite his personal limitations and that his personal limitations are even giving rise to greater courage and sanctification to the people of God who are in Rome and who know about his situation. Friends, Paul was in chains when he wrote this; he was literally in chains to a Roman guard, a Roman soldier, if not two of them, one on each wrist. Paul was in chains but he writes to tell the Philippians that the Gospel is not in chains, that the Gospel is moving forward, and as a result even though there were lies and opposition that had put him into this position at the hands of the Jews, he was undaunted and the Gospel was unchained as it was moving forward as God was working through all things to accomplish his purposes, and what we learn from that, what we see from that is that this is the way that you and I are to think about our personal difficulties as well, we are to see them in light of the overarching purposes of God not collapse or fall down before adverse circumstances in the midst of our lives, but rather to see them through the lens of God and his sovereign purposes that are being carried out and if we look for those things we will see them, and if we look for them we will find that God's work is moving forward even though our personal circumstances are adverse or people perhaps have disappointed us along the way. Beloved, this is the life of Christ lived out in us that we see things from this perspective.

So let's look at a couple of perspectives that Paul brings out in this letter. First of all, I want you to see the unchained Gospel. The unchained Gospel. As we have seen in the past, Paul was uniquely the apostle to the Gentiles and he had been moving out in the Gentile world to preach the Gospel of Christ but now he is in prison and this singularly great man, this singularly significant instrument of God for the extension of the Gospel to Gentile people like you and me is now isolated, he does not have freedom of movement, and from human perspective it might seem like that was a setback for the Gospel, it was a setback for the purposes of God that jealous Jews had used the Roman system to isolate Paul and to put him into chains. Without freedom of movement for the apostle, how was the Gospel ever going to go forward? With personal adversity and difficulty in our lives, how are we to think that God is actually blessing us in what is happening to us roundabout as those closest to us betray us, or as job circumstances go against us? How are we to think rightly about these things?

Well, to set your mind and to just put a verse into your thinking as we go through this to kind of let you lean on it as we go through, turn to Genesis 50 as we see a key verse that is one for us to remember throughout all the course of life, really. You remember the story of Joseph, that his brothers had sold him into slavery, that he was in an Egyptian prison, unjustly accused of having made advances on Potiphar's wife, and through it all God was providentially working out his purposes. Through it all, even through the great adversity that came upon him unjustly, let me emphasize that again, it came upon him unjustly, God was working out his purposes and eventually elevated Joseph, as you know, to a position second in the kingdom of Egypt only to Pharaoh, and now at the end

looking back on all of that, Joseph interprets it for his brothers who were afraid that he might take out revenge on them from his position of power, and in verse 19 Joseph says, Genesis 50:19, "Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? 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.'" You and I must remember these things as we go through life together. As you go through life individually, as you go through family circumstances, as you go through other aspects of life that are adverse and you find yourself suffering at the hands of people who have lied against you, who have cheated you, who have done wrong to you, you must understand that that adversity has come to you filtered through the hand of God who has overriding purposes that he is working out, purposes for your good even if it involves adverse circumstances and it involves hostile wicked motives against you in the meantime.

Beloved, we are not at the mercy, we are not at the hands of those men that we sometimes fall into, rather we are always in the hand of a wise and gracious providence that is using all things to accomplish his purposes for his glory and for our good, and sometimes we may not see any aspect of that in the moment but by faith we believe that and that causes us to persevere with courage and with strength and even with joy because we are confident in the overriding sovereignty of a great God. We have that privilege and we have that birthright as those who know Christ by faith. That is our position that we are under the hand of a superintending God who works all things together for good to those who love God, who love Christ and are called according to his purpose. Now that means that it causes you to look on everything that happens in life differently. This has a completely revolutionary perspective on the way that you look at life and you see this perspective being lived out by Paul as we go back to Philippians 1 now. Paul writing to people who probably thought that perhaps he was discouraged under the adversity, Paul writes to them in a note of triumph even though the Roman soldiers are still chained to him according to the Roman custom of the day.

Look at verse 12 with me. He says in verse 12, "Now I want you to know," this is something that he is emphasizing, that he has particular care that he wants them to understand as he writes to them. Verse 12, "I want you to know, brethren," my fellow believers in Christ, those of us who share a common union in Christ mediated by the Holy Spirit, my brothers in Christ who are also children of our heavenly Father, I want you to know something, he says, "I want you to know that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the Gospel." Paul anticipates their concern and he assures them that all is well. He addresses them as brethren, an expression of spiritual closeness that fits with his prior emphasis on love, the love that he had for them in his heart as we saw in verse 7 and in verse 9 and his emphasis on love for them. So he's writing to them with a sympathetic concern, writing to assure them and give them a sense of confidence to settle their heart and mind that he is doing well even in prison, and you see what the effect of spiritual maturity can do and what trust in Christ can do for one's attitude and for one's perspective and what he says about his circumstances as he writes to them. We, including I use the first person plural deliberately, you and I find it pretty easy at times to spread emotional and spiritual germs around because we are discouraged in our trials and we're not trusting Christ as we should. What we see here from the hand of the Apostle

Paul is what is actually possible for those who are trusting in Christ and trusting him to work out his purposes even though evil has been set against them. Paul writes to them and he can set aside his own difficulty in prison for the sake of saying, "I am writing to encourage you and to assure you that all is well. My circumstances have not put out the light of God in my life." So he's referring when he says "my circumstances," he's referring to, "Here as I sit under house arrest chained to a Roman soldier, I want you to know that the purpose of my life, the advance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is moving on unhindered even though I'm not free to move about personally." He is interpreting his circumstances through the greater lens of the providence and the purpose and the outworking of the plan of God and that changes his whole perspective on it all.

Look at it there in verse 12 with me again. He says, "I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the Gospel." From a human level, that which seemed to be a setback, he could no longer travel throughout the region and preach, he tells them, "God has done a remarkable thing, He has put me still, He has made me stationary but the Gospel is moving forth with power even though I am limited in my personal mobility." How could that ever happen? Look at verse 13, he says, "so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else." He says the Gospel is making progress even though I am sitting still. This is a testimony to the power of God.

Now this word "progress" that he uses there at the end of verse 12, it has turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, that word "progress" is a word that was used in other literature to describe a pioneer cutting his way through thick brush, or advance work being done by an army so that it can further its march through hostile territory. Paul is saying what's happening to the Gospel here is like that, in the midst of this dark Roman empire with the light of the Gospel shining its first early rays in the darkness here, the Gospel is moving forward through opposition, moving forward through opposition, cutting its way and making progress even though I am not personally able to move about in the process. And how did that happen and how can God do that when his primary, from a human perspective, when his primary human instrument has been put into prison? Well, beloved, what we see when we look at the situation properly is we start to see something about the immense power of God and the immensity of his ability to carry out his purposes apart from humanly expected means. Paul took the Gospel with him into prison. He had it with him as he was under house arrest and what happened rather than Paul going out into the world, God brought the world to Paul through the guards that were keeping him under wraps.

Paul is describing how this happened as he explains it in verse 13. Look at it with me again, he says, "my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else." The praetorian guard was the elite Imperial guard that served to protect Caesar and his residence. These men were not only highly skilled soldiers, they were people of influence in the community, in the city. They were highly specialized soldiers designed to keep Caesar safe as they guarded prisoners who were brought into the area among their other responsibilities. Well, they would take their rounds chained to Paul to make sure that he didn't go anywhere. One

soldier would serve his round of duty, another would come in and replace him and be chained, and on and on it would go. So different soldiers of strategic importance in the empire were rotating in, as it were, to have a private audience with the Apostle Paul, and what happened in that time was they thought they were keeping Paul captive and in a human sense they were, they intended one thing about the execution of their personal duties as a soldier in the Roman army, they had one thing in mind on a human level, but what God had in mind and what God was doing was something completely different. Instead of the soldiers keeping Paul captive, from the perspective of God and the Gospel, Paul had a captive audience with them. Paul, they could not go anywhere because duty demanded that they stay and that gave Paul opportunity to speak with them.

Paul was not in prison because he was a criminal but because he was a Christian. These Roman soldiers knew what criminals were like, they knew what the dark mind of evil men was like and they quickly found as they interacted with Paul attached to a chain to him, that Paul did not fit the profile of the men that they ordinarily guarded. So something else had to be happening and so they speak to him, "What are you doing here? Why are you here?" would be the natural conversation that would take place in circumstances like that. They had to do something to pass the time. And Paul as they watched over him day and night, suddenly had the opportunity to speak to these guards, "Well, let me tell you why I'm here. Let me tell you about Christ. Let me tell you about this Jewish Messiah who was crucified not long ago in the land of Israel. I'm His apostle. You know, that Christ, this Jesus of Nazareth who walked the earth was actually God in human flesh and He came for the purpose of offering a sacrifice to save His people from their sins, and though your fellow Roman soldiers crucified Him and buried Him and were keeping watch over His grave, He rose from the dead. He has ascended to heaven. He's alive forevermore and He is the only Savior from sin for those who will repent and put their faith in Him." This was the message of the Gospel.

This is what Paul says he is actually speaking about as you look at the end of verse 12 with me again, as it "turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that his imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else." Paul would see many of these soldiers as they rotated through on assignment, he would speak to them, and the guards would go out and they would speak to others and they would say, "The craziest thing just happened on my watch. Let me tell you about what this guy, why he's in prison and what he told me and the things that he said. He's telling me things I've never heard before." And they go and they speak to others and they find out that an innocent man is in prison for the things that he taught and, "What was it that he taught then," and the whole stage is set for an explanation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be laid out before them. And Paul preached Christ to them, and they carried it out, as it were, some of them perhaps converted, the text doesn't say, perhaps they're simply going out and spreading the word and God is using them even in their unregenerate state, we really don't know, but what we see is that the circumstances of Paul meant that the Gospel was being talked about, it was being discussed, it was being proclaimed in the most strategic center of the known world at that time, it was taking place in the very household of Caesar himself.

Now when you step back from that in light of that verse that we saw from Genesis 50:20, you realize the purpose of God. There was no way that the Apostle Paul could get to the inner circle of Caesar's residence just on his own, it took a surprising turn of providence for that to take place and it unfolded for Paul as life carried on in the midst of his prior responsibilities. Something strategic had occurred and, beloved, here's the thing and this is where it helps us: what at first would have outwardly seemed to be a setback had in reality created a very important advance for the Gospel, and this is what God has the power to do and this is what God is always doing, Colossians 1 says that the Gospel is constantly advancing throughout the world. God's purposes are never thwarted by the actions of men. God's purposes are never thwarted in our own lives by the opposition that sometimes comes against you or the difficulties or the frustrations that come to you in the midst of your life. God's power is always unchained. God's power is always at work. God is causing all things to work together after the counsel of his own will. What that meant for Paul was this, he stepped back as it were, from his chains and said, "What's actually going on here, what is actually happening in terms of the most important reason of my existence, the progress of the Gospel. Is the Gospel progressing as I sit here under house arrest?" He finds the answer is yes. It's a remarkable yes. It is spreading in circles that it never would have been heard before and so Paul finds himself a servant isolated and in chains, as it were, isolated in the sense that he did not have freedom of movement, but that did not stop the progress of the Gospel.

Now applying that, taking that to our own lives here, beloved, God's ultimate purpose for you in life transcends this world. God's ultimate final purpose for you is found in Romans 8 where it says that he intends to conform you to the image of Jesus Christ when one day you are glorified in heaven. That is the ultimate purpose for your life. It's not so much about what's happening in relationships now or what's happening in your job or other circumstances of life now, what's happening in your marriage or even in your parenting. That is not the ultimate purpose of God and so we need to think about the purposes of God in a way that go beyond our immediate circumstances so that we are thinking rightly about what is happening in life. There is more to your life than what you see and what the more, the greater portion of it is found in the transcendent purpose of God to conform you to the image of Christ through everything that happens, to sanctify you and to gradually conform you more and more to the image of Christ, and he uses his word to accomplish that and he uses providence to accomplish that. He uses your circumstances to do that and all of a sudden the adversity is no longer a matter of this is unfair at the hands of man, this is an absolute lie that that person has told against me, why is this happening to me, suddenly all of those, what do you want to call it, carnal attitudes start to fade away, start to diminish in importance to you when you view them through the transcendent ultimate purposes of God that are at work. For Paul, he saw that he was called to be an apostle of the Gospel, an apostle of Christ to the Gentiles, and that purpose was being carried out.

Beloved, the adversity that we go through among other things is designed to humble you, it's designed to teach you not to love this world, it's designed to teach you to trust God more than you trust men, to put your hope in heaven more than what happens in life, and as adversity multiplies upon you and seems to discourage you and weigh you down, in

part God is teaching you as you think through the purposes of God and what his word says about these things, God is teaching you to wean you from your love for the world, your confidence in self, that you would love the prospect of heaven and turn your confidence to Christ more than the things that previously dominated your affections. And you say, "But, but, but, Don, the adversity is so long. It's so hard. It's so difficult." I get that. You say, "Why does it have to be this long? Why does it have to be this hard? Why does it have to be this close to my heart to accomplish the purposes of God?" Well, a couple of things I would suggest and say in the midst of that. Number 1 is that when earthly adversity is so severe and so difficult and earthly men have so disappointed you, then the love of Christ who gave himself up for you, the eternal love of God from before eternity stretching into eternity future becomes far more sweet to you than it otherwise might have been. You start to see clearly that in Christ you have a foundation upon which to stand that will never move, that will never quake under your feet. You start to see in Christ you have a love that will never fail and in that process of recognition over time, you come to cherish Christ more highly, more valuable than you would have if you had not had some kind of adversity to cast you like waves upon the shore of his faithfulness to your soul.

Another thing that it does for you as well, beloved, and this is hard, this is humbling as well but it's very much a part of it, the fact that it takes the faithful loving affliction that God brings to our lives to do that teaches you something about the deep-rooted nature of sin in your own heart that it takes that much fire to purify the gold, it takes that much heat to bring that to light so that you can cast it away, so that you can skim it off and say, "That's not part of who I am any longer." Yes, the adversity hurts. Yes, the adversity is difficult. Yes, people disappoint us and betray us and hurt us deeply and have done so for many years for some of you, but don't you see, don't you see the that the aspect, the perspective on that is that this simply gives me a dark background against which I can see more clearly the brilliance of the diamond of the love of God that has been placed into my life by the Holy Spirit, and all of that comes to make Christ more precious to you as you take what Scripture says about the outworking of the purposes of God through all circumstances in your life, you look and you see, "Ah, I see. This is humbling. I must really have been more, there must be more depth of sin to me than I realized if it took this much to wean me from it." That's humbling and yet to recognize that it was in that sin that you start to recognize more clearly, you start to realize more clearly the love of Christ that died for you even in that nature of sin and indifference to your God.

So the adversity comes to us in a way to teach us to not trust in ourselves but to trust in Christ, not to love this world but to love the world that is to come, to love heaven and to cherish that place of permanent peace and stability more than anything that comes to us in this life. Now beloved, that is just what it means to be a Christian. This is how we view life. This is how we look through the prism and perspective is everything on it. So with Joseph in Genesis 50, with Paul in Philippians 1, in countless other places of Scripture, we can look at it and say what men intended for evil, God means for good. Right here in the midst of it, I don't know what that good is but do you know what? As I've been a Christian for now five years, you say, 10, 20, 30, 40, I can start to look back and I can see multiplied ways where what seemed to be unfair and adverse and unkind and unloving

from the hand of God could not have been more designed to produce my spiritual good and my spiritual peace as he worked out his providence over time in my life.

Now beloved, beloved, I'm telling you, based on the teaching of Scripture, that that is your hope. That is your hope as you move forward. The hope is not found in whether your spouse changes or not. The hope is not found in whether your children come to Christ or not, though we hope that they do, we pray for those things with you to that end, but that's not where our final hope rests. That's not what we're ultimately hoping in. What we are hoping in, what we are trusting in, what we are confident in is that God is good no matter what he brings into my life. No matter what happens to the people around me, I trust completely implicitly and totally on the goodness of God in the midst of these circumstances and nothing will shake me from that place of rest and confidence. Even if nothing changes, you say, I trust my God like that, and that trust is guaranteed to my heart by the cross of Jesus Christ who loved me and gave himself up for me. He loved me with the supreme sacrifice of himself. I will return to him a faith that trusts him even when life is not to my particular liking. I'll love him, I'll trust him, I'll cling to him. No matter what else happens, I will not forfeit or walk away from that place of faith and confidence in my Savior no matter what. I'll cling to that. And though the storm rages outside, it will be peaceful in my heart as a result. Paul, with that perspective, was able to look at his imprisonment and say that the Gospel is going forth. All is well, my friend. God's purpose is undiminished. God's purpose moves forward even though I do not.

Now there's a wonderful, there's a wonderful thing that happens when Christians live this way in addition to the effect that it has on us personally and the peace that it brings to our heart personally, and as vertically we trust in the purposes of God and see it being worked out in our lives. That's a wonderful thing to have happen and, in a sense, that would be enough, I suppose, but we don't live the Christian life in isolation, we don't, the way that we respond to adversity doesn't simply affect us, the way that I respond to adversity doesn't only affect me, it affects everyone that knows me. The same thing true for you, the way that you respond to adversity is going to have an effect on everyone that knows you. Now Paul here goes on in verse 14, whereas in verses 12 and 13 he had talked about the unchained Gospel, in verse 14 he goes on and he describes the effect that his circumstances was having on the believers around him, the believers that were not in prison, the believers that knew about his circumstances. Paul describes what the effect was upon them and we see the unchained church in verse 14, and what happened here is this. Well, let's read verse 14 first of all and then I'll expound on it for just a moment or two.

Let's go back to verse 12. I know, it's so hard to follow me. I'm so sorry. Paul says, "my circumstances," in verse 12, "have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, my imprisonment has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else," then in verse 14 he says this, "and," there's more that's going on beyond what's happening with me and the progress of the Gospel to unbelievers. He says there's something else. There's another dynamic, O Philippians. There's another dynamic that is taking place in the midst of my imprisonment and it's this, look at verse 14, he says, "most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more

courage to speak the word of God without fear." Beloved, what Paul is saying is that other Christians see my circumstance and they have grown in their boldness for the proclamation of Christ as a result. My adversity has resulted in a good spiritual result to those who know about it. These Christians at the time saw Paul's heroic example in prison, they saw him continuing to testify of Christ, they saw him not bending to pressure, they saw him continuing to cling to Christ and his testimony of Christ when a simple – watch this – when a simple word of denial would have released him from prison. If he had recanted at all, he could have gone free and yet he refused. In that sense, he was willingly chained to the Roman soldier beside him because he would not deny Christ in order to have it broken loose. He had courage. He had confidence in Christ. There was a commitment to the truth. There was a commitment to Christ that was unyielding, that was unbuckling that would not change, and what others saw when they looked at Paul was that, they saw Paul in prison standing firm and whereas before perhaps they were tempted to fear of man, whereas before they were tempted to stay silent, they saw the example of Paul and it kindled a fire of boldness in them that says if Paul can be like that in prison, I can be strong in freedom. I can go out and I can proclaim Christ as well.

Look at verse 14 and it wasn't simply the example of Paul, Paul's example because he was trusting in Christ stimulated them to trust in Christ more as well. Look at it again in verse 14 with me, "most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord," not in Paul, "trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear." So Paul looks at the situation from a Gospel-oriented perspective and he says, "My imprisonment is having a great effect for the Gospel. I'm not going anywhere and God is using this circumstance to advance the Gospel. It's going into the inner recesses of Caesar's household. The influential praetorian guard knows about Christ because I am here in chains and beyond that outside the walls of my house arrest," he says, "the people of God are trusting in Christ more and more because of my affliction and as a result of their trust in the Lord, they are speaking Christ more boldly in their circles of influence, their circles of relationship than they would have without this. So there is a multiplied exponential effect of strategic value to the very household of Caesar and broader circles are hearing the Gospel because people beyond me are trusting Christ more because of this affliction that God has brought to me."

Beloved, if you want something that will embolden you in your affliction, whatever it may be, understand that when you trust Christ in your affliction and you verbalize that trust, "I'm trusting Christ here even though I don't understand what's happening. I'm trusting Christ despite the evil of men arrayed against me." When you shine forth faith like that that is supernatural, that is contrary to human explanation, "Yes, I'm afflicted but I'm joyful, I'm confident, I'm trusting Christ in this affliction, I'm trusting Christ in this uncertainty, I'm trusting Christ in this terminal cancer," what your faith does is it lifts the whole tide around you as people know you and see you. That is your opportunity even in a narrow affliction that lays you aside, circumstances that lay you aside and it seems like your realms of influence have shrunk rather than increase as you've gone further into the Christian life. Beloved, beloved, I beg you to think biblically about those circumstances and to see and to trust the hand of God in them because people who trust God in affliction

lift the spirits of the Christians around them and they say, "Look at Lenny, look at Tim, look at Sheila, look at Dan, look at them trusting Christ. That's an example for me. That's what I should do in my affliction, I should trust like they do." And from perhaps a small circle geographically, the influence under the providence of God in the hands of the Holy Spirit working in your heart and in those who know you, suddenly there is a massive spiritual growth taking place because you personally trusted Christ in your adversity and what I want you to see, beloved, is this: we're talking about a kind of trust that's different from a self-centered trust that simply says, "God, get me out of here. God, remove this burden from me." Everybody can have that kind of desire in their heart. It is different when, it is different when a Christian like you, a simple Christian like you, maybe you're never upfront, you never have a platform, you don't even want the platform, but you have a position in life where under your adversity you say, "I am trusting Christ in this and that is enough for me. My soul is satisfied in Him." All of a sudden you become a beacon for what it means to be a Christian to those around you and your ability to trust Christ in your affliction gives them the ability to trust Christ and rise above their circumstances in their affliction. That's our opportunity. That's our privilege. That's our prerogative. Beloved, it's our responsibility to live that way.

Look at verse 14 with me, "most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment," their faith grew as they saw Paul's faith in action. If he's going to be courageous, I'm going to be courageous too. The man of God won't stand alone, they said in their first century sandals. That man of God won't stand alone. When he is courageous for Christ, then I'm going to raise my game too. I'll stand for Christ and take my cues from him. I will look at the example of that godly man and I will imitate it, I will emulate it, I will be like him. And they went out and they took the Gospel to places that even Paul couldn't reach. The church advanced in the preaching of the Gospel because Paul in his chains trusted Christ and those individual believers, bless their hearts, I say that sincerely even if that sounds weird, bless their hearts, they grew in their sanctification as a result of looking at Paul's trust in Christ. They grew in their sanctification, they grew in their knowledge of Christ. The Lord Jesus used Paul's affliction to motivate them to preach fearlessly as a result. Paul's godly example stirred their own confidence in Christ and with their confidence in Christ stirred, they realized Christ can empower me, Christ can protect me in my affliction and therefore I will go out in strength.

Paul states it in both positive and negative ways when he describes their courage. Look at it there at the end of verse 14 with me. He says, "most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage," it's not simply that they have courage, it's not just that they have more courage, they have far more courage. That's the positive aspect of it. They became fearless in the midst of it. And then he states it on the negative side, "without fear." Without fear. Without fear of man. Without fear of consequence. Without fear of those who would slander them. The fear of man had been driven out by the courage that comes from a proper understanding of the fear of God and that fear of the Lord made them bold, it made them strategic, it made them fearless, and all of this benefit from Caesar's household to the hearts of the saints, all of this benefit flowing from the affliction that Paul was in as he wrote this letter as he was in chains for the Gospel. Paul was in chains but the Gospel was free, the Gospel was powerful, the

Gospel was at work, the Gospel was advancing. Paul was in chains but the hearts of those who knew him and looked to his example were free, they were strong, they were courageous, they were without fear.

Beloved, all of this is premised on unintentionally, all of this in what I'm about to say right now we find the opening words that our brother Dane gave us as he opened the service about the faithfulness of God to his promises when you believe God, when you know his promises and when you trust him, this is the result that comes. Good things happen when the people of God know God, know his promises and trust him. It takes away the fear of man. It takes away the fear of the future. It emboldens those around you as well.

Paul's confinement did what outside life could never have done and, beloved, here's the conclusion that we would make of this, here's the conclusion we would make of this just in terms of looking at life today, Sunday, July 7 for you right now, is to understand this. This is so important. This is so important to understand. If you had only looked at the chains that Paul was in you would think that there was adversity that could not be overcome but Paul's understanding and explanation showed that just the exact opposite was the truth. When you look at the adversity in your own life, beloved, you need to understand something really critical. This is so important. You cannot rely simply on what you see in your circumstances today to evaluate the purposes of God and conclude that if you're under adversity, that things aren't going well. You can't think that way as a Christian. You start your thinking with the transcendent, unconquerable purpose of God and his faithfulness to his people. You start there. You say, "I belong to Christ. I trust Him. My faith is in Him and His purposes are always at work in everything that happens, so much so that even when people attempt evil against me, He's overriding it to accomplish good in my life." You cannot simply rely on what you see with your eyes, you must calculate the hidden purpose of God and his faithfulness to you in all of your circumstances all of the time because it's true no matter what and your life and your perspective and your faith and your joy and your conscience respond when your mind says, "I will trust in the purposes of God." Proverbs 3:5 and 6, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding." Don't trust in your finite mind in these times but, "In all your ways acknowledge Him," know him, trust him, in other words, "And He will make your paths straight." What was true for Paul 2,000 years ago is true for you today.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we thank You for Your faithfulness to Your promises. We thank You for Your faithfulness to Your word. We thank You for the indwelling Holy Spirit who gives us the power to respond to these things rightly. We thank You for Your Son, the Lord Jesus, who is the object of our eternal and undying affection. Father, I pray that You would have grace on the multiplied instances of adversity that are under the sound of my voice this morning. I pray that You would comfort and strengthen in body, soul and spirit those who are weary with the challenge, weary under the load. Father, may Your word strengthen them and help them. May they draw strength from the fact that Your word*

*says to the one who trusts Christ, "I fear no evil for You are with me, Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. My cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." That is ours, Lord, in Christ. That is ours in our Good Shepherd and I pray that Your people would draw strength from You today and respond in a way that advances Your purposes and they know something more of the joy and the peace of the Lord as a result of these things than they knew before they came in this morning. For those outside of Christ, Father, I pray that You would open their eyes to the futility of this world, the vanity of this life, and that they would flee from their own sinful minds and flee entirely to Christ to trust in Him for deliverance from sin and judgment. O Father, may Your Spirit apply these things to the hearts of each one according to the needs of each one because we have prayed to You and trusted You in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.*

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