



Praying Beyond Our Circumstances

Last week we looked at Apostle Paul's instruction to believers to **pray at all times in the Spirit** and also to pray for other Christians, especially for their faith and spiritual protection ([Eph 6:18](#)). In the same thought, Paul continued by asking the Ephesian believers to pray specifically for his ministry:

and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. [Eph 6:19-20](#)

Many would agree that Paul was the greatest apostle of Jesus Christ. Starting out as a Jewish Pharisee, he brazenly stood against Christianity and violently persecuted the early church (cf: [Acts 8:1](#)). After a divine meeting with the Lord on his journey to Damascus (to further inflict injury on Christians; see [Acts 9:1-3](#)), he was radically transformed into a powerful minister for the gospel, so much so that it is very likely that you and I have the gospel today because of Paul's ministry.

Yet, Paul's life after meeting Christ was wrought with suffering (cf: [2 Cor 11:24-29](#)), and when he wrote his epistle to the Ephesians he was actually in prison for preaching the gospel. And while Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit and had even met the risen Lord face to face (see [Acts 9:5](#)), he was still very much a human. And in this humanity, he no doubt struggled internally with the circumstances he was placed in. Tasked by Christ to bring the hope of salvation to the Gentiles, it must have felt terribly constraining to be incarcerated for several years. But he did what he could to continue his work by ministering through his companions, like Timothy and Tychicus, and he also asked the churches to pray for him.

What I'd like to call out is that Paul did not ask the Ephesians to pray that he would be freed or that his circumstances would change. Instead, he prayed that ***utterance may be given [to him] to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.*** Whether a free man or prisoner, Paul was solely focused on the mission at hand: sharing the gospel. This was all that mattered – doing what Christ commanded him to do, regardless of his circumstances.

This is a good lesson for us. We all face challenges in life – some small, some quite big. Some may even seem to contradict what we feel we've been called by God to do. It's very easy to complain, grumble, and become discouraged, and to negatively focus on our circumstances instead of the original mission we were given. We can learn from our brother Paul that when we seek prayer from others and when we pray for ourselves, our requests must be centered on *God's will*.



Was it God's will that Paul was *in chains*? Yes, absolutely. While we don't have an exact answer as to why God allowed sovereignly Paul to remain in prison, except perhaps that he was specifically called to suffer for Christ (again see [Acts 9:16](#)), I can imagine that we would not have this letter to the believers in Ephesus, or the other "prison epistles", if he had not been locked up. And within these letters are the majority of the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith. Let's not forget that the *mystery of the gospel* Paul speaks of here, as we saw in [Ephesians 3:6](#), is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs with the Jews in God's promise of salvation and redemption. Even 2,000 years later these letters continue to benefit each believer with sound truths that draw us into a deeper understanding of our faith.

God used Paul's circumstances to bless the Ephesians and every Christian who takes time to read his words penned in sacred Scripture. Paul understood his suffering was for both the glory of God and the church. This is how he was able to *be content in every circumstance* ([Phil 4:11-12](#)) and to not complain about the conditions he was in, and instead to simply seek prayer for the opportunity to boldly proclaim the gospel.

From this passage we can see two takeaways. First is to diligently continue to pray for believers and ministers, specifically for their spiritual health and growth, and that they would be emboldened to proclaim the true gospel to the world. And second, that we must find contentment and joy in our *current circumstances*, even if they are not ideal or what we want. Circumstances change, but our God-given mission to be disciples and Christ's hands and feet to the world does not.

Let's focus our thoughts and prayers on the finish line and not on the temporal problems that may be in front of us today.

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