

Turning Chains into Courage

Philippians 1: 12-18

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Today, we'll look at **chapter 1, verses 12-18a**, and we'll look at how Paul turns his chains into courage. We will look at two observations from this text and one main principle with two areas of application.

First Observation:

The first observation I like to make is from **verse 13**: "**As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.**"

Philip. 1:13

So that my bonds (shackles, chains) in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; (KJV)

Do you see it, bad things happen to good people, even God's people. Paul was in chains for Christ, not for crimes against anyone.

There is a false belief that many Christians carry around with them, and that is "*bad things don't happen to good people, especially not to God's people.*" And so when bad things happen to a good person or to one of God's people, *then it must be because that person has some unconfessed sin or that person really doesn't belong to God.*

That false belief and that false conclusion is not only not found in real life, but it's not found in the Bible.

Bad things do happen to good people. In the Old Testament, **Joseph** was sold into slavery. **David** was hunted down by King Saul. **Job** lost his family and his health. In the New Testament, **Christ** was betrayed, beaten and crucified. **Paul** was imprisoned and later beheaded.



All of the original disciples of Christ, not counting Judas, were martyred; only **John** lived to an old age in exile. Bad things do happen to good people and even to God's people, and only the wisdom of God can intend it for good and the power of God can bring good out of even the worse situations.

Meanwhile, God, in His Word, the Bible, offers solution to life's problems, even to the problems of depression and death. **What God does not offer is a problem-free life.** Anyone who tells you that being a Christian frees you from life's problems *is lying*. Being a Christian allows us to tap into the powers of Heaven in order to face the pains of earth. More about this later.

Second Observation:

The second observation is **that a Christian is a witness to Christ, whether he or she is a good witness or a bad witness: As a follower of Christ, we model Christ to others, and we do that well or we do that poorly, but no Christian can decline this responsibility.** Paul writes in **verse 14**, "**Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.**"

Philip. 1:14

And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds (shackles, chains), are much more bold to speak the word without fear. (KJV)

Jesus told his disciples in **Acts 1:8**, "**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, even Los Angeles.**" In other words, if you are a follower of Christ, you have the Holy Spirit in you, and you are a witness of Jesus Christ, *no exception*.

It has been said that you may be the only Bible someone else will read. Are you true to the Word of God? *Does your co-worker have a better understanding of who Jesus Christ is because of your words and your life lived out at work?* Do your classmates or unsaved family members have a correct interpretation of who Jesus is by your words and the life you live out at school or at home?

Paul, chained to different Roman soldiers 24 hours a day, was a witness to each soldier, of his relationship to Christ. Don't wait for an ideal situation to be a witness for Christ. If Paul can do it in chains, you can do it in your marriage, in your workplace, in your school, even in the shopping mall. **Simply be consistent with the Word of God in your words and in your life in whatever situation God places you.**

I recently heard that Bill Bright, who was the Founder of Campus Crusade, one of the largest non-profit organizations in the world, prayed, "*God, kill me before I do anything to shame the name of Christ.*" That's commitment to being a good witness to the person of Jesus Christ.

Your pastor would be willing to pray something like, "*God fire me from pastoral ministry before I do anything to shame the name of Christ.*" I'm growing in my commitment; I'm not there yet.

Okay, let's look at the main focus of this morning's passage under the framework of turning chains into courage. We will have two sub-points under this main point.

Main Principle:

Paul was able to take his situation and encourage others to be courageous and fearless, because he himself was courageous and fearless. **He turned his chains into courage by focusing on the prospect of a joyful outcome and not on the prospect of a dreadful process.** He concluded his thoughts on being imprisoned and being the target of troublemakers with **verse 18**, "*And because of this - this being 'Christ is preached' - I rejoice!*"

The prospect of a joyful outcome will create courage for anyone. By prospect, I mean the hoped for end result.

The mountain climber who is willing to scale rocks even in below zero temperature, losing fingers and toes in the cold snow on the way up, has courage because of the prospect of joy when he reaches the summit or top of the mountain. **The one who looks at his sacrifice and hardship will dread the pain of the climb.**

The student who is willing to study extra hard for final exams, losing sleep and socializing time or becoming the target of name calling such as nerd or bookworm, has courage because of the prospect of joy when he or she finishes their exams and starts their vacation. If they can look even further into the joyful future of a satisfying career of their interest, they would have even greater courage to face the peer pressure. The student who looks at the library as a jail or their diligence as a stigma **will dread the pain of studying.**

Sometime ago, I heard the prayer of an alcoholic businessman as he got ready for a company party. He prayed:

"Dear God, help me not to drink any alcohol.

But if I do, help me not to drink too much.

But if I do, help me not to get drunk.

But if I do, help me not to faint.

But if I do, help me to fall face down, show my name tag won't show."

Do you sense he was focusing on **the prospect of a joyful outcome** or **the prospect of a dreadful process?**

The prospect of joy is a powerful motivation for courage. Even the Son of God allowed himself to be crucified for the prospect of joy, when sinful people would be reconciled to their God and the fellowship of God and humankind would once again be restored. This is what **Hebrews 12: 2-3** tells us: ***"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*** The prospect of the joyful end enabled Jesus to endure the cross with courage.



I've heard that a common reaction to bad or difficult situations, whether a car accident, a broken relationship, an illness or any misfortune is to ask, ***"Why me?"*** **That's not a helpful reaction and such will lead to a victim mentality.**

A pastor friend of mine would say, ***"Why not you? Everyday, the world rolls over someone who was just on top the day before."***

In other words, what makes you immune to the tragedies of life? God never promised to make Christians immune to **cancer**, to **hardship**, not even to **stupidity**.

If you read Jesus' words carefully, He promised that we would have tribulation or hardship in life. My pastor friend would continue with his belief that God allows there to be a Christian with cancer for every non-Christian with cancer, so the world can see the difference. **I don't know that I would agree with the statistics here, but I do know that Christians can respond differently than non-Christians in difficulties, even to respond courageously because we have the prospect of some joyful outcomes.**

We will now apply the principle by focusing on two joyful outcomes.

One joyful outcome is fulfilling God's purpose for our lives. Paul rejoiced in his prison because even in there, he was fulfilling the purpose God had for him to advance the gospel, to spread the Gospel to Roman soldiers, who became captive audiences by the fact that they were chained to Paul.

He also multiplied workers for God by his courage (**READ verse Phil 1:14**). He was able to turn spectator Christians into participants who told others about the good news of Jesus Christ. If you come and sit here on Sundays, you have not worshipped. We offer the building-blocks for worship, and we individually have the responsibility of using what we learn on Sundays the rest of the week in our homes, place of work and place of recreation.

The first application of turning your chains into courage is focus on the joyful outcome of fulfilling God's purpose in your situation or your life: (We read this in verse 12.)

If a toaster could gain consciousness, it would rejoice each time it toasted bread or frozen waffles or whatever to just the right crisp and color. **If a painting** were to gain consciousness, it would rejoice each time it brought pleasure to its viewers. **Why is that?** Because a toaster's purpose is to toast bread and frozen waffles and a painting's purpose is to bring pleasure to the viewers.

Instead of asking, "*Why me?*" when you face difficulties in life, ask, "*What does God want me to learn or gain from this situation?*" Or "*What outcome does God want from me in this situation?*" In other words, ask, "What purpose does God have for me in this situation?" Focus on the purpose God has for you, not on the pain you are experiencing. Then along with God's help, take action to fulfill the purpose God has for you. **From the outside**, others will see courage flowing out of you and your actions, because *from the inside*, you are looking at the prospect of joy at the completion of God's purpose in your situation.

If you are about to lose your job, **don't focus on the dreadful process** of updating your resume or the possibility of a long unemployment period in between. **Pray about what God could possibly purpose in your life through this. Is God developing your trust in Him?** Is He wanting you to be in a different job that you might be a better witness for Him? Or will your next job actually pay more? **I don't know!**

In your prayer, ask Him what purpose He has in this hardship? Then along with God's help, take action to fulfill the purpose God has for you.

From the outside, your co-workers will wonder why you have such peace and courage throughout the prospect of being laid off, *while from the inside*, you are looking at the prospect of joy at the completion of God's purpose in your situation.

I heard some years ago about, and I forget his name, one of the team members of the Billy Graham Crusade ending up in the hospital and wondering why God kept him from helping at a critical time. Even worse, he was placed in the same room with a very bitter man, who ridiculed his Christian faith. Yet, each day, he treated his obnoxious hospital roommate with encouraging words and offered to share the food that others brought to him.

On the day the member of the Billy Graham Crusade was to be discharged from the hospital, his roommate slipped him a note that read, "If only for me, God brought you here, to show me His love."

While in hardship, we can check to see if we are fulfilling God's purpose in us or in others. We may be the object lesson of God's love or strength for another. We may be in our difficulty because difficulties serve as the sand paper for refining character. Maybe only in our weakness, can we see God's strength, when all the scaffoldings of life are removed.

I saw a sign the other day that says, "Courage is knowing that you are indestructible until God's work is done," and I would add "in and through you."

The second application of turning your chains into courage is focus on the joyful outcome of exalting Christ and not self in your situation or your life: (We read this in **verse 18.**)

Most pain in life is caused by ego-damage or by our pride being hurt. If we get out of the way and allow Jesus Christ to be our greatest love, our love for self would not be a problem. If we learn to rejoice at the exalting of Christ, that is, if we are happiest when others talk well of and walk well with Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, we will have more joy in our lives.

Paul told us what was important to him. The importance was not who got the credit. The importance was not whether others had the right motive. The important thing was that the truth of Christ was the subject of the talk and walk of the town. (We read this in **verse 18.**)

Let exalting Christ be the mode of operation in this church. Don't let the shortfall in the giving get you anxious. It's only temporary. Let's celebrate the fact that Christ is spoken highly of here. **Don't let** past differences create bitterness in you. Think of others kindly and with admiration since we are all sinners forgiven through Christ. Let's rejoice in what Christ has done in our lives and what he continues to empower us to do. **Don't let** the personal preferences be cause for resentment. Enjoy the uniqueness that God has brought to this church, the local body of Christ.

Here's my church growth philosophy; it's taken from **John 3:25-30:**

"An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. They came to John (the Baptist) and said to him, "Rabbi, that man (Jesus) who was with you on the other side of the Jordan--the one you testified about--well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

Loose translation: "John, how come your church is shrinking and Jesus' church is growing?"

"To this John (the Baptist) replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less."

The original Greek could be concisely translated as: "You idiot. It's not about me. It's about Christ."

Can you picture the joy a church has, when we surrender our ego and pride for the cause of exalting the truth of Christ? God will draw others to Himself in the church that exalts Christ.

To exalt Christ means to make Christ the priority, the head of the church, the head of the family, of the place of work and of the place of recreation. **Charlie Jones** noted, *"There is no such thing as Christian leadership. There is only Christian followership."*

To exalt Christ means to follow Christ, not our own ego or agenda. Christians who have joy in the face of terminal illness have chosen to die to self a little bit at a time along the journey of life and exalted Christ, so that when the time to leave their earthly body and possessions, comes the challenge is simply to die a little bit more to self and to go home to Christ.

A pastor will have courage to face obstacles when he exalts Christ and truly follows Christ in the ministry. **A husband** will have courage to face objections when he exalts Christ and truly follows Christ in leading the family. **A student** will have courage to face peer pressure when he exalts Christ and truly follows Christ in his relationships. And at your deathbed, **you will** have courage to face death when you exalt Christ and follow Christ into eternity.

Let me close with an excerpt from Paul's last letter before he was executed: **2 Timothy 1:8-12**. Paul exalted Christ during his life and at his death, he was confident to follow Christ into eternity. **"So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel (or good news) I was appointed a forerunner and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day."**

Conclusion: There is a phrase, "*Turning lemon into lemonade*," which is used to mean that one can take the bad and sour things of life and make it good. If you go away this morning thinking I've taught you how to turn the lemons in your life into sweet lemonade, you've missed the point. **I started out by uncovering a lie, the lie that bad things don't happen to good people. The truth is bad things do happen to good people, even to God's people.**

And sometimes when we work with bad lemons in our lives, no amount of sugar added will make the lemonade taste any better. But if we understand that the most important thing and the thing that will bring us eternal joy in life is not sweet lemonade, or the American dream, but fulfilling God's purposes in our lives and following Christ, then we'll have the courage to swallow every drop and even swallow some lemon slices, because our God promised a joyful outcome for those who have Christ in our lives.