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Philippians 1:12-19

### ***What Do You Know?***

This morning what I am going to do is continue in a series that I started several weeks ago from the book of Philippians. What I would like to begin with is just setting a little bit of the background for what we are going to read so that you understand what is happening in Paul's life when he is writing this passage.

Now, to give you a little bit of background on what we are about to read, the apostle Paul had recently gone through a series of extraordinarily unfair things. He, first of all, went down to Jerusalem where he went out of his way to attempt to be sensitive to his fellow Jewish brothers and sisters. He went out of his way to attempt to demonstrate to other Jews that he cared about them and he cared about their religion. So he was real careful to offer the appropriate sacrifices and to shave his head as he went into the temple and all of the things that were necessary in order to not give offense. You know, in our zeal for Christianity we can offend other people and other religions. But Paul was extremely loving and extremely sensitive. When he talked about Christianity, he didn't give undue offense. He was culturally sensitive without changing the message. He made sure that there weren't any stumbling blocks in the way of his preaching.

Paul goes to Jerusalem and goes through extraordinary lengths to not give any offense, but nevertheless offense is taken. When he is at the temple, he is falsely accused of violating certain Jewish sensibilities and he is almost lynched right there on the spot. On the temple mountain in Jerusalem, a crowd gathers. There is this mob and it is very

much a riot—like walking into the middle of the Los Angeles riots. There is this riot going on and they are about to kill Paul when he is rescued by the Romans. He is put in chains.

They are about to beat him, stretch him out to beat him, when he says, “Wait a minute. I am a Roman citizen. You are not allowed to beat me without a trial or a hearing.” In any case, he is then brought out of Jerusalem by the Romans and without any real hearing, without the opportunity to defend himself, the apostle Paul who was trying to do good and right, ends up in jail for two years in a city called Caesarea which is in Israel right on the coast of the Mediterranean.

Now, he spends two years in jail and it is not exactly clear why he is not being released from prison because they have no solid evidence against him. The Roman leaders who were keeping him in jail were probably just bending to the popular will of the crowd. That is, they didn’t particularly believe that Paul was guilty of doing anything wrong, but they didn’t want to offend their constituency. Politicians are like that sometimes. It is not necessarily the case that they want to do bad, but they have to serve the special interests of their constituency in order to stay in power. So they do things that they might not otherwise want to do or believe in. Well, these politicians decided to keep Paul in jail.

There is also some suspicion in the book of Acts that they may have wanted Paul to pay them off. They were looking for a bribe in order to get Paul out of jail. Unfortunately, Paul didn’t have any money and he would not have bribed them anyway.

So, here is Paul unfairly in prison for two full years, in chains, in a Roman jail, but it was not in Rome. My belief is that the book of Philippians was not written from Rome but from a prison in Caesarea. And Caesarea was where the Romans took Paul

from Jerusalem. It is a city right on the coast of Israel on the Mediterranean. There was a big fortress there where the Roman government had its local capitol. There was a fortress there and Paul was kept in prison, unfairly, for two full years.

Now, I want you to think about you being in Paul's situation for a moment and how you might feel. You are trying to serve God, you are going out of your way to not create any offense, you believe that you are doing what the Lord wants you to do, you are being so super careful to do it correctly and even though you are going out of your way to be careful and to obey and to serve the Lord, nevertheless, you are falsely accused. You have a bunch of people saying things about you that are not true. They try to actually kill you, to physically harm you, not just accuse you, but they try to physically harm you. Then you are dragged off and thrown in jail where the only way out is to bribe and you are not willing to do that.

You are sitting in jail and you are contemplating your life and your relationship with God. What would you be thinking?

It is hard for us to put ourselves in Paul's situation because none of us have gone through something quite that awful, but we often go through things which are hard for us to understand or even minor frustrations where our goals and desires are not being achieved. God is not healing someone you are praying for. And I just want to share with you some of the options that Paul had available to him in terms of his own understanding of what was going on.

One possible option available to Paul was to say, "This whole business of Christianity is not worth it. You know, here I am trying to serve the Lord. I am going out of my way to be honest and honorable and follow Jesus. It is very apparent to me that Christianity doesn't pay off. So why bother serving God? I might as well blow this

whole thing off and go ahead and sin. Bribe my way out of jail. See if while I am in prison, I can work out a little action for myself. Check out the babes here in jail. See if I can hook up with them. Maybe ask the guard for a bottle of cheap wine to comfort me in my distress because after all, I need a little bit of comfort too and God is not giving me any.”

Well, goodness, the first thought that comes to mind very often for me at least, and I don't think I am all that unusual, is why bother? You know, we are trying to serve the Lord and we are attempting to live the Christian life, but this bad stuff happens anyway, even though you are praying and even though you are going to church and even though you are giving money. So we might as well just go out and sin. The Lord is not really going to help. That option was available to Paul.

A second option, certainly, is to say “God has forgotten about me. Somehow, I have escaped God's notice. I have been raising my hand saying, ‘Oh, God. Over here. Over here.’ But the Lord keeps calling on someone else. These other people are succeeding and I am waving my hand saying, ‘Oh, God. Over here.’ But God keeps calling on people all around me.” Paul could have thought he was forgotten by God. That God didn't notice him.

And I guess third of all, Paul could have thought, “Well, maybe God sees me. Maybe God hears me. Maybe God notices me, but the way God has chosen to set up the universe is to turn control from time to time over to bad people or bad spirits, Satan. So lots of stuff happens to me or to you outside of the plan of God and that is just the way it is. God gets off the throne for a little while and he allows all this bad stuff to happen. And that is just the nature of the world. God is really not, ultimately, running things.

The institution has been turned over to the inmates. Now the mental patients and the prisoners are running the asylum.”

There are any number of options that Paul had when he was going through this painful experience, but I want you to note the option he chose. Look at Philippians 1:12-19.

“Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

“It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 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 for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.”

Now, there are a couple of phrases that I want you to pay special attention to because Paul understands the array of options that are in the minds of his readers as they look at what happened to the apostle Paul. He understands that people could think, “Well, if God didn’t protect Paul, how in the world will I ever make it?” I mean here is a

great man like Paul and if God doesn't take care of him, what is he going to do with someone who is as half-hearted as me?

And I want you to note a few phrases that Paul uses to really secure his readers. In verse 12 he says, "I want you to know, brothers..." There is something I want you to know.

And in verse 19 he says, "For I know..."

And if you look down at verse 25, Paul says, "Convinced of this, I know..." I want you to know. And then he says, "For there are some things that I know..."

I am convinced.

I am persuaded.

You are going through some pain. You are going through some difficulty. What do you know?

Let me give you an image that I think will be of some help to you as I am going through this message. It is an image that has been helpful to individuals as I have offered personal counseling to people who are going through a difficult time.

Years ago, before we had children, my wife, Marlene, and I went tent camping on a beach on the outer banks off of North Carolina. And it was the day after a hurricane. There was no one else there. And the winds were still blowing pretty strongly. We had gone down to set up our tent on the beach. Now, we had done some camping in the past, but we had never set up a tent on the beach. And we tried to nail down the normal tent pegs into the sand. But normal tent pegs don't stay in sand. The moment the wind blows, the tent pegs are just pulled out because they don't dig in. They don't go long enough.

So I worked on the tent with all of my mechanical ability. I worked on the tent for about a half an hour, trying to hold the flaps down while the wind was blowing against it. I was totally frustrated. And finally I said to Marlene, “Look, let’s just climb in the tent and our body weight will hold it down and let it flap around.”

Marlene said, “I am not getting in there and let the wind blow the tent around all night while we are trying to sleep. We could get blown all over the beach.”

So we argued about it for a little while and finally she won. I said, “Well, maybe they have special tent pegs for sand.” I didn’t know if they did. We went into town and we discovered that, yes, they sell very long, plastic tent pegs that dig into sand. And we bought some of them and pounded them into the ground and the tent was able to stand up even though the wind was blowing.

Now, let me apply this little picture to you. We all go through different degrees of difficulty from minor irritations of being stuck in a traffic jam or getting lost when you are driving to more painful situations of being fired from our jobs or going through a divorce or suffering some illness up to the loss of a loved one, the pain of losing a child or spouse or parent. We all have in varying degrees at various times wind blowing against our tents. And sometimes there is a huge gust of wind that comes from nowhere. We didn’t know that it was coming and we didn’t see it coming, but it comes up from nowhere and blows against our tents.

We can try with our little methods to secure our lives, make ourselves more comfortable, but there are certain things that you can use as tent pegs that will really grip and hold your life together in the midst of a very strong storm. You do not have to be blown all over the beach. You do not have to give up. The tent pegs are what you know and are what you have become convinced of. When everything is blowing around, the

wind is howling, what keeps you together is what you know at the deepest part of your being. What you have become convinced of. And you don't know what your real convictions are until the wind blows. Oh, all of us can say we believe certain things; it is when we're tested with temptation, with financial loss, with the loss of status in the eyes of someone else that we see how deep our convictions are.

Some of Paul's favorite phrases are: "I know," "I am persuaded," "I don't know everything," he says in 1 Corinthians 13; "I don't know why the wind, where it came from." He says, "I don't know everything. Now we know in part..." In this life we don't know all the reasons for an illness, a death, being out of work. We don't know why the wind is blowing on our tent. But there are things that we can know that have been revealed to us in the Bible and you can use those things as tent pegs and drive them in deeply. That is what I am going to urge you to do today, to drive those things deeply into your soul.

Because the wind will blow, it will. And it will test the depth of your knowledge, your convictions, and your persuasions. What you know will be called into question at a time of frustration or inconvenience or trial. So here is my question to you today: *What Do You Know?* What do you know? Let's pray.

Now, I want to start back in verse 6 and share with you some of the tent pegs that must be pounded in your life at a very deep level. The pegs will only be tested if the wind is blowing. You don't know what you don't know until there is pressure, and until frustration is brought to bear. Until things are not working out the way you intend for them to. And you feel like you are just running your head into a wall.

You don't know what you don't know. You don't know where you are really at until there is pressure. Until you test it. And those are the times that you need to have



those pegs of persuasion, of conviction, of knowledge, you need to have those things driven deeply into your life.

So Paul prays. He says, “I always pray with joy for you because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, [And this is the verse we are going to start with] being confident of this that he who began a good work in you will carry it on until completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

He is the first tent peg. This is what I want to start with. Do you know that God chose you for salvation? Do you know that? Is that absolutely rooted in the depth of your soul that God chose you for salvation, in the words of Ephesians 1:4, “before the creation of the world”?

Paul says, “Being confident...this is something I know [Paul says] about you...that he [meaning God] began a work in you, the work of salvation.” I know God started something in you. Do you know that?

See, I believe that one of the major problems of Christians is that they don’t get this first tent peg deeply in the ground – God chose us first. Christians look back on why it is that they are Christians. Where did you begin this salvation thing anyway? How did it all start? And what they do is to put into the ground a very shallow, little tent peg of their own choice.

“Well, why is it that I am a Christian? Why is it that I am saved? My Christianity is being called into question, why am I saved? Well, on such and such a date, I chose, I made a decision for God.”

Now, no one is going to be saved who doesn’t make a decision for Christ. You must make a decision for Christ. There is no one here who is listening to me right now who will be saved unless you make a decision for Christ. You have to do it. But, I am

telling you that that is a shallow tent peg to hang your salvation on because you blow hot and cold. You go up and down in your choices and your decisions and your thoughts and your feelings. You need something that will dig into the ground really deeply.

What digs into the ground deeper than your choice is knowing that God chose you first. “I am confident of this thing,” Paul says in verse 6, “he began the work of salvation in you.” The reason why you made a choice for God is because God first made a choice in your favor in eternity past.

Now there is a lot of controversy in the church about this whole business of God’s choice, but I believe to eliminate the first choice of God is to eliminate your basis for assurance and confidence in a storm. This doctrine, if you will, called election, is central to the New Testament understanding of salvation. Election means that God voted for you first. God selected you. God picked you out. God chose you.

Now, I want you to let that thought soak into your being. Many of you have not been taught that and you haven’t understood this. The way salvation has been presented to you is, well, the door is open, but God is not particularly interested in you. The door is open, if you want in, you can get in. But it is your choice.

No, you personally, you—from the mass of humanity, you have been called by your lover and invited to the party. God issued an invitation to you. Called you on the phone and said, “I have picked you to be my date at my banquet.”

Why me? That is a secret locked in the loving heart of God. It certainly wasn’t my works. It wasn’t your works. It wasn’t your faith. You must, to be secure, go back before your choice and allow the loving choice of God for you to really penetrate your thoughts and your soul. Let it soak in. Yes, my Father actually picked me.

Maybe some of you were people who were never picked for anything. You know, the last guy on the team, “Oh well, you mean I have to have him? All right, well, stand out in right field. Make sure if a ball comes that you get out of the way.” Nobody called you for a date. Everything that you have you have had to fight for and scrap for and scrounge for.

But I tell you, it is not that way in a relationship with God. God is always the initiator. He began the work, Paul reminds us. We love, John says, because he first loved us. That is the reason why you love God. That is the reason why you are able to love other people, because God first set his love on you. We must start the Christian life understanding that God is the leader of the dance. We are not equal partners. We didn’t start the dance. God is the leader.

You say, “Does God go against our wills?”

No. No. Never allow this thought of election to be pushed so far that people are turned into robots, folks that are saved apart from their will, in spite of their will, against their will. No. God’s love, as it comes to us, inclines our wills, stimulates our wills, motivates our wills to choose for him. No one is going to be in heaven apart from their own very real choice for God.

But my very real choice for God is second. First is God’s very real choice of me. There is a great deal of mystery in this and Christians have pushed through the mystery, I believe, dangerously and foolishly, like pushing through the fence that would be around the edge of the Grand Canyon. Many Christians have pushed through to try to explain this wonderful mystery of God that God chooses people. And in pushing through they have done damage to other scriptural truths. Like God doesn’t turn people into robots. He doesn’t force his will upon folks. No one is coerced into heaven. They push through

to the point where it is almost as if some people want to get in and they are not allowed. We have to put fences around this wonderful mystery.

There is no one who will be in heaven who won't want to be there or won't have chosen it. And there is no one who will be in hell who wanted to follow Christ and wanted to believe but God said, "No, I haven't chosen you. I am slamming the door." Everyone who wants to get in will get in.

People do ask and seek, but as the great reformer Martin Luther put it, the very wishing and asking and seeking are a gift from God. Paul is very careful to put these words around the mystery in Romans 12, "Oh, the depth of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments. His paths are but beyond tracing out."

Can you understand this mystery that God could choose us first? Guarantee that we will be in? Not only just open the door, but, actually reach out and select and bring us in. And yet do so in coordination with our own wills and choices, so as to preserve us as free, full actors in the drama and not turn us into robots? He says, "Who can understand the mind of God?"

But he also wants to make sure that we know where it begins and so he says, "Who has ever given to God that God should repay him? [And finally]...for from him and through him and to him are all things." Understand the source. Understand the means. Understand the end. It is all about God. So that, at the end of Romans 11, "...to him be the glory forever. Amen."

I don't care how you choose to explain your salvation, so long as at the end of the day your salvation depends entirely upon him and his choice so that he gets all the glory. Glory to God alone. The first tent peg. Do you know that God chose you?

Here is the second tent peg. Do you know that not only did God choose you, but that God keeps you? Philippians 1:6 says, “Being confident of this that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.” It is not just that there has been this work in the past, but God continues to work to this very day. God’s grace will triumph in your life. Do you know that? Why did I believe to begin with? Because God invaded my soul. Because God reached out and rescued me. Because God elected me to salvation. Because God chose me. He inclined me and infused me with faith.

Why do I keep on believing? Keep on seeking? Keep on praying? Where does that energy come from? It comes from the same God who began the work. He is now bringing it to completion. The reason I continue to believe and you continue to believe, the reason you continue continuing on despite all the opposition and the world and the power of the anti-Christian media and messages that you get day by day and your mind is bombarded with all kinds of stuff. You say, “My goodness, Christians are maybe only 10 or 15% of the population. Folks who really are following God and are regularly reading the Bible. Why are you one of those people? All the messages are against that. Why do you want to give your life on a continual basis? And you are inclined to want to pray more and to love God more. Why?

Because he who began the work in you is continuing to work in your life. He just didn’t save you in the past and then let you go to swim upstream against the current of your flesh and to swim upstream against the current of the world and the current of the demonic realm.

God, and his grace, will triumph in your life. Grace reigns. We don’t need a little assistance, a little help. We need to be, in the words of 1 Peter, “...kept by the power of God.”

Again, I have to emphasize that God is not the only actor. We act. We believe. We choose on a moment by moment basis. It is never apart from me, never around me, never in spite of my choices, but God is always the one who is the leader. At the end of the day, it will be glory to God alone. And however you want to express it, so long as at night, you can kneel by your bed and say, “Today my continuance in faith has been the result of your activity, God, and yours alone.” Glory to God alone. I don’t care how you choose to doctrinally formulate it.

The wonderful truth of being kept by God is that God never gives up. In the present, at this moment, you say, “What is keeping me keeping on?”

Let me share with you a couple of things to drive the tent peg of confidence deeper into your heart. One thing that you can be confident of is that God’s reputation is at stake in keeping you safe for salvation. God’s honor is on the line. When God makes a promise to you in your salvation, he is staking his name on it that he can rescue you and bring you all the way in. He won’t be thwarted.

Let me show you this from the Old Testament real quickly. Look back at me at Ezekiel 20. In Ezekiel 20 the Lord is expressing his understanding of covenant. How when God makes a promise, he commits himself to the same, to the uttermost. And in Ezekiel 20, the Lord is recounting the history of Israel from his perspective through the prophet Ezekiel. And from God’s perspective, he says three times concerning the nation of Israel, “...but they rebelled.”

In verse 8: “...but they rebelled against me and would not listen to me. They didn’t get rid of the vile images.”

And in verse 13 [you can underline these] “...yet the people of Israel rebelled against me.”

And then in verse 21 the same thing, “But the children rebelled against me. They didn’t follow my decrees. They were not careful to keep my laws.”

Three times, verse 8, verse 13, and verse 21— “But they rebelled.” And yet, through the passage, you read the triumph of grace because four times the Lord says, one more time than their rebellion, four times, the Lord says, “But for the sake of my name...”

Verse 9, “But for the sake of my name, I did what would keep it from being profaned...”

Verse 14, “But for the sake of my name, I did what would keep it from being profaned...”

Verse 22, “But I withheld my hand and for the sake of my name, I did what would keep it from being profaned...”

And then, one more time, verse 44, “You will know that I am the Lord when I deal with you for my name’s sake and not according to your evil ways and your corrupt practices, O House of Israel, declares the Lord.”

You say, “What keeps me when I am often so wretched, so inclined to drift?” One thing that you can know deeply in your soul is that God cares about his reputation and his name as a Savior. And he is going to honor his reputation in your life. He cares about his own honor more than he cares about your honor. God is acting, in a certain sense, on his own behalf when he acts on our behalf. He acts for his own glory when he brings you into glory. Oh, what a wonderful thing to drive into you. “But for his name’s sake...”

And, of course, you are kept by the prayers of Jesus. This has always been the anchor in the New Testament for securing believers, the notion that right now Jesus Christ prays for you. Hebrews 7:25, I have preached on this on several occasions, “Jesus

lives forever. He has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.”

We have someone whose prayers are always answered, namely Jesus Christ, our great High Priest who is right now standing before the throne of God praying that the Father would keep us safe for salvation. And, of course, the Father has made a promise. He answers the Son and he gives the guarantee of the Spirit to us. The Trinity is involved in right now keeping you safe.

So, I ask you secondly, do you know that you are being kept by the power of God?

Here is the third tent peg. Do you know that God guarantees that you will be saved?

Paul says, “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Between now and then, that moment in God’s Day-timer when he sends the Son of God back to bring the dead in Christ with him, and those of us who are alive at the second coming of the Lord to be raised up with Christ so that we will ever be with the Lord, and ever be with other Christians, God guarantees that you will be saved in the future. You know that saying, “There are lots of slips between the cup and the lip.” You know, there are lots of things that can drip out of the cup as we are bringing it to our mouths, but not in the case of God. There are no slips.

Jesus said in John 10:28, “I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” You are in the hand of Jesus. You are in the hand of God.



And then he says, “My Father and I are one.” You are kept between the hand of the Father and the Son. You cannot fall out. The future is sure for the Christian.

Flip with me to Romans 8, you give to get these tent pegs into your heart. Romans 8:29, Paul says, “For those God fore-knew, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son that he may be the first born among many brothers. And those whom he predestined, he also called. Those whom he called, he also justified. Those whom he justified, he also glorified.” People call this the “Golden Chain of Salvation.”

I want to focus on one phrase: “...those whom he justified, he also glorified.” Presently, we are justified. In the future, when we take on our resurrection bodies at the day of Jesus Christ, at that moment, we will be glorified. But you know that our glorification is so certain in the mind of Paul that the future glory is spoken of in this text, Romans 8:30 as a past tense, an accomplished fact. He says those who he has justified, he has glorified. It is the aorist tense in the Greek. He is using it in a past tense, an already completed fact. Your salvation is so certain that what remains in the future in the mind of God is already a done deal in the past. By being joined to Jesus Christ, it is appropriate to speak of you, at least from the perspective of God, as already glorified. In our experience and our life we are not yet glorified, but from the perspective of God, there is a truth and a reality that you are already glorified. Past, aorist, tense—completed action. It is a done deal.

Anyone who speaks of their salvation as somehow uncertain – I hope I will be saved; I sincerely wish I can be saved – doesn’t understand this very simple, but profound thought that the eternal verdict is already on your life and you can hear it now in time. God has slammed the gavel down and he has declared in the case of the justified, “Here is my eternal verdict. Innocent. Innocent. Innocent.”

What will I hear on the judgment day? Innocent. Innocent. Paul says in the rest of Romans 8, “If you don’t get it, let me list seventeen things for you that could get in the way.” And he says anyone of them or in combination will not separate you from the love of Christ. It is inappropriate for the Christian to say, “I hope I will be saved. I want to be saved. It is my fondest dream and wish that I will be saved.”

The apostle Paul says you need some long tent pegs to secure you when you are really being blowing around and you are being accused. You need something that penetrates into the soul. “I am convinced,” he says, “I am persuaded. I know that nothing will ever separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus my Lord.”

So the apostle Paul is incredibly confident in salvation. And then in the text that we were looking at, Philippians 1:12, he is also incredibly confident in suffering. He says, “I want you to know, brothers, after going through this business of establishing this great confidence on one side of the tent that you can have in your salvation,” he says, “now, let’s bring this home and say, you can have great confidence even while you are suffering. I want you to know something, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.”

“As a result it has become clear throughout the whole palace garden and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.”

What Paul is basically saying is that, “Do you know that God works good out of bad all the time for Christians?” Every time bad occurs God makes you a promise that he will make good out of it for your sake.

Let’s look at the particular situation that Paul was in and then we will extrapolate off of that into our own lives. As I told you before, Paul was thrown in jail. He was unjustly accused of things that he never did. He was maligned, his reputation was shot at

from every side, not only by the Jews, but then the Romans were looking for a pay-off. Tremendous isolation, almost beaten, almost killed.

I mentioned before that he had a number of options. In looking at his situation, he could have said, “God has forgotten me.” He could have sunken into self-pity and said, “Woe is me. Oh, my terrible situation. Oh, I have a right to lick my wounds.”

He could have basically walked away from the Lord and said, “I am going to blow you off because you blew me off. It makes no sense to try to live like a Christian, because God doesn’t help you anyway.” He could have thought that somebody else was in control.

But, no, he said, “I want you to understand something. That apart from this situation of me being thrown into jail, I never would have had the opportunity and the gospel would never have had the opportunity to move up the chain of Roman society the way it has since I have been in prison in Caesarea.” Because while he was in jail, Paul had the opportunity to witness to his guards, many of whom apparently became Christians, to move up the ranks of the military hierarchy as the gospel spread and, ultimately, to preach the gospel before governors, Festus, Felix, and he was looking forward to preaching the gospel, to kings, to Caesar in Rome. He says, “This tragedy, this so-called problem has actually been used by God to clear a path for the gospel.” That word “advance” is a word that is used for cutting trees and brush out of the way of pioneers. This trial has served to clear the ground. It has been like an ax, pushing through ahead of me and the gospel. It has really all turned out for good.

And this is it. This is the principle. You see, every time Satan or people work for bad in the life of a Christian or in the life of churches, every time there is an intention for bad to you from a bad person, from a bad circumstance, from a bad spirit, Satan, in effect,

the way you can think about it is it like one of those little mechanical toys in which the key is wound around tighter and tighter and tighter. And all that serves to do is to propel that toy farther and farther and farther. The bad that happens in the life of a church as persecution comes against the church simply is God's way of winding the church up to be pushed out farther and farther and farther.

Where do you get that from, Rich?

I get it from this text. I get it from the history of the church in the book of Acts. I get it from the testimony of the church throughout Christian history. Every time something happens against the church, persecution comes; it is like the winding up of one of those toys. And in the book of Acts what you see on several occasions is the persecution came and the enemy tried to stomp down on the church and all it did was drive the church out farther.

"I am going to stomp on the church in Jerusalem," the enemy said. All it did was spread the church out to Samaria. Acts 8, "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church of Jerusalem and all except the apostles were scattered through Judea and Samaria." And in scattering the church, the Lord was spreading the flame, and then once the church was persecuted in Samaria, it scattered more widely. This has been the history of the Christian church.

The truth is that during a time of peace and prosperity, the church generally goes to sleep. We are like people in a canoe on a still lake. We lay back in the canoe. We dangle our toes in the water. But then the canoe drifts into white water. It wakes the church up. We grab our paddle and stir like crazy and we cry out to God. We hang on for dear life. The church becomes alive and it becomes dependent and it begins to seek God. And the gospel spreads.

Now listen to me. It is not the case; it is not the case that God causes every bad thing that happens. God is not the only cause of things. We are told that there are bad spirits, demons that cause bad things. There are bad people who say and do bad things. But God is so wise, God is so powerful, God is so extraordinarily in control, that even in the face of defiance and rebellion, God is going to bring good out of every bad thing that happens in your life. You can bank on it. There is no thread that he won't bring to completion for good. He hasn't dropped anything. He hasn't forgotten anything. It is going to turn out for good. It is one of the tent pegs to drive into your soul. Whatever bad is happening now, it will work out for good. Do you know that?

In the short term, the good may be your opportunity to bring the gospel to nurses, to bring the gospel to doctors as you have to go into the hospital. The gospel advances in a different place than it would have. In the short term, it may be your opportunity to bring comfort to others by sharing with them a story of hope. In the long term, God has plans for your difficulties and your trials well beyond what you can presently foresee.

And God not only wants to bring good out of bad in the sense of bringing good out of bad circumstances, but God wants to bring and wills to bring good out of bad people. Verse 15 Paul says, "It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will. The latter do so in love knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. Though former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 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."

It is important that you don't short-change the passage or water it down so as to lose the extraordinary knowledge that the apostle Paul had. The incredible comfort and

confidence in the overarching purpose of God to work good out of bad, not only out of bad circumstances, but out of bad people. You know, some of the commentators try to suggest that the people he was speaking about were altering the message of the gospel. That these people in verses 15-18 that Paul was having a great deal of pain from were folks who were adding to the gospel. Maybe they were Judaizers. Maybe they were folks who were adding law to the gospel and they were saying you have to do certain things to be saved other than to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I believe that unduly waters the passage down. I think that the passage is saying that Paul was dealing with people who, at least regarding the essentials, had things right. They were preaching Christ, not Christ and something, not heresy, not some Gnostic thing, not a Judaizing gospel. They were preaching Christ. But they were bad people. He says that they were preaching Christ out of selfish ambition, out of envy, out of rivalry.

Here is the deal. We Christians must stop being so naive as to believe that if somebody has the message correct that they are correct. Because someone is basically preaching orthodoxy that that must mean that they are generally okay. We Christians need to come to the view point that a church can be fundamentally off even though its message is right because God also looks at the motivations. There are lots of ways to motivate people to do things. You can motivate them to activity by way of fear. You can motivate people out of envy, out of rivalry and get people to compete with one another. If you bring in five people, then you are going to get your name on a plaque. Bring in 10, and we'll make you a leader. People will do things out of selfish ambition, out of a desire to be recognized by leaders. They will do the right things for the wrong reasons.

The apostle Paul says, “I am totally in touch with the bad motivations that many Christians have. Some of the motivations are so bad that they actually intend to hurt me. Here I am, I am sitting in jail and some of the people think ‘Oh, that’s great because now we will be able to pull people toward ourselves. We won’t have to compete with Paul.’”

You can motivate churches by competitiveness, by arrogance, by pretending that there are all these enemies out there trying to get us. But Paul says, “Ultimately, God’s gospel is going to win. Good is going to come because God will honor his word and people will be saved.” The folks who were working out of bad motives will be dealt with by the Lord. The Lord knows how to discipline folks, he really does. The fact that churches grow, that people get saved is no statement regarding us. It just means that we get the message right. But the Lord probes deeper and says, “But are you right? Are your motives clear for why you are doing this Christian thing? Is it out of love? Is it out of concern? Is it with a servant heart? Is it out of humility? Are you doing it for the right reasons?”

The apostle Paul says that even with bad people, God will work good. Do you know that?

Here is the fifth thing. Do you know that you can be an inspiration? Tent peg #5 to be driven into your soul when you are being tempted, when you are going through a hard thing and you are saying, “Man, I don’t know if I can keep going.” Drive this into your soul. You can be an inspiration to others if you keep going.

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.” You look at somebody who is really suffering for the sake of Christ and that inspires you to greater

service, to greater faithfulness, to a greater desire for Jesus. You say, “Well, if that brother can do it and keep going, then I can too.”

Do you know that you have the opportunity to be an inspiration? Most of us don’t think of ourselves like that. “Oh, me being an inspiration? How can I be that?” All of our lives are on parade. The apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3 that you are a letter being read by everyone. Watch someone go through an illness, a difficult period of time, but you talk with them and they are telling you that they are praying and looking to God. They are not full of self-pity, they are not full of self-indulgence, self-absorption. They say it is hard; they are not denying anything, but they are looking to the Lord. I don’t know about you, but that kind of person just challenges the heck out of me.

I watch people give sacrificially, serve and serve and serve when it is inconvenient, when it doesn’t pay anything at all. They are not in the limelight and they are not getting any money—they are an inspiration. They challenge me.

I watch folks in this church take their Saturday mornings to go down to our Food Pantry and give groceries away. That inspires me. I talked with a retired couple, I will tell you who they are, John and Lois Myer. He is retired now, John is. He has passed his 62 birthday, retired from his job. He could take his time playing golf or working on his house. He came by the church on Friday. I said, “Where you going, John?”

He said, “I am going down to Fruit of the Vine. Lois and I are going down and spending the afternoon cutting baloney so we can serve it up on Saturday.”

That inspires me.

I have a physician friend who built a big house. The reason he built the big house was so that every week, and he has been doing this for years, every week he has a 150 single people over to his house and does a huge Bible study with them. He put in all of



these bathrooms so that these folks could use the bathrooms. He has kids crawling all over the place. That inspires me.

I have a friend, Steve Nicholson, in Evanston, Illinois, who wrote down as one of his life's goals, he said, "I want to live a life that can only be explained by the existence of God." He wants people to look at his life and say, "This life doesn't make any sense unless you take into account God." He wants to be an inspiration.

In everything you do, in everything you buy, in all of your giving to the church, to the Lord, do you know that you can be an inspiration? Whenever I see somebody who is a few steps ahead, I say, "It can be done. They did it. I can be more faithful. I can pray. It can be done because they are doing it."

The last thing: the last tent peg. Do you know that God can help you right now? The wind is blowing. You have nailed some tent pegs down, but here is one that you need to get to the very core of your being. Do you know that God can help you right now? Not just theologically, not just in your ideas and not just your beliefs, but really, really help you right now even though the wind is blowing hard in your family and the things you are really concerned about.

Philippians 1:19 Paul says, "Yes, and I will continue to rejoice for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance."

He mentions two ways that the Lord helps us right now. One is by the prayers of other Christians. "By your prayers..." The Lord stirs a few people up to pray for you. You get three, four, five, ten or however many people if you are going through something and you say, "Here is the help I need. More than counsel, more than wisdom, more than money, what I really need are a few people to pray for me."

And the second thing, in terms of help, is the supply of the Spirit. Paul says, “For I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ...” it literally reads, “And the supply of the Spirit.” Hey, I am not going to make it through without being refueled and refilled by the Holy Spirit.