

## **Paul the Prisoner of Christ Jesus**

Ephesians 3:1

Jeremy Cagle, April 26, 2020

Hello everyone and welcome to another Sunday morning service here at our Grace Fellowship YouTube channel. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Jeremy Cagle and I'm the teaching pastor at Grace Fellowship Chilliwack. We are a Bible teaching church located in Chilliwack, British Columbia. And like many churches right now, we are recording our messages online due to the Coronavirus, if you can believe this. We've been doing this for seven weeks now, so it's been almost two months of this type of ministry. But we are staying faithful in it, and we are grateful to the Lord for the opportunity to use the technology this way.

We've been trying to be creative in the places where we've met, if you've been following us, you know that we have had sermons in a in my office. That's where we started this, we started in my study. Then we went to a cemetery of all places, we recorded in a graveyard here in Chilliwack for our Good Friday service. From there, we went to a public park, we have met in some farmland, and this morning we are meeting in front of a brick wall. We are meeting in a very sober place. And I'll tell you why here in just a moment. But we are trying to use this opportunity to show some creativity in the ministry. We really appreciate your support in that.

I also want to encourage you if you haven't had a chance yet to please check out our YouTube channel. We have some wonderful resources on there that I think you will find to be beneficial to you. We have 18 videos so far, 18 videos that you can see; most of them are from our Sunday morning services, but some of them are from other things as well. For example, one of our elders, Quintin Smith did a video called "A Physician's Perspective on COVID-19" because Quintin is a medical doctor. He is trained in the field of medicine and in biblical counseling. He's a certified counselor with the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors. In the video he talks about the Coronavirus from both perspectives. He talks about it from the physician's perspective and from the biblical counseling perspective, so you'll want to check that out. We also did another video with another elder, Kevin Laser, on the subject of "Why do Bad Things Happen to Good People?" because Kevin was paralyzed at a young age, he was wheelchair bound from a skiing accident when he was 10 years old. So we did an interview with him where we asked him the question, "Why do things like that happen? Why does God allow so much evil and suffering in the world?" And you can also see that on the YouTube channel as well, but all that to say that we're trying to make the most of this season. We're trying to shepherd you digitally if we can't do it personally right now in person, and so please take advantage of that. God has graced us with this venue for continuing the services of our church. And with that said, I'd like to do that this morning.

I'd like to shepherd you this morning by inviting you to open your Bibles to the book of Ephesians. That's the book we're in this morning. That's what we're looking at. If you would, please turn with me to the book of Ephesians, and we're in chapter two. This morning, to continue our online ministry, we're going to look at a book that we've been in for some time since the fall of last year, and that is the book of Ephesians. And as you're turning there, I want to go ahead and read our passage to you to get you thinking about it. But if you would read Ephesians 2 starting in verse 11. There the Apostle Paul writes,

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands— remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.

If you notice, as you read the long section in your Bibles, it starts off with the word “therefore.” It points you back to what was said earlier; it points you back to the previous passage where Paul says that when you became a Christian a great change occurred in you. That's what verses one through ten say; a great conversion happened. And it was a conversion with a single purpose. It was a change with a single goal in mind, and that was to put you into the church. That's why God changed you, to put you alongside of others so that you don't have to go through the Christian life alone. In the words of this passage, in verse 11 He takes you who are formerly Gentiles in the flesh and separate from Christ, and He brought you near by the blood of Christ. That means near to God and near to others. God took you who were out there, and He brought you in here, or He took you who are this far apart from each other, you had nothing in common with each other, and He made you one. And what Paul goes on to say is that God isn't through with that yet, He isn't through with the process because He's still building the church. Verse 21 says that we are

being fitted together and growing into a holy temple and being built into a dwelling place. And if you notice, all those verbs are in the present tense. They're continuous to say this is still happening today, this is still going on. God is still building His church. And what Paul says at the start of chapter three is that he knows this personally. He says, "God is still building his church and I can testify to that," Paul says, "because I'm in prison for it. I'm in jail for the sake of the church. I'm suffering for it in a cell." He says in Ephesians 3:1

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.

That phrase "for this reason" could be translate for the reason of the church, for the reason of all these things I've been telling you, I'm thrown in prison. It happened because I told people they can have access to God. It happened because I told the Jews and the Gentiles that they can be one. In fact, he says he did it for you Gentiles, which means it was on account of you Gentiles that this happened. It was on account of Paul's preaching the gospel to them that he was arrested.

Just to give you some background for what he's saying, the book of Acts says that after preaching the gospel to several Gentiles cities like Ephesus, non-Jewish towns, Paul was arrested at the temple in Jerusalem because the Jews thought he was bringing a Gentile named Trophimus into the temple where he was not supposed to be. They thought he was taking Trophimus into the court of Israel, which was off limits to him. It was a false charge. Paul didn't do that. But as a result of this, a riot ensued, mob violence broke out and Paul was beat up and arrested all because of the Gentiles. All because of his love for them. Which is ironic if you think about it because Paul was never arrested as a Jew. He was never arrested as a Pharisee, but the moment he became a Christian all the trouble started. In fact, before he was a Christian, not only did Paul not go to prison, but Paul threw people in prison. Acts 8:3 says that before he was saved, Paul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and he drug men and women off to prison. The word "ravaging" there means ravaging like a wild dog. Paul was like a wild dog toward the Church, going house to house, arresting everyone he could. And now that he became a Christian, he says he is the one in prison and tables have turned for him now. And that's what I want to talk to you about this morning. That's what I want to look at with you this morning. I want to talk about Paul's imprisonment.

I want to talk about this episode in his life. Matter of fact, we're meeting in front of a brick wall because this was the most prison like place we could find. We were going to do it outside, we had some locations, but it was just too cold and windy. But I want to make a point of bringing up all this background to you for this reason. Let's be honest, this is one of the passages we read and skip over. And this is one of the portions of God's Word that we kind of look at and we say, "Well, yeah, I know Paul was in prison. But so what? You know, I learned this in Sunday school. What's the big deal?" Well, the big deal is this. Most of us don't know anybody in prison, do we? The big deal is most of us don't know anybody in jail or if we do know somebody in jail, we

avoid them. We stay away from them, and the last thing we would ever do is take advice from them. The last thing we would have ever do is listen to somebody in jail tell us about God. And yet that's exactly what you read here in the book of Ephesians. And that's exactly what's going on.

In this letter. Paul is telling you about God. Paul is telling you about salvation. Paul is telling you about the church from a jail cell. Charles Spurgeon once said, "When you read John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, it smells like a prison." Because that's where Bunyan wrote it. He wrote it in a jail cell. You could say that about the book of Ephesians. This should smell like a prison to you. Matter of fact, 3:1 says it and 4:1 says it again just in case you might forget. Paul says

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling.

Paul says, "I implore you as a prisoner." The word "prisoner" in both of those passages is *desmios* in Greek. It means someone who is in prison, who is locked up because they're dangerous. That's the idea of the term here, someone is locked up because they can't be trusted. They're a menace to society. pots. That's what Paul was when he wrote this, that's how the Romans would have looked at him, as a menace to society. And we don't want to minimize that. We don't want to downplay the impact this should have in our lives as we read this.

This is a dangerous letter. This is a dangerous place to write from. You don't get locked up because you're safe. And we might add that this was not the first time Paul experienced something like this, it's not the first time he was thrown in jail. In fact, it's been said when Paul went to a town, he didn't ask where the hotel was, he asked where the prison was because that's where he was going. That's where he was going to end up. It's also been said if you wanted to ask Paul for a reference, don't ask his former employer, ask the warden because that's who knew him the best. And it was the same way for many people in the early church.

Early Christians were constantly being thrown in jail. Matter of fact, the most interesting thing about our church today is how few of us are in jail compared to them. Which is interesting to think about because Paul, and the early Christians, they were not evil men. You know, according to the statistics I could find, the current number of prisoners in Canada is 38,786, which is a small portion of the population. It comes to about point .001% of the people. So we live in a very safe place, not many prisoners Canada wide. And they've been arrested for all sorts of reasons. If you do a survey of why they're in prison. Assault and robbery is one cause, murder and rape, you can get into drug abuse, child abuse, spouse abuse, just evil stuff. But Paul wasn't in prison for any of that. and the early church wasn't in prison for any of that.

They were in prison for preaching the gospel. They were in prison for telling people the good news. That was illegal in the Roman Empire. It's hard for us to fathom this today. It's hard for us to get our minds around this, but the ancient world was so passionate about the subject of religion, they were so serious about it, that they would throw you in jail or execute you if you threatened the gods in any way. They would put you to death.

One Bible Dictionary said it this way, it said, "The New Testament persecution as a whole began with the Jews attacks upon the church, but before long the Jews sought assistance from the local authorities, specifically the Romans, making it a government affair. At first, the Romans seemed uncertain as to how to act for they were not consistent, because sometimes they would assist in the persecution and sometimes they would protect the early Christians. Over time, however, the Roman authorities began to adopt a more hostile attitude toward the church because of its widespread influence; they did everything they could to snuff it out. Thus, in the latter writings of the New Testament, such as the book of Revelation, the threat of attack by the government is mentioned everywhere because it had become commonplace.

And that's an important point to mention here. That's an important thing to bring up. Because what Paul is experiencing here, it's not mere suffering. This is an attack. It's important to talk about this. This is not just an ordinary trial, this is persecution. I mentioned that because a lot of people think we're being persecuted right now. You talk to a lot of Christians and they think that we're under attack by the government, because we can't meet like we want, and we can't worship like we want due to the Coronavirus. We have to hold church services like this online. But I just want to remind you that they're asking other people to do that too. I just want to remind you that they're asking businesses and restaurants to do the same thing. They're not picking on us. They're not singling Christians out, yet anyway.

But when you read this in Ephesians, Paul is being picked on here. When you read this passage here, this is a persecution. This is a planned attack. And that's what I want to talk to you about this morning because we may have to face that someday. I want to talk to you about what he's experiencing here because while it's not happening right now, while fortunately, we live in a country that has freedom for us to worship like we choose, that may not always be there. There may come a day when the freedom will end, and we need to be ready for that. We need to have our hearts prepared for that day.

And with that said this morning, we're going to look at seven principles we learn from Paul's imprisonment. So if you're taking notes today, that's our outline. That's what we're talking about this morning. In the book of Ephesians, we're going to see seven principles that we learn from Paul's imprisonment. Because that's where Paul was at this point in his life. That's where he was at when he wrote this. He was in prison. He was in jail. A very miserable place, the kind of place you would never want to be in. Paul was not in an ivory tower when he wrote this. A lot of

people say that. A lot of people make the claim that the people that wrote the Bible were in a comfy chair, they were in an armchair, they were sitting beside the fire; and that's not what you read here. Some even said, as Paul's writing this letter, he mentions his imprisonment because he could hear his chains rattling as he wrote. And while many of us have never experienced that for the faith, while we've never suffered like this, we live in a free country, that may not last. Prison may come for us some day. We need to be ready. And so with that said this morning, we're going to look at seven principles we learn from Paul's imprisonment. I talk about so many of them here because this is an important topic to look at.

The first one is this, the first principle we learn from Paul's imprisonment is that anyone can go to prison. That's the first thing we learn here. Anyone can go to prison. If it happened to Paul, it can happen to you. If it happened to an apostle or a leader of the church, someone who wrote the Bible, it can happen to any of us. Nobody's immune from this. Nobody's too good for this. This could be the lot of us all and if you look in verse one again Paul says,

For this reason, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles.

This is an interesting verse and we're taking a whole sermon to look at it because the term "prisoner" looks like a title here. The way it's worded, it sounds like an office in the church because it has the definite article in front of it. In other words, Paul's not saying, "I'm *a* prisoner of Christ for the sake of you Gentiles, but I'm *the* prisoner of Christ." Not to say that he's the only one, but to say that he's the only one for the sake of you Gentiles, or he's the main one and the primary one. A lot of apostles were responsible for evangelizing the Gentiles, a lot of them ministered to the Gentiles, but Paul was the first one to do that. He actually called himself the apostle of the Gentiles at the time because this was such an unusual thing. Jesus sent the apostles first to the people of Israel, right? The Old Testament was written to the people of Israel. But now all of a sudden Paul is going out to the non-Jews, the Gentile world. And he says here that he's a prisoner for their sake. He's in jail for their sake.

This also takes us back to the very beginning of the book. If you look in 1:1, there Paul gives his other title. He says, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus." If you notice the word "apostle" there, that's the other title Paul has, that was the other office in the church. And it was a high one, because an apostle is someone who was sent out personally by Jesus, someone who was sent out to start the church and lay the foundation of it. You couldn't get any greater than that, you couldn't get any higher than an apostle. We don't even have apostles today because the Bible has been given to us. We don't have that office anymore. But now Paul says I have another title to mention to you. I have another office to go along with that and it's just as important as that one. I am the prisoner of Christ. I am the jailbird. To remind you that anyone could go to prison, anyone can be persecuted like this. If this is for the highest of



us, it's for the lowest as well. If this is for the greatest position in the church, this is for everybody all in between. Elders, deacons, saints, anybody. There's no exemption from this.

Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12, which was also written in prison, that's another letter that was written from jail. He says,

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

In other words, don't expect to get better treatment than this, Timothy, don't expect something better will happen to you. All who desire this will be persecuted. The word "all" means all there. It means everybody. You, me, and the guy next door.

Another passage for this, Jesus says in John 15:20 He says,

Remember the word that I said to you, "A slave is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

And there you see a connection between someone's response to Jesus and someone's response to us. It's a very sobering passage. But Jesus says if they love Him, they will love you. If they keep His word, they will keep your word. And if they persecute Him, they'll persecute you. Because you represent Jesus to them. That's the idea there. You represent Christ to a lost and dying world. They can't get to Him. They can't touch Him. He's in heaven. He's seated at the Father's right hand, but they can get to you. And that's exactly what you can expect.

If you wonder why that is, it's because the world doesn't like it when you're godly. We'll talk about that in a minute. But if you wonder why this happens it's because the world doesn't like it when you refuse to act like they do, and talk like they do, and look like they do. They don't like it when you're different because it makes them feel guilty. And as a result of that, they attack. And Paul says you have to be ready. You don't need to be caught off guard about this. I think we can get so comfortable down here that we forget this. We can get so comfortable and lazy that we forget that the Christian life is about suffering. It's not about comfort. Let's be honest friends, sometimes we're so weak that when the government asks us to stay home along with everybody else, we call that persecution. We're so weak sometimes that we think that if the government asks us just to do what everybody else is doing, they're out to get us. We need to remember the Christian life is about pain. It's not about ease. It's not about comfort. Martin Luther said it this way, "They gave our Savior a crown of thorns. Why do you expect them to give you a crown of roses?" They put Him on a cross, why do you expect the world to put us in a better place?

And it brings us to another point to consider this morning. And I'm going to kind of go through some of these quickly, it brings us to another principle we learn from Paul's imprisonment, and that is that you can go to prison for doing the right thing. First one is that not only can anyone go to prison, no one is immune to this. But a second one, a second principle we learned from Paul's imprisonment is you can go to prison for doing the right thing. You don't go to prison simply because you're bad. That's not what you see here. You don't go to prison or jail, or you're not persecuted simply because of your sin, because you sin. Here Paul shows us that you can be persecuted for doing what is right in the eyes of God. If you think about it, Paul was proclaiming the gospel and he was arrested, wasn't he? Paul was telling people how to go to heaven; you would think they would give him a trophy for that, you would think they would give him some kind of reward, pat him on the back, say "Way to go Paul, good job." They don't do that here. You read the opposite.

Instead, they put them in a jail cell. Instead, they chained him to a Roman guard after beating him up. In fact, just so you can see how common this is, you can see how many people experienced this type of treatment in the Bible, I want to do a little study here with you. If you keep your fingers in the book of Ephesians and turn over to Hebrews 11. I'll read this passage to you in a moment, but if you would turn to Hebrews 11. And as you're doing that, you know many people in the Bible experienced what Paul did. Many people in the Bible experienced this type of treatment for doing the right. For example, going way back to the Old Testament, going back to the book of Genesis, the first murder ever committed. The first time anybody ever killed anybody it was over this issue; it was over religious persecution. Cain killed his brother Abel because he offered a better sacrifice. That is religious persecution. Abel gave a sacrifice that was pleasing to the Lord. He gave a sacrifice that honored God, and Cain did not, so Cain murdered him. And we often talk about Cain in that story. We often make him the focus of our attention. But what about Abel? He didn't deserve that. He didn't do anything wrong, and he was murdered anyway.

Then you go a little farther into your Bible. And you see the same thing happening with Joseph. You see the same thing with Israel's favorite son, if you remember that story. I mean, Joseph is thrown into a well and he's taken off into slavery in Egypt. And while he's in Egypt, he is then put into prison for refusing to sleep with his master's wife. He was punished simply because he wouldn't commit adultery with her. In fact, she accused him of rape. That's how bad that was. She accused him of assaulting her when she assaulted him; it was the other way around, and he went to prison for it. And it just goes on from there. You see the same thing happening with David in the book of 1 Samuel. Saul tries to kill him for being the Lord's anointed, for being someone who found favor with God. You see it happening with Elijah in the book of 1 Kings, Daniel in the lion's den.



You go in the New Testament, you see with the apostles; and if you look in the book of Hebrews, you see a summary of all this. If you look in Hebrews 11, that's why I asked you to turn there, it gives you a summary of the persecutions in the Bible. In verse 32 it says,

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us

If you notice, as you read all of that there's a lot of persecution going on in that chapter, isn't there? There's a lot of pain and suffering. And the author just listed one after another, he mentions one person after another who was attacked for doing the right thing. That's a hall of faith chapter. These are your heroes, and "Look at how they treated your heroes," the author says, "Look at what they did to them." In fact, there's so many of them, the author says, "I can't even list them all," says, "Time will fail me if I list them." But he does it to drive the point home this could happen to anybody. That's the point here, to drive the idea home to our hearts that you can be persecuted for following God.

You know, when I was a kid, and when you were a kid, we saw a lot of these people in Hebrews 11 in Sunday school. They were the ones that were held out to us as people to imitate. Look at what happened to them. This is a common theme in the Bible. It happens over and over and over again. There's never a moment of peace in Scripture. There's never a time when someone's not in trouble because there's a battle going on. There's a war between good and evil, light and darkness, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. And you're in the middle of it. That's what you're reading about in the book of Ephesians. You're right in the center of the battlefield which means this is what you can expect if you're a Christian, this is what you signed up for. You signed up for war. It's been said that when you're a Christian, you're walking on a battlefield, not a playground.

It leads to another point here and I just want to stop at this one for a moment and maybe make it personal for us. But a third principle and maybe the most convicting one so far, is that the godlier

you are, the more you will suffer. The third principle we learn from the Apostle Paul's imprisonment, is that the godlier you are, the more you will suffer, the more you will be persecuted and go to prison. I mention this because this is what you see in the Bible as well. This is what you see in Scripture. The closer you get to Jesus, the more difficult it is for you. The closer you get to the sun, the more you feel its heat. And the closer you get to God, the more you feel the world's hatred of Him, reflected on you.

And this is important to mention because I don't think a lot of Christians get this today. And this is why we're spending a whole sermon on this one verse, on this one idea. But I don't know that a lot of believers get this because when persecution comes, we're so shocked by it. When the war comes, we're blown away. We say, "Why me Lord, why is this happening to me? I don't deserve this. I didn't do anything wrong." Well, friends, you didn't do anything wrong. This is not happening to you because you did something wrong. It's happening to you because you did something right. The war comes to us because we're doing something good. We're preaching the gospel. We're confronting sin. We're preaching the good news, the Bible. And they want to know, "Why did I lose my job? Or my friends? Why am I in trouble with my family? Why does everyone at school look at me funny when I don't laugh at their dirty jokes?" Well, that's because you're doing the right thing and they don't like it. Because you're pleasing God and it makes them feel guilty, and they're attacking you in response. In other words, in their eyes, you're on the wrong side of the war. In their eyes, you're on the wrong side of the battlefield, and they want to make you pay for it.

I remember when I first got saved, a friend of mine in high school told me and said, "You've got to calm down with this whole Christianity thing. You got to take it easy because you're making us look bad. We go to church too, you know, we're Christians too. But when you don't party with us, when you don't drink with us, it makes us look bad. You got to calm down, knock it off." You can expect that sort of thing from the world. That's what you're signing up for.

Listen friends, we don't believe in a health and wealth theology where you follow God and you get wealthy and you get rich. We don't believe in a prosperity gospel where you believe in Jesus and become prosperous and successful and everybody likes you. We don't believe in your best life now. We believe in your best life later, in the next life. In this life we believe in a gospel of suffering. In this life we believe in a theology of the cross.

I've talk to Christians, and we could talk about persecution from so many different angles, but I've talked to Christians who have gotten in trouble simply for praying before a meal at work. Bow their head, close their eyes, ask the Lord to bless this food quietly to themselves and they get in trouble for it. I've heard of other believers who have gotten shouted at in a coffee shop for inviting people to church. In fact, if I understand some of the laws here in Canada, if I'm interpreting them correctly, speaking out against some sins like homosexuality and the

transgender movement could be considered a hate crime. Friends, that's what you signed up for. You signed up for this type of behavior. A response or gut reaction from a lost world. Satan doesn't like it when you when you call sin, sin. Satan doesn't like it when you tell the truth and he's gonna do anything he can to make you stop.

A Christian from the Middle East was once talking to a Christian from North America. And they were trying to get to know each other and understand their differences. And the Christian from the Middle East said, "I think the difference between you and me is this. It's that to you, persecution feels like a punishment; to you, persecution, and when you're persecuted, you feel like you did something wrong. But to me persecution is a way of life. To me, it's unavoidable." Friends, we need to think that way. We need to have that perspective. This is an unavoidable thing in the Christian life. This is should be our way of life because the closer you get to God, the more the world is going to persecute you. You can look at the saints in church history. All of them suffered persecution.

Which leads to another point to consider this morning. I just want to tell you the story. I think about the time George Whitfield talked about the time that his enemies would throw dead cats at him. That's the kind of treatment we can get as believers. It leads to another point to consider here. Another principle we see from Paul's imprisonment that I mentioned earlier. I want to go back to the first one, anyone can go to prison; that's how this begins. Second, you can go for doing the right thing. Surprising isn't it? That's shocking. We're supposed to go to prison for doing the wrong thing. You're supposed to be mistreated for doing something that's evil. Not in this world. In this world things are turned upside down and you can be mistreated for doing the right thing. Third, the godlier you are, the more you will experience all of this. So another point to consider, a fourth principle, and that is that your persecution is not meaningless if it's done for Christ.

A fourth principle we see from Paul's imprisonment, is that persecution is not meaningless if it's done for Christ. This is important because this is the hardest part of suffering, and this is the hardest part of persecution. It can feel so meaningless sometimes. It can feel so pointless as if you're just in the wrong place at the wrong time. But look at what Paul says in 3:1. Look at how he interprets this; Paul writes, and he says,

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.

Now if you understand what Paul is saying there, he calls himself a prisoner of Christ, of Christ. That means he's doing this for Him. He's not a prisoner of Rome where he's locked up, or who is overseeing his capture. He's not a prisoner of Caesar, or of the Jews who are responsible for all this mess. Paul is a prisoner of Christ. He's doing it for Him. This is done for His namesake. Paul had a higher calling here. He had a higher purpose. He served a higher authority and you do as

well. I mean, Paul never lost sight of what he was in prison for. He never lost sight of what he was persecuted for.

And you'll know the hardest part of suffering is we forget this; the hardest part of persecution is losing your purpose. Paul never lost that. And I might add, Paul said things like this over and over again in his letters. He referred to this over and over again of why he did what he did.

For example, in Philippians 3:7-8 Paul says,

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss, and count them but rubbish so that I might gain Christ.

The word "rubbish" there is an interesting word. It's actually the word excrement. The King James Version translates it as dung. But that's the idea here. Paul says all things that I lost were like dung to me. He's not being vulgar or crude. He's just saying, "They're worthless because of my love for Him. They're nothing out of affection for Him." If you think about it, Paul gave up a lot of things. He gave up his freedom. He gave up his safety. He gave up his life eventually; it was all dung to him. It was meaningless compared to Christ. 2 Corinthians 12:10 he also says,

Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak then I am strong,

That's the key to all Paul saying here. That's the main point. Paul is doing this for Christ's sake. Friends let me ask you, are you suffering this morning for Christ's sake? When your neighbors mistreat you, when your friends at schools snub you, when your co-workers at work say mean things about you, when they accuse you of hate speech, do you go back and say, "I'm doing this for Christ's sake." That's the only thing that'll get you through that. That's the only thing that will help you persevere.

Leads to a fifth point here. I'm going through these a little quickly, but a fifth principle is that life is not over when you're persecuted. A fifth principle we learned from Paul's imprisonment is that life is not over when you're persecuted. It doesn't come to a grinding halt when you're in prison. It doesn't come to an end. If you do things for Christ's sake, there's an element of keeping at it that you see here. You never give up. A lot of us when we suffer, we say, 'My life is over. Woe is me,' and we call it quits. But Paul says that's not the right way to respond. That's not the right way to handle things. You need to remember your life is not over.

Now this is really an issue in prison. I was looking this up this week, and an interesting statistic you learned about prisoners is the high rate of depression you see there. And they say that in prison, the risk of suicide is seven times greater than the norm. You're seven times more likely to kill yourself if you go to prison than you are outside of it. It's such a gloomy place. It's such a miserable place. They have nothing to live for. And yet here, you see Paul ramping up his ministry in prison. Paul doesn't give up, he ramps up, speeds up. In fact, if you count all the letters of Paul, Paul wrote 13 letters in all in the New Testament; seven of them are written from a prison. More than half of his letters were written from jail to remind you that the ministry does not end when you're persecuted. Some even think God may have even put Paul in prison so he could write these books. God might have even put him in jail just so he would do this because a man like Paul wouldn't sit still for long. A man like him, he's very hyperactive, a very quick guy always on the move; so God sat him down in a jail and cuffed him down, so he would write the New Testament. The books he wrote from prison include the book of Ephesians, the book of Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus to remind you to never give up. Paul did not give up when he was suffering, and you never know, but God may be putting some of you through a trial for this reason. He may be making some of you suffer to accomplish something greater in your life like this.

We studied the Book of Esther yesterday in the men's Bible study. And one thing you learn from Esther's life is who knows whether or not you've attained royalty for such a time as this. You remember that? Mordecai tells Esther, "Who knows but God may have put you through this trial. He may have had you marry a wicked king, an evil king, and an evil empire just so you could save his people." And you never know, God may be putting you through a trial for the same reason this morning. You just need to be faithful which gives us another lesson to learn here.

A sixth principle we learn from Paul's imprisonment, and that is that hope does not disappear in a prison cell. Hope does not disappear in a prison cell. And this is helpful because I've never been in prison before, I've never been a prisoner, but I've talked to some prisoners and they tell me prison is a very gloomy place. It's a very miserable place because you do the same thing every day. They say the boredom alone would kill you. The boredom alone makes you suicidal, very monotonous. Same brick wall every day.

But if you read the book of Ephesians all the way through, one thing you notice as Paul writes this, is that this is not a gloomy book. One thing you notice as you read this letter is that this is not a hopeless epistle. There's hope all throughout the pages. If you look in 1:3, this is how Paul starts off and he says,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

Now, let me read that to you again, and think of yourself sitting down beside Paul in prison. Think of yourself sitting down chained next to him with a Roman guard beside you. Smell the prison with him. Look around and see the cobwebs on the wall, and the mice running on the floor. And then listen to him say this again.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

Now, if you read that in a place like that, you would think he'd lost his mind. You would think he'd gone nuts. Blessing in jail? Blessing in prison? Then down in 2:4 he goes on and he says,

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us.

Now Paul's talking about mercy. Now he's talking about undeserved favor, in jail. And then if you look down in 3:8, he says this,

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ.

Now he's talking about riches. Now he's talking about treasure, unfathomable treasure, unsearchable treasure; from a jail cell.

All to show you that hope does not disappear in a trial. Hope does not disappear when you're in chains. You know, I don't know where you're at today, and I don't know what you're going through, but maybe some of you need to hear this. Maybe some of you need to pay attention to what Paul is saying here because you're suffering, and you think life is over for you. You're going through a trial and you're saying, "Woe is me? God hates me. God is out to get me." Life is over and you're calling it quits. The Coronavirus has got you down maybe not just physically but spiritually. The isolation is driving you crazy. And if that's the case, I want to remind you of what we read here. I want to remind you of the setting for this letter. Paul says there's still hope for you. Paul says there is still mercy, and blessing, and joy, and riches to be found, even in your suffering. That's the message of Ephesians. That's the message of this book because God has something better in store for you. God has something greater in the next life.

There's a saying going around today, it's very popular saying, but it needs to be corrected because it's wrong. And it says that, "He is so heavenly minded that he is of no earthly good." Have you ever heard that before? Ever heard that expression? You know, he's got his mind so fixed on eternity that he's no good in this world. That's wrong actually. The saying has got it all backwards. Paul would have disagreed with that because Paul would have said he is no earthly good until he is heavenly minded. He's no good in this world until his mind is focused on the



next one, because let's be honest, this world can be so depressing at times. This world can be so miserable and ugly and foul that the only thing you can look forward to is the next world. The only thing you can delight in is the place where you're going when you die, and that's what Paul does here. That's what this whole book is about.

Paul didn't get all of these blessings in this life; he got some of them, but not all of them. He didn't see all of God's mercy in this life. He didn't see all of these treasures; that came later. That came in the next life. And if you want to get through persecution, if you want to get through hard times, if you want to get through pain, that's what your mind has to go to. You have to think about the next life. You have to think about the world that is to come. Christians, we're a people that are always looking down the road. We're always looking forward. Paul says, "I forget what is behind me and I press on to what is ahead." That's the mindset of this book. That's another principle that we learn here.

It leads to one more lesson we see in the book of Ephesians, or one more lesson from Paul's imprisonment. And just to review these other ones, the first principle we learn is that anyone can go to prison. Doesn't matter who you are, doesn't matter where you come from. Some of us come from very nice places, some of us come from very bad places, none of that matters. If you follow Christ, you're going to suffer, you can expect that. Second, you can go to prison for doing the right thing. Another lesson we learned here in the book, very sobering lesson, but you can be persecuted for doing what pleases God. Also, we learned that the godlier you are, the more you will be persecuted. The more you grow in your walk with God, the more you're going to experience this, not the less. Not only that, but looking at it from another angle, your persecution is not meaningless if it's done for Christ. Looking at this positively, your suffering is not pointless if it's done for His namesake. Paul suffered a lot of things in here, but he got through it all remembering who he was doing it for. It's doing it for Christ. Another lesson we see here is that your life is not over when you're persecuted. We kind of went through that one quickly, but your life continues in the midst of a trial. Sixth, hope does not disappear because Paul found hope here. He found joy in the midst of these difficult times. And I'd like to say more about that. But we need to move on to a seventh and final principle we learned from Paul's imprisonment.

And it takes us back to some other things we've said, but we need to really talk about this. The seventh principle, final principle we learn from the imprisonment is this; salvation is for anyone because it's for prisoners, too. The final lesson we learn from Paul's imprisonment that takes us back to the beginning is that salvation is for anyone because it's for prisoners too. That's what's so shocking about this at the end of the day. That's what's so surprising about this letter, or this setting. Is that Paul wrote this from the worst place imaginable. I really can't think of anywhere worse than a prison cell. If you're to scratch your mind and think of anywhere on the planet, anywhere is better than this. We don't want to downplay that. Paul was not a murderer. He was

not a rapist, but he was locked up right alongside them to show us this important lesson that anyone can be saved. Anyone can go to heaven.

You know, as Paul is writing this, he doesn't turn to a cellmate and say, "You know, I wish you could have all of this, but you need to get out of jail first, and do some community service, and clean up your life. He doesn't say that. He doesn't turn to the Roman guard chained next to him and say, "I wish you could have this, but you got to get out and amend your wicked ways; you're a terrible person. Doesn't say that either. In fact, he even puts it in personal terms if you look down in 3:8. We're gonna say more about this next week. But he says

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ.

That's an interesting passage there because there Paul refers to himself as the very least of all the saints. In fact, that's the second personal reference in this chapter. First, he calls himself a prisoner, and then he calls himself the least of all the saints. So kind of putting those two things together, you know, we would look at Paul and say, "Paul, how could you be the least of all the saints, look at all the things you did for the church." But Paul's in prison and he says, "The way I look right now, I'm the least." That phrase, "least of all the saints" could translate less than the least, or the lowest one imaginable; it was a term of condescension. It was a term of deep humility because that was how Paul thought of himself. He was at the bottom of the food chain, not the top. He was at the bottom of the social ladder, not the height of it. He was the scum of the earth, which is what made prison bearable for him. It made prison endurable because he didn't think he was too good for this.

I think that's what makes persecution so hard for us at the end of the day. I think that's what makes it so difficult for many of us, it's because we think we're too good for it. We think we're better than the ill treatment; so when people say those things to us, or they shun us in that way, or whatever it is that they do, we say, "We're better than that." Paul didn't believe that way. Paul had the opposite mindset, and because of that he could endure this trial. And not only that, he could hold out hope that anyone can be saved, even those in prison. Paul did not think this message was too good for them. He did not think that this gospel was too good for them. It was for them as well.

I remember hearing a pastor say one time that the only difference between you and the worst criminal on death row is that he did everything you thought about. The only difference is that he acted out your fantasies. You did it in your head, but he did it in real life; so you're no better than him.

It leads me to ask friends. Do you believe that today? Do you get that message? Do you believe there's no difference between you and the worst criminal on death row? Do you think that God sees you the same because you sin in your mind, just like he does in real life? I ask you that because if you don't, you are going to have a hard time suffering. I asked you that because if you don't, you're gonna have a hard time applying all the things we're talking about this morning. This morning is a lesson in humility. This morning is a lesson in condescension. And you need to have that perspective so that when persecution comes, you don't say, "I'm better than this" because you're not.

You know, thinking about all these things. We talked about tying this whole sermon together. Are you ready for this to happen to you? Are you ready for persecution and trials and suffering and hard times? Do you have that mindset? I ask you that because it will happen to you; that's a sure thing. I ask you that because it is unavoidable. Remember Paul said all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. That means all of us, every one of us, young and old, rich and poor; so, are you ready for that? Are you preparing for that? To say it another way, are you ready to fight? Are you ready to stand up for the truth no matter what because that's what you signed up for? You are serving in war; you're not serving in peacetime. You're serving on the battlefield, not the playground.

You know, in World War Two, the last Japanese soldier to surrender was a man named Hiroo Onoda. The interesting thing about him is that he surrendered 29 years after the war was over. He surrendered in 1974, which means he fought in the jungles of the Philippines by himself from 1945 until 1974 until his former commanding officer showed up and told him to stop. And when he was asked why he did that, when he was asked why he kept fighting? Onada said he did it because he was following orders. He was told to carry on the mission no matter what. Friends, let me ask you this, will you do the same thing for Christ? That man did that for his country, that man did that for Japan, will you do it for Jesus? Will you do that for the Lord? We need to carry on His mission. We need to keep fighting for the Lord no matter what. That's what Paul did here. That's the lesson we get from this great apostle. And may we pray now and ask the Lord's blessing to go out and do that in our lives?

Would you go to the Lord with me in a word of prayer?

Father, we come to you this morning after looking at a very sobering passage; and a very difficult one in many ways because we do feel really separated from what Paul is talking about here. We do live comfortable lives. We have air-conditioned homes, we have heating, we have a refrigerator full of food. We have all the freedoms and comforts we could desire. And yet we're reading a letter from a place like this, telling us this is what we can expect. Lord, would you help us to be all the things we talked about this morning? To be humble, to be contrite, to be ready for the things that the world is going to bring at us and throw at us? Lord, I pray for my brothers and

sisters in Christ because I do fear for them, I fear for myself as well that many of us are not ready.

Lord, would you light a fire under us this morning? Would you light a passion under us to be ready to stand for truth in the midst of hard times? The world is not getting better, it never does. It is getting worse. It always does that. Which means that the persecution continually ramps up and so we need to be prepared. Lord, help us to put on the mantle of suffering. Help us to take up our cross and follow Your Son in this. Thank you that He suffered that we may be saved. Thank you that Paul suffered that we may have the Bible. So did all the men who wrote this book. May we go out in their spirit for Your glory and we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

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