

Paul's Prison letters

Pity party or prayer?

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How do we act when bad things happen to us?

We always have a choice

We can retaliate

We can throw a pity party

We can blame others

Or we can trust God no matter what and try to respond in a way He wants us to

No one or no circumstance ever forces us to act in a way God doesn't want us to

In our podcast today we'll look at a how the Apostle Paul responded in a very difficult situation

Paul's situation

He had spent 10 years since he had become a Christian constantly traveling, sharing Jesus, and starting churches

He worked with a large and often changing team of fellow evangelists, pastors, teachers as we see in how he mentions them in his books

It was during these travels that the churches he writes to in what we call "the Prison Epistles (letters)" were written

He planned to go to Rome, went to Jerusalem first that resulted in 2 years of imprisonment on his way to Rome

Once there under house arrest chained to a Roman guard for 2 more years (though he had no idea how long while there)—supported by friends and churches

What was his response?

Overall and always—we can see he prayed

We are going to look at his prayers

Amazing content

You'd never think that they were written by someone in prison

Most amazing is he almost never mentions his prison conditions or his legal situation or the things he suffered

He keeps his eye on his mission and his people

We will briefly go over the books and then his prayers in them

Pattern of much of his writing

First orthodoxy.

Then orthopraxy!

Orthodoxy is right thinking.

Orthopraxy is right conduct.

In Romans and in the Prison letters this pattern is most clear

We need to BELIEVE certain things, but based on that

We need to LIVE a certain way

The book of Ephesians

He founded the church there

Spent 2 years there

Paul is not focused on any particular error—

Wants to "expand their vision of life"

He's looking at the "heavenly realms"

(1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12)

There is the saying, "so heavenly minded, no earthly good"

In reality unless we are heavenly minded, we are no earthly good

That is the true reality, both now in that Christ is in control and for our future

Paul truly lived knowing that the most terrible things that can happen here, or for however long are hard, once we get to heaven will be "like a night spent in a bad hotel"

Where our focus needs to be

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. . . ." - (Ephesians 1:3)

His first prayer, a prayer of praise

Paul isn't looking at his chains—he is looking up and ahead!

Because of that he could pray--

Eph. 1:15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit[a] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Eph. 1:15-23

Focus on:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the ***Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.*** I pray that the ***eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us***

who believe.

We may know Jesus as Savior—but there is so much more to him.

The better we know him, the more we can trust him

Also, if we know better the HOPE to which he has

called us....the riches of his glorious inheritance—I think it would make a huge difference in how we live

Question I ask myself, do I really want this?

Or am I afraid it will make me weird?

Colossians

The theme of Colossians is the complete adequacy of Christ, as contrasted with the emptiness of mere human philosophy.

The book is one of the clearest statements that Jesus was God in human form

Col. 1: 15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Much of the book deals with false beliefs that made Jesus less than what He is— and we can't ever allow that in our lives.

Paul's prayer for them

Col. 1:9-11 *That, in fact, is why, from the day we heard about it, we do not cease to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with an ever-growing knowledge of his will, in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may conduct yourselves worthily of the Lord, and in such a way as to be altogether pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the fuller knowledge of God. May you continue to be strengthened with all strength according to his glorious power, so that you may possess all fortitude and patience with joy.*

C. F. D. Moule has said, that prayer makes two great requests. **It asks for the discernment of God's will and then for the power to perform that will.**

Wm. Barclays comments:

Prayer begins by asking that we may be filled with an ever-growing knowledge of the will of God. . . . We are trying not so much to make God listen to us as to make ourselves listen to him; we are trying not to persuade God to do what we want, but to find out what he wants us to do.

It so often happens that in prayer we are really saying, "Thy will be changed," when we ought to be saying, "Thy will be done." The first object of prayer is not so much to speak to God as to listen to him.

This knowledge of God must be translated into our human situation. (Wm. Barclay)

We pray for spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Spiritual wisdom is sophia (**Greek #4678**), which we could describe as knowledge of first principles.

Understanding is sunesis (**Greek #4907**), which is what the Greeks sometimes described as critical knowledge, meaning the ability to apply first principles to any given situation which may arise in life.

So when Paul prays that his friends may have wisdom and understanding, he is praying that they may understand the great truths of Christianity and may be able to apply them to the tasks and decisions which meet them in everyday living. A man may quite easily be a master of theology and a failure in living; able to write and talk about the eternal truths and yet helpless to apply them to the things which meet him every day. The Christian must know what Christianity means, not in a vacuum but in the business of living.

This knowledge of God's will, and this wisdom and understanding, must issue in right conduct. Paul prays that his friends may conduct themselves in such a way as to please God. There is nothing in this world so practical as prayer. It is not escape from reality. Prayer and action go hand in hand. We pray not in order to escape life but in order to be better able to meet it.

To do this we need power (Wm. Barclay continues)

Therefore, Paul prays that his friends may be strengthened with the power of God.

The great problem in life is not to know what to do but to do it. **For the most part, we are well aware in any given situation what we ought to do; our problem is to put that knowledge into action.**

What we need is power; and that we receive in prayer. If God merely told us what his will was, that might well be a frustrating situation; but he not only tells us his will, he also enables us to perform it.

Knowledge we ask not, knowledge thou hast lent,

But Lord—the will, there lies our deepest need.

Grant us to build above the high intent--

The deed—the deed.

Through prayer we reach the greatest gift in all the world—knowledge plus power.

Encouraging the Colossians to pray

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. (Colossians 4:2-4) Be "watchful and thankful"—don't let life just happen.....

His prayer request—

Not for ease or freedom, but for success in the ministry God has called him to

We've got to remember what is important when we pray

Book of Philemon

Paul wrote this short letter (see vv. 1, 9, 19) probably at the same time as Colossians and sent it to Colossae with the same travelers, Onesimus and Tychicus.

Paul wrote this letter to Philemon, a believer in Colossae who, along with others, was a slave owner. One of his slaves, Onesimus, had apparently stolen from him (cf. v. 18) and then run away, which under Roman law was punishable by death. But Onesimus met Paul and through his ministry became a Christian (see v. 10). Now he was willing to return to his master, and Paul writes this personal appeal to ask that he be accepted as a Christian brother (see v. 16).

His prayer for Philemon

"I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints." - (Philemon 5-7)

Interesting that in sharing our faith, we see what we really have in Christ

Happens for many reasons—

We have strength to do what we couldn't do before
We see changed lives

Philippians (NIV notes)

The church at Philippi had a special significance for Paul—it was the first church he founded in Europe (see Acts 16:6-40).

The first convert was Lydia, a seller of purple cloth, and women continued to have a prominent role in the Philippian church (e.g., Phil. 4:2).

His brief incarceration in Philippi (Acts 16:23-40) would make Paul's later imprisonment mentioned in this letter all the more poignant for the Philippians, especially for the converted Philippian jailer.

Paul visited Philippi a few times after his initial departure, and the church maintained active support for his ministry (Phil. 4:15-16).

Reasons for writing the book

Paul's primary purpose in writing this letter was to thank the Philippians for the gift they had sent him upon learning of his detention at Rome (1:5; 4:10-19).

In the Roman prisons you were dependent in large measure on the gifts of friends and family (as people are today)

Paul wrote to thank the Philippians for the gift they had sent him and to encourage them to stand firm and walk worthy in the face of persecution and to rejoice—regardless of circumstances.

It contains one of the most profound Christological passages in the NT (2:5-11). "Kenosis passage"

Phil. 2:5-11

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature^[a] God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Definition of Kenosis:

the relinquishment of divine attributes by Jesus Christ in becoming human. ... Late Greek kenōsis, from Greek, action of emptying, from *kenoun* to purge, empty, from *kenos* empty.

Yet even here Paul's purpose is not to teach theology alone, but to call the church to unity on the basis of the humility and servanthood of Jesus Christ. (NIV study bible notes)

His prayers for this special group of people

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. Phil 1:9-11

Similar to the previous themes of keeping in mind what is coming

And so for love based on "knowledge and depth of insight"

Our love for God and actions towards others should go beyond emotional responses

But we aren't required to do all this alone

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." –

Will perfect (**epiteleo** from **epi** = intensify meaning of following verb + **teleo** = make an end and bring something to its destined goal) conveys the sense that God will carry the work out to the finish. God will not commence this and then abandon us. He will finish the **work** He has begun in us and will bring it to its intended goal, when we shall be like Him (1 Jn 3:2-note). from Precept Austin)

Spurgeon said "The life of a Christian is a series of miracles."

Spurgeon was also once asked by another minister "whether he believed in the final perseverance of the saints. "Well," said he, "I do not know much about that, but I firmly believe in the final perseverance of God, that where he has begun a good work he will

carry it on until it is complete."

Then he tells them how to pray

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. - (Phil. 4:6-7)

He then goes on to share his example of not being anxious: Phil. 4:¹⁰ *I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

¹⁴ *Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. ¹⁵ Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

Phil 4:13

Must comment on one of the most misused verses
"I can do all things....
Somehow twisted into I can do whatever I want to do.
Paul couldn't—chained to a Roman guard...
See context
Meaning—he can handle every circumstance God gives him
Abased, abounding, whatever***circumstances never a deterrent for doing God's wills

Other translations of Phil. 4:13

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. KJV
For all things I have strength, in Christ's strengthening me; Youngs
In general and in particular I have learned the secret of facing either poverty or plenty. I am ready for anything through the strength of the one who lives within me. Phillips Trans
Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am. Message Trans.
We can get through anything because of the Lord's help

A final prayer

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. - (Philippians 4:23)

A fitting summary to all the letters and prayers
We did not do or earn anything for our salvation
A gift of pure grace with a glorious future
Great prayer for all, repeated in various ways that we understand that that truly means
And that we live in a way that reflects that reality

- **That's all for now,**
- Please check out the notes from this lesson, they are in Downloadable PDF format and other materials at www.bible805.com
 - Please Subscribe to the podcasts so you don't miss any in this series of Kings and Prophets and let your friends know about it so they too can be encouraged as they learn more about God
- Until next time, I'm Yvon Prehn, your fellow pilgrim, writer and teacher for Jesus.
- I'd like to close with this benediction:
- May you know the invitation of God, to move
-from confusion to clarity
-from wandering to rest
-from loneliness to knowing you are loved
-from turmoil to peace
From wherever you are on your spiritual journey to a growing knowledge of God's Word and in your personal relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit . Amen