

## INTRODUCTION

Today I'm going to talk about how bad and evil and misfortune can result in good. The title to today's message is an equation that I believe with all my heart. If you are a Christian and know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, this equation applies to your life—even though bad things may happen to you, it can all equal good in God's economy. If you're not a Christian, this equation is not for you. If you're not a Christian, that equation reads: Bad + Evil + Misfortune = Bad + Evil + Misfortune. But when you insert Jesus Christ as the center of your life, he changes everything.

Some of you Christians are going through some tough times right now and you are wondering how on earth you can get good out of these bad things. We'll find out today in Philippians 1:12-26.

“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 goodwill. 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. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”

If you'll look at the outline, I've placed a blank box at the top of the page. I want you to write what is the most important thing, person, or peak value, or thing that gets you out of bed every morning. When people look at your life, what do they see? If you had to condense it down to the one most important thing you could accomplish in your life, what would it be? What's in that box? What's number one? All of us have a box and all of us have something in that box. It may be we don't consciously think about it. But we all have something of absolute importance.

For some celebrities, we know what it is. If you've been watching gymnastics in the Olympics, you know the athletes have had to dedicate their lives to their sport. When you think of Shannon Miller, you would write "gymnastics" in the box. When you think of Jackie Joyner-Kersey, you'd write "heptathlon" in the box. When you think about Michael Jordan, you'd write "basketball" in the box. What's in *your* box?

In the Apostle Paul's box, was this word: Christ. Magnifying Christ and advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ was his priority. Later he would say, "For to me, to live is Christ..." (Philippians 1:21) How would you complete that phrase? Don't just write something religious just because you're in church. What is that thing that you think about or talk about the most? Where do you

invest most of your money and time? Whatever is in your box will determine how your entire life is directed. Because the apostle Paul had Christ in his box, Bad + Evil + Misfortune could equal good. Today we're going to find out how it happens. There are three principals we can learn from Paul's life. Put yourself in Paul's sandals as we learn these lessons for ourselves.

## 1. HOW TO FACE UNPLEASANT CIRCUMSTANCES

"Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel." Paul was facing some unpleasant circumstances but he didn't use it as an opportunity to feel sorry for himself.

What are some of the things that happened to Paul in the four years leading up to this point? After he returned from one of his missionary journeys, he went to Jerusalem where he was mobbed in the temple, because they said he had brought a Gentile onto Temple Mount. The Roman soldiers had to come and rescue him when he was mobbed. There was such intense hatred against Paul, there were 60 Jewish men who took a vow before God that they would not eat or drink until Paul was dead. He was moved to Caesarea, where for two years he sat in a Roman prison, waiting to have his case brought before the court. He gave his testimony before Festus and Felix and finally he said, "I appeal to Caesar," which was the right of every Roman citizen. He boarded a vessel to Rome. On the way there, he was shipwrecked and washed up on the island of Malta. He finally made it to Rome, where again he was imprisoned and chained to a Roman soldier. Bible scholars tell us he had been in prison two years when he wrote this letter. So for the past four years, Paul experienced one setback after another. Instead of preaching the gospel and starting churches like he wanted to do, he was sitting in jail. But Paul said, "all these bad things have been for the good."

The thing I love about the apostle Paul is he was the kind of guy who could take something negative and turn it into something positive. He was an optimist. "Because of my chains, all the palace guard, the praetorian, is hearing about Jesus Christ." Romans soldiers were chained to him around the clock. We don't know how long their shifts were, but several times a day, a soldier was chained to him and Paul could have looked at that as a negative, but he made it a positive.

He wrote back to the church at Philippi, "Hey this great! I love it! They're even chaining people to me right now and I've got a captive audience!" Rather than moaning about his situation to the guard chained to him, he probably said something like this: "Hi, my name's Paul. What's your name? Marcus? Hi Marcus. I want to tell you about my life. I used to be very religious but I was not a Christian. But one day on the way to Damascus, I met Jesus Christ and my life has been totally different ever since. Let me tell you about it..." Six hours later, that guard was unchained; another man took his place. "Hi, my name's Paul. What's your name? Phillip? Hi Phillip. Let me tell you about my life..."

Around the clock, what do you think these Roman soldiers saw and heard in the life of Paul? Someone who was bemoaning the fact he was in prison? No. They heard him preaching and singing praises like he and Silas had done. They heard him pray, they heard him dictate letters like the one we're studying today. Paul says, "All of this evil and misfortune has resulted in good, because all these guards are hearing the gospel." And these weren't just any guards. The

word used for praetorian referred to a special group of elite soldiers. There were only 10,000 of them in all the Roman Empire. They received double pay and special privileges. They were the cream of the crop. These soldiers went all over the Roman Empire on assignment. I truly believe that when we get to heaven and meeting all the people up there who know Jesus Christ, I won't be a bit surprised if we meet some Roman soldiers who'll say, "You know how I became a Christian? I was chained to Paul in prison and he told me about Christ." Paul could take a bad situation and turn it into something good by the power of God. Here's the key for this principle that we can apply to our lives:

**Key: Concentrate on the good God can accomplish through your bad situation to advance the gospel**

Some of you here today are in prison, not literally, but you're in prison to a health problem, relationship or financial problem. Some of you may be the primary caregiver to someone who is so ill that it demands so much of you time and attention that it's like being in prison. But God can turn your bad into good if you'll concentrate on the good things He can do through your bad situation.

Most of you have heard of Joni Eareckson-Tada, who was a vibrant, active athletic teen. She dove into some water and broke her neck and was paralyzed from the neck down, making her a quadriplegic. For many months she was bitter and angry. Then she came to the point where she prayed for God to heal her and her friends took her to many faith healers and she had hands laid on her, but she was never healed. And she became angry at God. One day, in the depths of depression, Joni says, "God spoke to my heart when I got still enough to listen. And this is what I came to understand: I might be able to give God more glory by worshipping him and serving him from this wheelchair than by receiving a healing." She said that was the turning point of her life. "Now I look at this wheelchair as an opportunity to give God more glory." Today, Joni has been a source of encouragement and blessing to millions of Christians.

What happened to Joni was bad, a terrible misfortune. But she allowed God to turn it into good. And God will do that with you if you'll let him.

I think Paul can relate to this poem by an anonymous author:

I asked for strength that I might achieve;  
And I was made weak that I might learn to obey.

I asked for health that I might do great things;  
And I was given infirmity that I might do greater things.

I asked for riches that I might be happy;  
And I was given poverty that I might be wise.

I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;  
And I was given weakness that I might feel my need for God.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;  
And I was given life that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing that I asked for;  
But everything that I hoped for.

Almost despite myself;  
My unspoken prayers were answered.

And I am among all men most blessed.

Have you had bad things happen that you wish hadn't happened? You can't do anything about those, but you *can* do something about how you react to those situations. If we take Paul's example, we can let God change our bad circumstances into experiences that will give him glory. Paul says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." That's the first principle we learn, how to face unpleasant circumstances. But Paul had another problem we can learn from.

## 2. HOW TO FORGIVE UNKIND CHRISTIANS

Not only did Paul have a prison problem, he had a people problem. You've heard the saying, "You don't have to be a cannibal to be fed up with people." There was a group of Christians who were giving Paul fits. He talks about two different groups. "It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 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." (Philippians 1:15-18)

Most scholars tell us these troublemakers were called Judaisers. They wanted to tell people that before you could become a Christian, you must first enter Judaism or become a good Jew, be circumcised, obey Old Testament law. Paul didn't preach that. He taught just the opposite: Anybody, anywhere, anytime—place your faith in Jesus Christ. Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. The Judaisers used Paul's imprisonment to try to get others to see their way. They were trying to add on to the gospel. We've got to be careful never to add on to the gospel ourselves, other than what the Bible says.

The Judaisers were preaching Jesus Christ, but trying to stir up opposition against Paul. What was Paul's reaction? He didn't get angry. His answer is a great example to every one of us. 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."

**Key: We must concentrate on the good God can accomplish through people with impure motives**

There are always going to be some who are sincere, but whose impure motives do a lot of harm. These people are going to be more of the problem than the solution to the problem. Yet Paul decided to rejoice and refused to respond to his attackers the way they treated him.

These past few years have seen the dramatic and necessary fall of many so-called televangelists, because of moral failures. I think they shouldn't be preaching because of those moral problems. But I am convinced that even though they might not have been pure morally, ethically or otherwise, God still used some of them. I believe when we get to heaven and start asking others, "How did you come to know the Lord?" Some may say, "I used to listen to a preacher on television, even though he ended up going to jail; I accepted Christ as a result of that." One of my seminary professors used to say, "God can strike a mighty lick with a crooked stick."

For many years, George W. Truett was the wonderful, faithful pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas. Across the county line in Tarrant County, was J. Frank Norris, Pastor of First Baptist Church, Ft. Worth, Texas. J. Frank Norris hated George W. Truett. Norris was vitriolic, mean and malicious in his attacks upon Truett. He wrote articles to newspaper editors talking about how George Truett was immoral, mean, devious and many times even called him a liar. Norris even called Truett on Sunday mornings before he would preach and verbally attack him, trying to get Truett's heart out of being prepared to preach. But through all of those attacks, George Truett never attacked J. Frank Norris.

Once, an editor from the Dallas paper asked Truett what he thought about Norris. It was his opportunity to respond to all the lies Norris was spreading, but he didn't do it. Instead, he said, "The ministry of J. Frank Norris has helped multitudes of people." He didn't talk about the bad person; he talked about what Norris had accomplished. Isn't that Christlike? Isn't that what the Apostle Paul did. He was attacked, but he didn't fight back. Truett refused to go down to Norris' level. He was merely following Jesus' words, "Pay back evil with good." That's what we should do when we experience that kind of problem too. Many times others might try to do things to hurt you, but God can turn it into something good.

Joseph's brothers hated him. They sold him into slavery thinking they would never see him again. Instead, Joseph's journey took him to Egypt, where God elevated him to a position of leadership and many years later, he had an opportunity to help his family. Genesis 50:20 is one of the greatest verses in the Bible. It's what I call the Romans 8:28 of the Old Testament. After all he had been through, Joseph said to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." Isn't that a great promise? Bad + Evil + Misfortune = Good if you do it God's way.

### **3. HOW TO FIND UNCOMMON COURAGE**

"I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." You know what was in Paul's box? His top priority was to magnify Jesus Christ, even though he was in prison. God will enable you to turn negatives into positives.

A shoe salesman was sent to Africa to sell shoes. After he'd been there two weeks without selling a single pair of shoes, he was so discouraged he sent a telegram back to the home office that read: Bring me home. The people over here don't even wear shoes. They sent a second salesman over. A week later he sent a telegram: Send me all the shoes you've got. I've never seen so many prospects. The difference between those two men was their outlook.

### **Concentrate on the good that God can accomplish through you to magnify Christ**

Paul said, "Sure I'm in prison. Sure I'm in chains. Sure there are people out there who are trying to stir up opposition against me—but I'm going to rejoice and let God turn my negatives into positives. I still believe God wants to do something in me." Then he gets serious. "Whether I live or whether I die, I just want Jesus to be magnified in my life. If it takes dying and if God can get more glory if I die in this prison, I'm all for it!"

When you're in a difficult situation, you should be more concerned about what God's trying to do through you than complaining about what God's doing *to* you. Concentrate on the good that God can accomplish through you to magnify Christ. When you're going through a tough time, say, "Lord, what are you trying to do through me?" If your desire and if what you've written down in your box is to magnify Christ, he'll do that.

I believe with all my heart that God best does that when we go through difficulties. That's when God magnifies Jesus. That's what a telescope does. It takes something big, but far off, and brings it nearer. For many people in this world, Jesus Christ seems to be far off. But when you go through adversity and rejoice, you become a lens to bring Jesus closer to those who don't know him.

A microscope takes tiny things and makes them bigger. To a lot of people out there, Jesus Christ is so small and insignificant, some historical character. But when you rejoice in adversity, you become a lens in a microscope to magnify Christ. He becomes bigger to them—and that doesn't happen when you're going through the good times. It happens when you're going through the tough times.

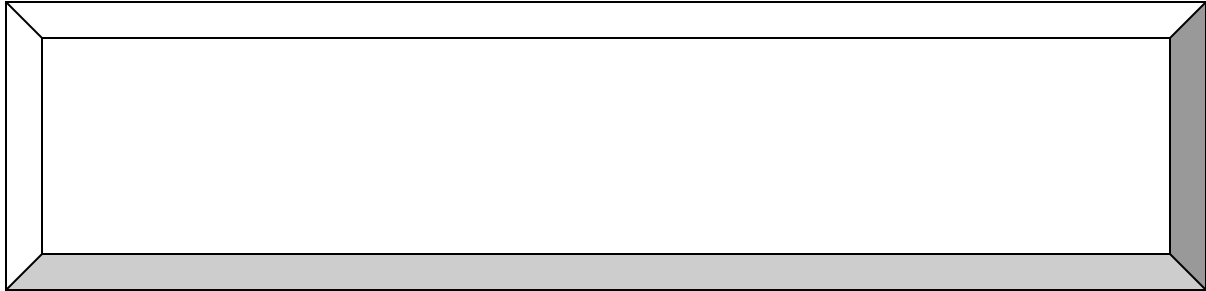
### **CONCLUSION**

Dr. R.G. Lee once asked his housekeeper, "What's your favorite verse?" She said, "My favorite verse is 'and it came to pass.'" Dr. Lee kept waiting for her to finish it and she said, "That's it. 'And it came to pass.' Trouble does come, but it comes to always pass." What you do with that trouble determines whether or not Jesus is going to be magnified. Can people see Jesus in you when you're struggling? When you've learned you've got a malignancy? When you have a relationship problem? When you're out of money? Remember Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? It was not until they were in the fiery that Nebuchadnezzar looked and saw Jesus. "I see a fourth man, it's like the Son of God." It is not until you go through adversity and walk through the fire that people are enabled to see Jesus.

Here we are 2,000 years after Paul wrote this, and we know Paul is a great father of our faith, but if you'd been alive then, Paul would have been the insignificant guy wasting away in a prison

and somebody like Nero would have been the VIP, living in the lap of luxury, with all the power and the fame. And many would have said it would be Nero that would be remembered in history, not that old man in that prison. But let me remind you, almost 2,000 years later, we name our dogs Nero and we name our sons Paul.

## OUTLINE



### THREE LIFE-CHANGING LESSONS:

#### 1. HOW TO FACE UNPLEASANT CIRCUMSTANCES (vs. 12-14)



Key:  
Concentrate on the *GOOD* God can accomplish through your bad situation to advance the gospel!

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." *Romans 8:28*

#### 2. HOW TO FORGIVE UNKIND CHRISTIANS (vs. 15-18)



Key:  
Concentrate on the *GOOD* God can accomplish through people with impure motives

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." *Genesis 50:20*

#### 3. HOW TO FIND UNCOMMON COURAGE (vs. 19-20)



Key:  
Concentrate on the *GOOD* God can accomplish through you to magnify Christ



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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes