

are handicapped on all sides, but we are never frustrated; we are puzzled, but never in despair. We are persecuted but we never have to stand it alone: we may be knocked down but we are never knocked out!" (Phillips) In short, God is bigger than any problem we will ever face.

In verse 21 Paul says, *"I eagerly expect and hope that ... now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."* From Paul's perspective he could go on living and serving God, or he could die and go to be with God. Either way he won! Paul is saying that, as believers, we have the same power because nothing can really harm us. Thanks to the power of God. Even death only brings us to eternity in God's presence. Since Jesus has defeated death for us, we are literally untouchable. Nothing can really hurt us. Thanks to the gift of eternal life that Jesus gives.

Everything else in life comes up short. There is nothing else to help us and protect us when tough times come. When money is our objective, we must live in fear of losing it, which makes us suspicious. When fame is our aim, we become competitive lest others upstage us, which makes us envious. When power and influence drive us, we become self-serving and strong-willed, which makes us arrogant. And when possessions become our god, we become materialistic, thinking enough is never enough, which makes us greedy. Only Christ can lead us to satisfaction whether we have or don't have, whether we are known or unknown, whether we live or die.

This morning think of the problems that you're facing right now. What is it that you are focusing on? Do you keep reminding yourself about all the damage this problem can cause? Do you catch yourself saying, "This will be the end of me, I'll be ruined, I'll never be able to bounce back?" Let us try this way. Instead of focusing on what the problem can do, focus on all it can't do. Our problems aren't all powerful. But our God is! And God has promised to put that power at our disposal, taking care of us no matter what happens in life.

Paul's faith-based pioneer advance enabled him to see some things that most people miss. Deuteronomy 4:29 says that, *"... you will find Him (God) if you look for Him with all your heart and all your soul."* No matter how you look at it, nothing can steal your joy if you possess the single mind! Verse 21 becomes a valuable test of our lives. *"For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain."* Let us pray God to change our hearts to see God's provision in the midst of our struggles, pains, challenges, and weaknesses. Let's us pioneer advance together with God.

May 28, 2017

Philippians (3): **Pioneer Wanted**

Philippians 1:12-26

Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

What do Michael Jordan, Abraham Lincoln and J.K. Rowling all have in common? Michael Jordan says, "I have missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. On 26 occasions I have been entrusted to take the game winning shot, and I missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

This is a list of Abraham Lincoln's Failures: Lost job, 1832; Defeated for legislature, 1832; Failed in business, 1833; Elected to legislature, 1834; Sweetheart (Ann Rutledge) died, 1835; Had nervous breakdown, 1836; Defeated for Speaker, 1838; Defeated for nomination for Congress, 1843; Elected to Congress, 1846; Lost re-nomination, 1848; Rejected for Land Officer, 1849; Defeated for Senate, 1854; Defeated for nomination for Vice-President, 1856; Again defeated for Senate, 1858; Elected President, 1860.

J.K. Rowling spoke about failure and how it changed her during Harvard Commencement speech in 2008: "It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all – in which case, you fail by default.... Failure gave me an inner security that I had never attained by passing examinations. Failure taught me things about myself that I could have learned no other way. I discovered that I had a strong will, and more discipline than I had suspected; I also found out that I had friends whose value was truly above the price of rubies. The knowledge that you have emerged wiser and stronger from setbacks means that you are, ever after, secure in your ability to survive. You will never truly know yourself, or the strength of your relationships, until both have been tested by adversity. Such knowledge is a true gift, for all that it is painfully won, and it has been worth more than any qualification I ever earned."

They know that failure is a stepping stone to success. They overcame their failures and turned them around into positive ways. This morning I would like to introduce another person who turned around his situation.

We continue to study Paul's letter to the church at Philippi. More than anything else, Paul's desire as a missionary was to preach the Gospel in Rome. Rome was the key city of Paul's day. If he could conquer it for Christ, it would mean reaching millions with the message of salvation. Paul wanted to go to Rome as a preacher, but instead he went as a prisoner!

To many, this would have looked like failure, but not to this man with a “single mind,” concerned with sharing Christ and the Gospel. Paul did not find his joy in ideal circumstances; he found his joy in winning others to Christ. And if his circumstances promoted the furtherance of the Gospel, that was all that mattered! The word furtherance means “pioneer advance.” It is a military term referring to the army engineers who go before the troops to open the way into a new territory. Instead of finding himself confined as a prisoner, Paul discovered that his circumstances really opened up new areas of ministry.

God still wants His children to take the Gospel into new areas. He wants us to be pioneers, and sometimes He arranges circumstances so that we can be nothing else but pioneers. In fact, that is how the Gospel originally came to Philippi! Paul had tried to enter another place, but God had repeatedly shut the door.

God sometimes uses strange tools to help us pioneer the Gospel. In Paul’s case, there were three tools that helped him take the Gospel to the elite Praetorian Guard, Caesar’s special troops.

1. Paul’s first pioneer advance was to overcome his chains and critics of him. (1:12-18a) We have all experienced the bumps and bruises that are caused by tough times. We tend to focus only on the surface, so we see only the bad that comes from bad. Paul had a faith that there were unique advantages that could be found in the midst of his current difficulties.

You know, Paul had always wanted to go to Rome so that he could preach and do missionary work there. In Romans 1:15 he said, “... *I am eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.*” With his faith-empowered eyes he was able to see that his imprisonment made many wonderful things possible. For example in verse 12 Paul says, “*I want you to know brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.*” When he arrived at Rome he had at first been put in prison. But eventually he was given his own private apartment. And, in this apartment he was constantly under guard, chained with a short length of chain to a soldier. The Roman soldiers heard the conversations Paul had with his visitors as they discussed spiritual things. They were constantly bound to this man who prayed without ceasing. His imprisonment provided the opportunity for the gospel of Christ to spread into the most powerful men in the empire. He would never have had that kind of opportunity if he had not been imprisoned. So Paul could see that his troubles had been good for the spread of the gospel.

In verse 14 he writes, “*Because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*” In

other words, Paul’s unpleasant circumstances inspired the other Christians in Rome. Before his imprisonment, they had been fearful to share their faith. But, now they were boldly sharing Christ in their everyday conversation. His circumstances invoked courage in the Roman Christians. If God could use Paul in prison, God certainly could use them outside of prison. Even Paul’s enemies were motivated by his example to spread the good news of Jesus more boldly. Their motives were not pure. They were jealous of Paul and wanted to undermine his authority, so they preached to compete with Paul. Paul had looked at their activity from God’s perspective and he saw that the motive in their preaching didn’t really matter, ministry did matter! He wrote in verse 18, “*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.*” So, Paul could see that his imprisonment helped the spreading of the gospel.

2. Paul’s second pioneer advance was to find God’s provision in his suffering. (1:18b-26) In verse 19 he writes, “...*what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.*” Paul could see that God was going to work in this suffering to mold him into a better person. He would grow and mature under this burden. So often we cry when suffering comes. We strike out at God when the circumstances of our lives are unpleasant. We moan, “Why me?” and we wallow in self-pity. But we need to know that tough times can be turned to good for us. Brian Harbour writes, “When there is no calamity, there is no courage; no hardship, no hardiness; no stress, no strength; no suffering, no sympathy; no cross, no crown.”

Paul did not complain about his chains; he consecrated them. We must look at our problems from this angle so that we can envision the benefits of bad times or tough times. Every problem has benefits. We just need to look to see them. What’s your handicap? What’s your unpleasant circumstance? What is it that binds your life? What causes you to suffer, pain, or worry? Don’t complain about these things. Rejoice in them because God can use them to do great things for you, in your life and in the lives of others. Every experience of suffering is a great crossroad in our lives. Paul learned what tough times can do, but this perspective also enabled him to see something else.

Paul had discovered that trials and tribulations can’t separate us from God’s love. In Romans 8:38-39 Paul says, “*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” They can never truly defeat us. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, “We