

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



“Lord, Help Me See What You’re ‘ACTUALLY’ Doing in This”

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Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): Phil. 1:12-14; 4:14-18; Acts 21:10-14, 31-33; 23:11; 26:28-29

Sometimes all we can see is the immediate reality of what we are facing. We see the circumstance, the pain, the disappointment, the delay, the injustice, or the thing that simply does not make sense. And when we are standing right in the middle of it, it can be very difficult to imagine that there might be another layer to what is happening. It is a little like watching an artist work while the picture is still unfinished. There are strokes and smudges that seem completely out of place, and if we judged the painting before the artist was finished, we might conclude that something had gone terribly wrong. But then the picture begins to come together, and suddenly those strange-looking strokes make sense. There are seasons when our prayer needs to become very simple: “Lord, help me see beyond what this looks like right now. Help me see what You are *actually* doing in this.”

That is where Paul is when he writes to the *kedoshim* in Philippi. They are concerned about him—and understandably so. He has been falsely accused, beaten, imprisoned for years, subjected to malicious misrepresentation and deadly plots, transported as a prisoner, shipwrecked, and finally brought to Rome, where he remains under house arrest waiting to stand before the emperor. Yet when Paul speaks about everything that has happened, remarkably, there is no bitterness in his words. Instead, he writes, “*I want you to know...that what has happened to me has **actually** resulted in the advancement of the Gospel.*” (Phil. 1:12). Paul had learned to see his circumstances through a different lens—the perspective of the One who sees the finished picture. And in Phil. 1:12-14, he shows us three things that God was actually doing through circumstances that appeared, on the surface, to be going terribly wrong.

1. WHAT LOOKED LIKE A SETBACK WAS ACTUALLY ADVANCING THE GOOD NEWS. Paul begins, “*Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually resulted in the advancement of the Good News*” (Phil. 1:12). That word “actually” (μᾶλλον, *mallon*) carries the idea of “rather” or “instead.” In other words, what happened produced the reverse of what people might naturally have expected. You would think prolonged imprisonment would discourage Paul and hinder the Gospel. You would think false accusations, years of confinement, a shipwreck, and continued waiting would have slowed down everything God had called him to do. But Paul says, “**Actually**, the opposite has happened.” The very things that looked like they were stopping the work of God had become instruments through which God was advancing it. What looked like interruption was actually part of the mission.

Paul did not arrive at that perspective because the suffering was painless or the injustice somehow ceased to matter. He could see it because he knew the Lord and had learned to trust His voice. While Paul was imprisoned, “*the Lord stood beside Paul and said, ‘Take courage! For just as you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome!’*” (Acts 23:11). Paul knew there was purpose beyond what he could presently see. When he was being beaten in Jerusalem, he did not yet know all the faces of the people he would eventually encounter because of that imprisonment. He could not yet see Felix, Agrippa, the sailors aboard the ship,

the soldiers in Rome, or the people within Caesar's household. But God could. Like Joseph looking back over what his brothers had done to him, Paul was learning that what appeared intended to destroy could become something God used for good. Sometimes faith means trusting the Artist before we can recognize the picture.

2. PAUL'S CHAINS ACTUALLY OPENED DOORS FOR MESSIAH TO BE MADE KNOWN. Paul continues, *"And so my imprisonment in the cause of Messiah has become well known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard and to everyone else"* (Phil. 1:13). Paul might have been imprisoned, but the Good News was not locked away. His chains actually brought him into contact with people he might never otherwise have reached. Members of the Praetorian Guard were placed directly into Paul's life, and what could have been viewed only as confinement became an opportunity to bear witness to Yeshua. Paul could have spent his days explaining how unfairly he had been treated. He could have told every new guard about the raw deal he had received and how everything had gone wrong. Instead, his perspective seems to have been, "The Lord has brought me here, and if you are here with me, perhaps I am here for *you*." The chains that appeared to restrict Paul were actually creating opportunities for the Good News to enter places it might never otherwise have gone.

That perspective had already marked Paul throughout his journey. He spoke about Yeshua before governors and kings. When Agrippa said, *"In a short time you are trying to persuade me to be Messianic!"* Paul answered, *"Whether short or long, I would pray to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today would be such as I am—except for these chains!"* (Acts 26:28–29). Even standing before someone with authority over him, Paul's heart was not angry or bitter. His heart was, "I want you to know Yeshua like I do—but I do not want you to have these chains." The love Paul prayed would overflow in knowledge and discernment was being tested in his own life, and what came out of him in the testing was love. His suffering did not become an excuse to turn inward. It became another place where Messiah could be made known.

3. PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT ACTUALLY MADE OTHER BELIEVERS MORE COURAGEOUS. Paul then says, *"Because of my imprisonment, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord to dare more than ever to speak the message fearlessly"* (Phil. 1:14). That may be one of the most unexpected results of everything that happened. If the enemy's intention was to silence Paul and frighten the believing community, well *actually*, the opposite happened. Paul was confined, so others began to speak. People who may once have stood back and allowed Paul to do the proclaiming began stepping into the void created by his absence. Instead of a singular Paul publicly sharing the Good News, suddenly there was a multiplicity of believers becoming confident in the Lord, abounding in courage, and speaking the Word without fear.

Sometimes we assume that if God is working, everything will continue exactly as it has before. The same people will lead, the same doors will remain open, and the same methods will continue working. But sometimes God allows a familiar avenue to close and, through that very circumstance, awakens something in others. Paul's chains did not bring the mission to an end; they helped multiply the messengers. What looked like Paul being removed from effectiveness actually caused others to discover their own calling. The Gospel expanded. Courage multiplied. Others began to use their voices. So when something changes that we thought God absolutely needed in order to accomplish His purposes, look again. The Lord may be doing something far larger than we can presently see.

CONCLUSION: LORD, SHOW ME WHAT YOU'RE ACTUALLY DOING

There will be moments when we simply cannot perceive what God is doing. Paul could eventually look back and connect many of the pieces, but he could not have known all of them while he was being beaten in Jerusalem. He could not have looked ahead and identified every Roman soldier, every prisoner, every ruler, or every believer who would be affected because of where this road was taking him. Some things only became clear later. And the same will be true for us. The circumstances may still hurt. The injustice may still be real. The waiting may still be long. But joy and peace become possible when our perspective is no longer imprisoned by the circumstance itself. We begin to pray, "Lord, give me ears to hear Your voice and eyes to see what You are doing. Help me see beyond what the surface circumstances are telling me."

Maybe today you are standing in the middle of something that looks nothing like the plan you thought God had for you. Perhaps you have obeyed Him and still encountered opposition. Perhaps you are carrying disappointment, wondering why something has been allowed to continue for so long. Bring that honestly before the Lord. We aren't pretending the pain does not exist; we are surrendering our demand that we must understand everything before we will trust Him. Ask the Lord to guard your heart from bitterness and to give you the perspective Paul had—to recognize that the One who began a good work is still at work even when the painting looks unfinished. And let this become your prayer: "Lord, I trust You. Keep my heart soft, my eyes open, , and help me see what You are actually doing in this."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In Phil. 1:12, Paul says that what happened to him had "*actually resulted in the advancement of the Good News.*" What circumstances from Acts 21–28 would naturally have appeared to be setbacks rather than advancement?
2. How did Paul's imprisonment create opportunities for the Good News to reach people he might never otherwise have encountered?
3. According to Phil. 1:14, what effect did Paul's imprisonment have on the other believers, and why is that result so surprising?
4. Is there something happening in your life right now that you have primarily viewed as an interruption, setback, or closed door? How might your prayers change if you began asking, "Lord, what are You actually doing in this?"
5. When you experience mistreatment, disappointment, or prolonged waiting, what tends to come out of you? How can you allow the Lord to produce the kind of love, courage, and Yeshua-likeness that Paul demonstrated while he was being tested?

Closing Prayer

Abba, give us ears to hear Your voice and eyes to see what You are doing beyond what our circumstances seem to say. When we are disappointed, falsely accused, delayed, or walking through something we cannot understand, keep our hearts from bitterness and discouragement. Help us trust that You are still at work and that nothing surrendered to You is wasted. Spirit of God, produce in us the character of Yeshua. Let our love overflow more and more in knowledge and discernment. Give us courage to make the Good News known wherever You place us, and let even the difficult places of our lives become places where Messiah is revealed. Lord, when all we can see is the unfinished picture, help us trust the One who is painting it. Help us see what You are actually doing in this.

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.