

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“Living Beyond Adversity”

Colossians 4:2-6

2004

Introduction

What I find most remarkable about this passage of scripture is what *isn't* there:
There is no self-pity, no bitterness, no anger, no disillusionment and no despair.

A review of Paul's situation:

1. A zealous persecutor of the early church
2. Converted and commissioned by Christ on the Road to Damascus
3. Spent the later part of his life communicating the liberating truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
4. His reward? 2 Cor 11:23-29
 - Repeated flogged
 - Beaten with rods three times
 - Stoned once
 - Shipwrecked three times
 - In constant danger from bandits, Jews, Gentiles and false brothers
 - Known hunger, thirst and nakedness
 - And faced the daily pressure of his concern for all the churches
5. Now he is imprisoned for preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ
6. Awaiting trial in Rome - Eph 3:1; 4:1; 6:20
7. Yet he refuses to consider himself a victim either of the Jews or of Rome
 - a. He is a prisoner of Christ Jesus - Eph 3:1
 1. For the sake of you Gentiles
 - b. He is a prisoner for the Lord - Eph 4:1
 - c. He is an ambassador in chains - Eph 6:10

Paul had learned the importance of living beyond adversity! Even while shackled in chains, he remained focused on the goal of proclaiming the gospel.

But Paul was just one of the countless, nameless thousands in the early church who lived beyond the adversity of persecution in order to fulfill the Great Commission. Listen to the words recorded for us in Hebrews 11:35-38

“Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated -- the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.”

Christian history is filled with examples of believers “Living Beyond Adversity” in order to achieve something great!

One of those examples is William Tyndale:

In the late 1400s, Tyndale declared, "If God spare my life, it will not be many years before I will cause a plow boy to know more of the Scriptures than the Pope." And with that declaration, William Tyndale went into hiding and began translating the English New Testament from the original Greek.

Scripture in the English language was completely forbidden. Ten Christians were even burned at the stake for teaching their children the Lord's Prayer in English.

William Tyndale's new translation went into print in 1525 but was not completed until 1526. The English Bibles had to be smuggled in bales of cotton. Anyone caught possessing one was put to death.

In 1535, William Tyndale was arrested, and burned at the stake in October 1536. With the English Bible still illegal, his last words were, "Lord, open the King's eyes!" His prayers were answered one year later when the King gave official permission to print and distribute the English Scripture (74 years before the first King James Bible).

The greatest achievements and advancements of the Christian church occurred when men and women made the strategic decision to “Live Beyond their personal Adversity.”

I Remain Focused On Prayer

A. Paul’s command to **devoted** prayer [Verse 2]

Devoted = Poskartereo = “To persevere in, adhere to, be diligent in”

Rom 12:12 “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

Illustration: Devoted spouse or a devoted friend

A person who hangs in there through the good times and the bad.

A person who never gives up believing the best and hoping the best.

A person who is loyal and committed to the end.

Application:

If you take this understanding and apply it to prayer, Paul is saying:

“There may be when you don’t feel like praying – pray anyway!”

“There may be times when you question the effectiveness of your prayers – pray anyway!”

“There may be times when you don’t know what to pray – pray anyway!!”

“Keep on praying! Don't ever abandon the power of prayer!”

1. Being **watchful** for:

Watchful = Gregoreuo = “To stay awake or to be vigilant”

Eph 6:18 “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

Illustration: The Garden of Gethsemane

Jesus said to Peter, James, and John, “watch and pray, so that you will not fall into temptation.” We know that despite Jesus’ request, the disciples all fell asleep – repeatedly. Why? Because they didn’t fully comprehend the danger they were in or what was at stake.

Example:

Consider the difference between two military sentries. One guards the barracks at PMRF and the other is guarding the barracks in Iraq. Which one is more diligent? Which one is more attentive? The one who realizes that they are in a battle.

As believers (whether we acknowledge it or not) we are in a battle – not against flesh and blood, but “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Eph 6:12-13

So what are we to be watching for?

a. Satan’s schemes - 2 Cor 2:11

Matt 26:41 “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

Luke 21:36 “Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

b. God’s opportunities

Eph 2:10 “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Workmanship = Poiema = “God’s work of art, His masterpiece”

2. Being **thankful**

Thankful = Eucharistia = “To be grateful or to give thanks”

Paul repeatedly exhorts the Colossian church to a life of thankfulness - Col 2:6-7; 3:15, 17

What are we to be thankful for? EVERYTHING!!

1 Thess 5:16-18 “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

a. For the challenges

Rom 5:2-3 “And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

James 1:2-4 “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

b. For the blessings

James 1:17 “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

B. Paul’s request for **intercessory** prayer [Verse 3a]

Two things are worth noting here briefly:

1. The humility and transparency of Paul’s request

Paul regularly asks the church for prayer:

The church in Rome - Rom 15:30

The church in Ephesus - Eph 6:19-20

The church in Thessalonica - 1 Thess 5:25

The recipients of the book of Hebrews - Heb 13:18-19

2. The selflessness of Paul’s request

Note what Paul doesn’t ask for:

- His immediate release from prison.
- Protection from the violent criminals around him.
- A good attorney
- Courage in the face of loneliness.

In the midst of injustice, hunger, nakedness, bad food, infestations of rodents and insects, and apparent abandonment by God, there is only one pressing issue on Paul’s heart -- that he be a faithful witness to his Lord Jesus Christ.

1. **Open** doors for the message [Verse 3b]

Door = Thura = “A portal, entrance or gateway”

Interesting. The door I might have been tempted to pray for God to open would have been my cell door. Instead, Paul asked for a door of opportunity to share the gospel, whether to the other inmates, the guards, or even the civil officials.

Application: Divine appointments

Do you pray for God to open doors to communicate the gospel?

You may not know whether a door is open until you turn the knob.

2 Cor 2:12 “Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me ...”

a. The mystery of Christ

Mystery = Musterion = “A secret”

“A divine truth that is unknowable apart from special revelation.”

Of course, the mystery Paul is talking about is a mystery no longer:
Col 2:3 "... the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

What is this mystery? The gospel of Jesus Christ!

b. For which Paul was in chains

Paul often openly refers to his status as a prisoner of the Lord:

- "The prisoner of Christ Jesus" - Eph 3:1
- "A prisoner for the Lord" - Eph 4:1
- "An ambassador in chains" - Eph 6:19-20
- "In chains for Christ" - Phil 1:13

2. **Clarity** of proclamation [Verse 4]

Proclaim it clearly = Phaneroo = "To manifest, or to render apparent"

The prayer here is that when the opportunity presents itself that Paul will be able to take full advantage of it by providing an understandable presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Eph 6:19-20 "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."

Application:

One of the things that can be very helpful in making a clear presentation of the gospel is to write out your testimony:

1. Life before Christ
2. How you came to Christ
3. Life since Christ

II Remain Focused On The Mission

A. Be wise in the way you **act** toward outsiders [Verse 5a]

Act = Peripateo = "To walk about or live" (present active indicative)

Application:

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you need to remember that people are watching you. I don't mean that Dickie Chang is camped on your lawn reporting your every move. But your family is watching, your neighbors are watching, your co-workers are watching, your friends are watching – and people you don't even know are watching. They are wondering if the gospel is true. They are wondering if Christ really makes a difference. They will draw their conclusions not from a Bible Study (at least not at first), or a church service. They will draw most of their conclusions from watching you.

Titus 2:7-8 “In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.”

B. Make the **most** of every opportunity [Verse 5b]

Exagorazo = “Redeeming the time” Literally: “To buy up, ransom, or rescue from loss”

Eph 5:15-16 “Be very careful, then, how you live-not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”

Every one of us has passed up opportunities to represent Christ. The enemy wants you to feel guilty about that. God wants you to forget your failures of the past and move on. The Lord’s mercies are new every morning! Today is a new day!

Application: Tips on making the most of opportunities:

1. Recognize that your life and time belong to God - 1 Cor 6:19-20
2. Pray every morning to recognize God’s divine appointments - Eph 2:10
3. Watch for the leading of the Holy Spirit - Gal 5:25
4. Step out and speak boldly in faith when the moment arrives - Acts 4:31

C. Let your conversation be always full of **grace** [Verse 6]

Full of grace = Charis = “Spiritual generosity”

As opposed to a judgmental and condemning attitude

Matt 7:1-2 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

1. Seasoned with **salt**

It means conversation that is flavored in such a way so that listeners are stimulated to a thirst for spiritual things.

Mark 9:50 “Have salt in yourselves ...”

2. So that you may know how to **answer** everyone

Answer = Apokrinomai = “To respond”

If you are not controlled by “grace” then you will not be able to respond in the right way!

1 Peter 3:15-16 “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”

Conclusion

Everyone has problems!
 Everyone has challenging circumstances!
 Everyone is overwhelmed!

That's life! Satan's strategy is to get us to throw whatever he can at us in order to get us to back off.

For the church in Colosse, it was internal problems with false teachers

For Paul it was false imprisonment and the threat of imminent death

What is it for you?

A difficult spouse?

A wayward child?

A stressful job?

A financial crisis?

A physical disability?

If you wait for everything to be perfect in your life, you will never fulfill your destiny in life!

If you truly desire to hear those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant," you must learn to "Live Beyond Adversity." And in Colossians 3:1-4, Paul tells us the secret of "Living Beyond Adversity":

"Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."