

Finding Joy in Personal Affliction

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[0 : 00] and oh boy, oh boy. It comes in different forms. But I think we all experience it in one way or another.

Maybe it's from external sources. Maybe it's from internal sources. But we can be afflicted. We can be pressed. The word affliction there means to be pressed.

So feeling under pressure. In Acts chapter 4, Peter and John were arrested for preaching Jesus. They went before the rulers of the Jews and gave their defense. And as Peter opened his mouth, the Holy Spirit filled him. And he began to explain to them that Jesus was the cause.

Jesus was the power. He began to explain to them that this is the same Jesus that they had rejected. The one who the prophet said was the rock of stumbling.

[1 : 03] And this rock that they had rejected became the very cornerstone. And it was this Jesus that they were preaching. And he was the only way of salvation.

So the rulers got together and they could not deny that a miracle had been done because the man was standing there and he had been blind from birth and they had, or crippled from birth and they had, he had found healing in Christ.

So they charged them. They decided to charge them to speak no more in the name of Jesus. Don't use that name. And with one of the most well-known quotes, Peter and John responded, whether it is right before God to listen to you rather than to God, you be the judge.

Do what you gotta do. But for us, we cannot but speak what we have seen and heard. Do whatever you gotta do.

So they went away and reported to the church. And I find it fascinating the way the church responded to this. When they were released, Acts 4, 23 describes, when they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and elders had said to them.

[2 : 25] And when they, the church, heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, Sovereign Lord. Interesting who they think about, how they think about God in these times.

Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything beyond them. So they're getting real big picture here. Who, through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, why did the Gentiles rage and the peoples plotted vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed, the Messiah. And then they bring it home.

For truly, in this city, there were gathered together against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your head and your plan had predestined to take place.

And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness while you stretch out your hand to heal and signs and wonders perform through the name of your holy servant, Jesus.

[3 : 42] And when they prayed, the place where they had gathered was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

Afflictions for the gospel. Peter and John were arrested because they're preaching Christ.

And the church's response, their response was, hey, do whatever you gotta do. We gotta speak about what we've seen and heard. We're just witnesses. We gotta tell. And then the church's response was the same.

Give us more boldness. Even though the rulers are set against us, give us more boldness, we'll take the affliction because what really matters is the gospel.

Afflictions for the gospel lead these early Christians to prayer and boldness. It leads Paul to joy. It leads Paul to joy. Philippians, as we have introduced a couple weeks ago, is a little book full of joy.

[4 : 56] joy. And now, as we come to the second section, it's, even in prison and affliction, Paul is able to rejoice with joy. And my question is, how does he do that?

How does he turn what could be depressing and bitter and frustrating, how does he turn it to joy? So last week, we looked at the roots of joy in shared ministry.

As Paul writes his opening paragraph to this wonderful little church, as he recalls them, as he thinks of them, he is brought to joy. He talks about, in verse 4, how every time he prays for them, he makes his prayer with joy.

He doesn't say that about the other churches. But when he thinks of these Philippians, when he thinks of them and prays for them, it brings an inner smile to him to pray for them.

I pray for you with joy. Why? Verse 6, because of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. 12 years ago until now. Your shared passion for the gospel brings joy.

[6 : 07] So Paul has a passion for the gospel, but these Philippians did too. They shared that passion. They didn't just give to him. They didn't just write a check.

They did give to him. They did send support to him. But we see in this book that they also suffered for the gospel. They also prayed for Paul.

They participated by praying. They participated themselves by witnessing as well. They're partners. And then as Paul prays for them, excuse me, in verses 9 through 11, he tells them exactly what he prays.

He prays for their love to abound more and more in knowledge and discernment so that you may approve what is excellent. In other words, so that you may know and recognize what really matters and be pure and blameless to the day of Christ having been filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus.

So this prayer reveals that passion for the gospel springs from a maturing love. Paul's praying.

They're already participating in the gospel, but he's praying that their love, not that they're witness, he prays that their love would deepen and enrich and expand, but in a particular way.

[7 : 31] In real knowledge and all discernment. So he's giving it some bounds. And notice the purpose. Verse 10, so that you may approve what is excellent.

So that you may come to know, a mature love comes to know what really matters. It's able to discern between the majors and the minors. It's able to discern between the things that really, really matter and the things that matter sometimes, yes.

It's mature love that does that. And then notice verse 11, it's, it's, it's, this happens how? Is that something I stir up? Is that a love that I, I just have to do?

I must do? I should? Ought? No, it's a love that having been filled. So it comes to me. Having been filled with the fruit of righteousness that is through Christ.

So it's, in other words, it's through my relationship with Christ. It's Christ then pouring himself out into me. It's me abiding in the vine and the vine then giving the life and the fruit. I bear the fruit.

[8 : 36] He produces the fruit. It's not about me measuring up. It's about abiding in Christ. So this maturing love empowered by Christ shows us what really matters.

And, and, and so it becomes a passion for the gospel because that's what matters. So let me ask the question again. What is joy? What do we mean by joy?

From a worldly context, we think of joy like it's happiness. happiness is based on what happens to you. Joy is beyond that.

Joy is internal, not external. It, it, you can rejoice in spite of what happens to you. So joy is a mindset.

It's rooted in what matters most. It's a mindset. It's a perspective. It's an internal conviction of what really matters. That brings me through hardship or suffering or pain or a difficult situation.

[9 : 48] It's why, as Rick mentioned, James 1, consider it all joy when you encounter various trials. What? That takes a perspective because then he goes on to give a reason.

Because you know something. not because you love the trials. That's silly. It's not happiness. It's joy. Because joy is rooted in what really matters and what really matters is, oh, endurance produces or, what's James say?

James, what does James do? When you encounter various joys for the, see? trials produce endurance.

Yeah, there you go. Okay. It's good for you. No, but see, are you convinced of that? Are you convinced? It's a conviction. No, this is good.

Okay. Okay, so Paul continues to share his joy. Now in verse 12, he's going to, he shifts out of the mode where he's, in verses 3 to 11, he's giving thanks for them and he's praying for them.

[10:57] Now in verse 12, he kind of begins his letter. Now, he wants to tell them what's going on. He wants to give them a report. And in this report, he talks about, it's not what you expected. I'm in prison.

We think that's bad. But I want you to know it's actually turned out for good. In fact, he ends the section, verse 18, by saying, all of this, what about all of this?

Being in prison, being afflicted, what about all of it? Whether in pretense or truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I read joy. So he finds joy in this affliction. So how does he do that?

Two reasons. He finds it in this perspective and this attitude, this conviction of what really matters. And so I want to give these two reasons for joy and personal affliction that comes by a matter of what really matters.

First reason is, Paul finds joy in affliction because what matters is gospel progress, not personal comfort or not personal growth, not personal progress.

[12:05] Gospel progress is more important than personal progress. See, what really matters? Gospel progress. That's what matters.

That's what's eternal. That's what lasts. That's what makes a difference. So it begins with a report. Verse 12. He knows they're concerned about him. These are people that are praying for him.

They're concerned about his situation. He's in prison. They're 800 miles away. They haven't got a clue what's going on. What's going on for Paul? We know he's in prison. How bad? And it can be bad.

Roman prisons can be really bad. Sometimes you don't even know where the guy is. They stuff him away in some dungeon. He's in bonds. He's literally in bonds.

Chained to a Roman guard. Good luck guard. So he says, I know you're concerned, but it's not what you expect.

[13:03] Expect that I'm, here I'm stuffed away in some dungeon. I'm silenced. I'm confined. You think that the gospel's hindered. Well, I'm stuck on the sidelines. But it's not so.

It's not so. In fact, God has been working. And now he tells of the progress of the gospel. The end of verse 12. I want you to know that it's really, what's really happened has served to advance the gospel.

Believe it or not. My being put away to the side has actually advanced the gospel. It's progressed. It's spreading. How ironic is that?

The preacher's stuffed away and it's going out? How's it going out? Well, he talks about two different results. One is inside. Inside the prison, verse 13. See, it's advanced the gospel so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

Gee, I wonder how that happened. How did the whole praetorian guard, in other words, the praetorian guard are the elite of the Roman guards.

[14:11] They are the praetorian guards, which means they are Caesar's personal guards. And Caesar at that time was a man named Nero.

Not a real stable individual. In fact, one who in the years after this letter is written will increase the pressure and the persecution of Christians.

Okay? There were up to 9,000 of these guys in the first century. So does Paul really mean it that it went to the whole?

Did it? How did it get to the whole? I understand the guys that get chained up next to Paul. You know, good luck, right? Why are you here, buddy? Let me tell you. This is what I was doing. And so, obviously, he's not chained to 9,000 guys, but it spread. Going back to the barracks, hey, who'd you have?

[15:17] I had this guy named Paul. And he's not like the normal prisoner. This guy's full of joy. I mean, we always get these guys that are depreed. They're bitter. They're angry.

This guy, man. And then the story he told, you wouldn't believe. This is why he's there. He's not a political guy. He's not a criminal.

He actually believes in something. So, in other words, Paul's message gets spread throughout the whole Praetorian Guard under Nero's nose. And they all know why I'm really there.

They know I'm there for Christ because they've heard my story. So, that's one result. So, even inside the prison, the gospel's spreading to the guards.

And then everyone else, whoever else, the cooks and the, you know, the cleanup guys and I don't know what guys work in dungeons. And then there's a second result, verse 14.

[16:15] Not only inside the prison, but also outside the prison, the people, the Christians out in the churches here in Rome, most of the brothers having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

So, outside the prison, brothers dare to speak the word boldly. They take the risk of proclamation in this time of Neronian rule.

Because it is a risk to preach under Neron. Why did they do that? Why would they take the risk? He says, in verse 14, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment.

Having become persuaded in the Lord. So, it wasn't just that they looked at Paul and got inspired and got impressed. It came through the Lord. They were confident in the Lord.

They became persuaded by the Lord, through the Lord in relation to Paul's imprisonment. They're inspired by this. Here's Paul.

[17:26] Boy, prison, that's, you know, if I get caught preaching, I could end up there too. Bummer. But look at Paul, he's actually having a good time. He's got a captive audience.

And the gospel's spreading and so now they're inspired. They're, oh, you can't stop Jesus. You can't chain the word.

Here they go. They're inspired. They're encouraged to preach. And the word there, verse 14, have become confident.

It's perfect passive means they've been changed by this. They've become persuaded and then that affects them.

Now, this is not unique for God to cause the gospel to spread through affliction. God often promotes the gospel in affliction.

[18:41] He often works through affliction and persecution. The early church, we just read in Acts 4 how they were persecuted and that the gospel continues to spread. Chapter 5 did the same thing.

In fact, the persecution steps up in Acts 5 where they get beaten because they kept preaching. We warned you. Now, we're going to beat you. And the guys left rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be persecuted for Jesus.

Right? Because that's what really matters. So it's not unique. So then by chapter 8, remember Jesus had said, you know, here's the commission.

Go make disciples of all the world. Right? Go be my witnesses starting in Jerusalem and then spreading to Samaria and Judea, Judea, Samaria and then the rest of the world.

Well, we get to chapter 8 and they're still in Jerusalem because they're having a good time. Things are happening. Got a big church. This is great.

[19:46] Caused a problem for the deacons though. They're like, okay, there's a problem. The widows aren't being fed. Okay, we got problems because of the numbers. Blah, blah, blah. So anyway, get back to what the commission was.

God said, go. And they're like, no, we're having a good time here. It's all good. We're all lovey-dovey. So what happens? God sends a persecution. Acts chapter 8. Started actually at the end of Acts chapter 7 when Stephen got killed.

And right after Stephen was killed, Acts 8 says, Saul, by the way, that's Paul who writes this letter. This is back in Acts 8.

He was Saul, not the good guy, approved of Stephen's execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem.

And they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles. Devout men took Stephen and they made great lamentation over him and they buried him.

[20:48] So here we have the church suffering. They've got a loss of Stephen. There's distress and upset. They're all spread out. Goes on. Paul was ravaging the church and entering house after house.

And he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. So this goes from bad to worse. Then we read, Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

Jerusalem's heard the message. Time to move out. Time spread, like I said. Samaria, Judea, parts of the world. So if you won't go, I'll make you go.

It's kind of like the Jonah thing. You won't go, I'll get you there. Where? Those who were scattered went about preaching the word. And then Philip, Stephen goes down, next man up, Philip. Philip went down to Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip.

[21 : 59] And when they heard him and saw the signs, he did. In the time of distress, here's the church scattered. They're lost. They're imprisoned.

And yet the word continues to be proclaimed. It's a time of change and upset. And yet they're not hindered. This distressful situation does not hinder what really matters.

The gospel over comfort. It's kind of a theme. God spreads his word through affliction.

God can spread his word when things are all nice too. In fact, that's the way we prefer it. Could you just, you know, bring people and they're receptive and go, yeah, nice and smooth and we like it that way.

And we all get along. Right? Like the early church. We want to be like the early church where they all got along. Did they?

[23 : 02] Hello. Book of Corinthians. Galatians. Okay. We wouldn't have a New Testament if the church got along in the early century. Philippians are pretty good. But even in the Philippian church, remember chapter four, there's two ladies and they're not getting along.

Huh? What's with the ladies, right? No, that's you. I'm just teasing this. By the way, the ladies were very important in that Philippian church.

There were strong women in that Philippian church. Started with Lydia, right? Okay. So even in this good effect, so Paul's like, hey, what matters most is the gospel progress over my personal comfort. I'm imprisoned. I'm stuffed away. I don't have freedom. I'm secluded. But the gospel still goes forth and that's what matters. But even in that good effect, not all the brothers who were inspired to preach the word were inspired by all.

Some were inspired by something else to preach the word. So we see right after he says there, verse 14, they're preaching the word or they're speaking the word more boldly without fear.

[24 : 23] Verse 15, some, some, indeed, preach Christ from envy, rival, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I'm put here for the defense of the gospel.

The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. They're trying to hurt me, trying to kick me while I'm down.

So what's my conclusion? What then? What really matters? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.

That's odd. You got bad preachers or disingenuous preachers, pretenders, posers.

I don't know, what's the term today? I mean, they're doing it in pretense. They're doing it with hidden motives. Paul's like, no, I see through that.

[25 : 31] I know what you're doing. And yet, he can rejoice in the message they preach, which means that the message is what really matters, not the motives.

Now, it doesn't mean that for those preachers the motives don't matter. Yeah, it matters for them. They'll, God takes care of that. Paul's not worried about that. God take care of that. Hey, what they're preaching, that's the gospel.

I'm good. Why they're doing it, I don't care. Well, care. But in terms of what really matters, message. Message. Now, Paul's quick to point out when the message is off. Right? Galatians. He's quick to point out that, oh, that's not the gospel. No, no, no, that's not the gospel. So whatever these guys are doing, why ever they're doing it, they're still preaching Christ.

The gospel's right and true. They haven't changed it. Their motives are off. That's all. So here again, what really matters? Well, message over motives.

[26 : 39] Don't motives matter? Yes, they do. But they're not the most important thing. Does that mean we let them go? We'll let the Holy Spirit work on you on that. Okay?

I'm more concerned about the message. That comes first. So there's two groups here, he shows. There are those. Let's take the second group first because he kind of unfolds them first at the end of 15.

He talks about at the beginning, some indeed preach Christ from envy and rival. We'll get to that in a minute. But others from goodwill. So we got those who, first of all, in the first group, those preaching from passion.

They preach from goodwill. They have right motives. They have a passion for the gospel. And then he further clarifies that in verse 17. What does he mean by that? The latter do it out of love. So it's not just goodwill that motivates them. It's actually love. And he's mentioned that love before. Back in verse 9, he prays for that love, right? That love that will be deep and mature and will grow and will recognize what really matters.

[27 : 41] And will be empowered by Christ. That's that love. So they're doing it from that love. Love for Christ. Love for the gospel. Love for people. They do it out of love. Knowing.

Now watch this. Love for Paul too. Because now he connects it to himself. They do it out of love knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

So in other words, these people love Paul. Part of this Philippian church and it's part of why he's so joyous about them because they get him. And they get it.

Why he's in prison? Not because he's some failure. Not because he blew it. Not because he... He's there because he's defending the gospel. Because he's being faithful to his call. He's sharing the gospel boldly.

That puts him in prison from time to time. Actually, for years at a time. For years at a time. Don't think he's being productive while he's stuck away in prison.

[28 : 40] Half of his letters are written from prison. Right? Including this one. Excuse me.

So they get it. And then there's the second group. And this is the one that interests us. 15 at the beginning there. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry. How do you do that?

How do you preach Christ from envy and rivalry? What's envy? Well, it's jealousy and wanting what somebody else has.

Or wanting to take away what somebody else has for yourself. Or, I don't know, not liking that they're doing well. And strife.

In other words, these are competitive preachers. You ever met a competitive preacher? Yeah, I used to be one. Wanted to be better than others.

[29 : 40] Wanted to be known. God took care of that. And if I ever, you know, start to, he takes care of it again. So now I don't care about me.

But these guys, they're competitive. They're striving. They see themselves in competition with Paul. Oh, he's that kind of preacher. I'm a better kind of preacher. I know.

And then he goes on in verse 17. The former, the former, the ones from Envy and Rival, they proclaim Christ out of rivalry. Not, yes, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. So out of rivalry, self-seeking ambition. They're in the image. They're thinking it's about me. It's like a certain most popular preacher in America who on his pulpit has his initials.

Not, not JC, but J-O. That means it's about him. If I put my initials on the pulpit, that's what you get. [31 : 00] Yeah. See, I think Paul would say about J-O, was he preaching the gospel?

Well, I don't know. I don't believe we're in this for our best life now. Don't believe you can find that in the New Testament. So these guys are driven by self-seeking ambition.

They preach in a way they think will stir up, they actually preach in a way thinking to stir up trouble for Paul. To somehow put more pressure on Paul. And he doesn't explain how.

We're curious. Well, what did they do? How did they do that? It was fruitless because Paul's able to just kind of, you know. Okay.

He doesn't, he refuses to be judged by men. He says, no, my conscience is clear. I'm judged by the Father and I don't care what you think. I'll defend it if you ask me.

[32 : 15] But they stir, so what are they, maybe they're criticizing him. Maybe they're saying, see, he's in prison so he did it wrong. Or maybe they're the faith kind of guys and maybe they're thinking, oh, he doesn't have enough faith. See, if Paul had enough faith, he wouldn't be in prison.

He'd overcome. Those are the same people that say, you know, about his thorn in the flesh when the Lord said, no, you're going to keep the thorn because, you know, I got a reason for that.

They're the same people that say, no, he shouldn't have that thorn in the flesh. He didn't have enough faith. They literally say that. They say, Paul was wrong. I'm reading the text going, no, God told him.

He got an answer. They didn't want to make it about something else. Triumphant. Maybe that was what's going on. I don't know. Maybe they're saying, hey, see, God's punishing him.

As if suffering is somehow unbiblical. As if suffering and affliction is somehow a lack of faith. Oh, brothers and sisters, let me tell you, that is a lie. That is a lie.

[33 : 18] Do not listen to that. Do not. All you got to do is say, okay, was that true in Jesus' life? Okay, no, suffer, suffer, suffer.

Is that true in the apostle's life? No, suffer, suffer, suffer. So where are they getting it? Okay. I know we'd rather hear the other message.

I'd rather this be my best life now. I'd rather just be happy all the time. But see, the gospel has a different perspective. It's not about happiness. It's about joy. Even through.

Even through. Even in the midst. In spite of. See, that's what shows power of God. Anybody can be happy when things are going good.

That doesn't take any power. But to find joy in hardship, that's another world. That's not natural.

[34 : 16] So for Paul, what's the answer? Verse 18, what does he conclude? So what really matters? What then?

It sounds bad, right? Preaching from pretense. Only that in every way, the only thing that matters is whether in pretense or truth, Christ is proclaimed. That's all that matters.

Message over motive. that Christ is proclaimed. That's what I'm into. That's what I rejoice in. I can find joy because, yeah, so they got it out for me.

I don't care who's sitting on the throne. I'm in here, not because of them. I'm in here because Christ wants me in here. I'm a servant of Christ.

Remember how he said it in Ephesians? I'm a bond slave. Not to Rome. I'm a bond slave of Christ.

So the whole reason I'm in prison is because Jesus said, yeah, time to go to prison. Because I need you to write Colossians, Philippians, and I need you to talk to these guards.

[35 : 27] I didn't tell them that. He just, Paul obviously figured out after, ooh, the whole, hey Paul, I heard about you. You know, Cleavis.

You know, the other centurion, the Cleavis. Oh, Cleavis, I don't know their name. Tell me your story. I want to hear it for myself. The whole barracks are talking about you, Paul.

So how does Paul know the whole praetorian guard? Because he's hearing reports. Dude, I can't wait to get locked up next to you, man. Tell me the story. I don't know what happened, but something's going on there.

Okay. Can I quote D.A. Carson again? Yeah, of course I can. All right. I told you last week, this guy's, I don't hold any scholar higher.

And in his sermon on Philippians 1, he says this, what we must ask one another is this, what is it in the Christian faith that excites you?

[36 : 33] What consumes your time? What turns you on? Today, there are endless subgroups of confessing Christians who invest enormous quantities of time and energy in one issue or another.

Abortion, pornography, homeschooling, women's organization, for or against, economic justice, a certain style of worship, the defense of particular Bible version, and much more.

The list varies from country to country, but not a few countries have a full agenda of urgent peripheral demands. Not for a moment am I suggesting that we should not think about such matters or throw our weight behind some of them.

But, when such matters devour most of our time and passion, each of us must ask, in what fashion am I confessing the centrality of the gospel?

This is not a subtle plea, Carson goes on, this is not a subtle plea for a denuded gospel, a merely privatized gospel, a gospel without social ramifications.

[37 : 41] We wisely re-read the accounts of the evangelical awakening in England and the great awakening in America and the extraordinary ministries of Hal Harris, George Whitefield, the Wesley brothers.

We rightly remind ourselves how under God their converts led the fights to abolish slavery, to reform the penal code, to begin trade unions, to transform prisons and free children from serving in mines.

All of society was transformed because soundly converted men and women saw that life must be lived under God and in a manner pleasing to Him.

But virtually without exception, these men and women put the gospel first. Not least in their own aspirations.

Not to see this priority means we are not more than a generation away from denying the gospel. See, what matters most to us are the periphery things and those are important.

[38 : 54] Huh? abortion issue, very important. Social justice, very important. We fight for all those things.

Christians have fought for those things. But if that becomes the major and the gospel message becomes the minor, Carson's right.

We're not a generation away from completely denying the gospel because that is where the major denominations have gone. They're focusing on social over the heart of the gospel.

And those are good things. See, they're letting the good erase the best. Important things over what's most essential.

So I think those are good questions. What is it about the Christian faith that excites you? Does the gospel hold your passion? And then to rejoice even in affliction.

[40 : 02] How does Paul do this? Listen to another place where, of course, he talks about rejoicing in his sufferings in Colossians 1. Paul says, I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake. There it is again.

I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake. And in my flesh, I'm filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body. And by the way, who's his body?

The church. Do we think of the church as the body of Christ? We call it the body of Christ, but do we think of it as Christ's body on earth?

It would change how we think about the church. Well, if it's Christ's body, wouldn't it be more perfect? Well, working on it.

Of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you to make the word of God fully known. The mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now revealed to his saints.

[41 : 07] To them, to the saints, God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery. What's the mystery? The mystery is Christ in you. Christ in you.

The hope of glory. That's transformational. It's not Christ added to you. It's Christ in you. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

See, it's not important just to get people to Christ. It's important to get people matured in Christ because there's a purpose. We're here. How does he do that?

Watch this now. For this I toil. That word means to labor to exhaustion. For this I toil. And how does he do that?

This is the most important. For this I toil. Struggling. Literally agonizing. Struggling with all his energy.

[42 : 11] That he powerfully works in me. Not struggling according to my strength. Doing the best that I can.

Struggling, agonizing with all his energy. I'm abiding. It's that branch in the vine. It's depending on him. Active faith.

Not, oh I believe now. It's up to me. Uh-uh. Paul would have faded long, long ago. It was up to him. Joy and suffering.

How? It's a matter of perspective. It's a conviction of what really is of value. And for Paul to live as Christ. That's the big picture. What matters is him over whatever pain, hurt, strife, affliction, whatever my situation.

What really matters is the gospel progressing, not my personal perspective. Not my personal comfort. What matters is the message of the gospel over motives of the preacher.

[43 : 20] because it's the message that transforms not the preacher. Okay? It's the message.

Romans 1.16. The gospel is the power. Do you believe that?

Well, they're just words. Yeah, they're just words. But when the Holy Spirit takes them and then points them right at your heart, oh, there's power. There's power.

It's miracle power. Unnatural. So it's the message that transforms. It's the message that's the power, not the preacher.

The real power is in the message. As Paul said, he works in me with power. Struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

[44 : 25] Do you know that power? Are you convinced? It is a mindset. It's an attitude. It's a right perspective. But I believe for it to become joy and rejoicing, it must be not just a perspective but an internal conviction.

I believe this. I know the gospel's power. That's all that is needed. I know that Christ is what's the most important thing, not me.

are you convinced so that you experience joy? May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in your believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Let us pray. Father, we thank you for your word and thank you for Paul and the hardship you put him through so that he could come to recognize what really mattered. And thank you, Lord, that you did powerfully work in him.

He could say, yet not I but Christ. So thank you. Bring us to that. Convince us of these truths.

[45 : 50] transform us. And may we, Father, be like Paul who affected people around him. Not because we had a program around him but because we've been changed.

This we pray in Christ's name. Amen.