

GLENWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH

September 13, 2020

Prisoner for Christ

Acts 28:11-31

Pastor Paul Jackson

[music: "Only Jesus"]

Good morning! It is great to see all of you here this morning, and to those of you joining us online, welcome. No matter where you find yourself sitting this morning we are here to worship the God of the Bible together, and that is a great place to be.

There are two outreach opportunities we want to share with you this morning. The first is right here in Vancouver, in downtown Vancouver, at Fish Food Pantry. Fish is focused on serving emergency food needs for homeless and hungry families and individuals. Many of you know James Fitzferald, who attends here; he is the executive director of Fish and has shared with us their need for volunteers. So this is a great way that we can care for the pressing needs in our community and show the tangible love of Christ.

The second outreach opportunity is one that we look forward to every fall, and one that Glenwood has participated in for many years. It is Operation Christmas Child. Operation Christmas Child starts here but then goes out around the world. We invite you to fill a shoebox, or fill many shoeboxes, with playful and practical gifts for children in need. And then those shoeboxes are going to get sent out around the world. My sister-in-law lived in an orphanage as a child, and she remembers receiving one of these shoeboxes, and those small gifts made her feel loved and cared for. And so now we have an opportunity to love and care for children around the world through these shoeboxes. The shoeboxes are a way that we can demonstrate Christ's love, and they also open a door to share the Gospel with

children. Part of Operation Christmans Child's ministry is something called the Greatest Journey, which invites children who receive those boxes to participate in a discipleship program to learn more about Jesus. So on October 18th and 25th, we will have boxes here for you to pick up and take home and fill. And if you're not able to be here on a Sunday to pick up a box, you can come by during the week and do that, or you can fill a box online. So for more information on outreach opportunities with Fish and Operation Christams Child, you can go to Glenwood's website at glenwoodcc.org. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, this morning we are thankful. We are thankful that we worship the Creator of this world and that You hold all things in Your hands. We are thankful for cleansing rain and clearer skies, for this day to worship together. We are thankful for Your world that shows us who You are. We are thankful for opportunities You give us to serve. And we pray for Fish and Operation Christmas Child and the work that they are doing in Your name, that people's needs will be met in practical ways and that they will recognize Your hands and feet at work so that their hearts are drawn to know and follow You. God, will You help us to be mindful of the people that You've put around us this week. Will You help us to speak Your love and share Your hope and speak Your truth with each person that we interact with. We pray all these things in Your name, amen.

Ben Rico:

Amen, would you stand with us as we sing in praise and thanksgiving to our great God of strength in whom there is no bondage, there are no constraints, there is true freedom in Christ.

[music: "Rescuer"]

Amen. Heavenly Father, we thank You for rescuing us. We thank You that there is no power we need to submit to. There is no power that You cannot rescue us from,

not of this world, not of the flesh, not even sin. We thank You for rescuing our hearts to Yours, we thank You for being our God who makes us Yours.

[music: "All I Have is Christ"]

Please be seated.

Pastor Paul:

Good morning. It is great to see you guys, thanks for joining us this morning and for those online, welcome. Let's take your Bibles and open to the book of Acts, Acts 23. Acts 23, this morning, we come to the end of our story in the book of Acts, we've been in it for these past months. It's a story that helps us to flourish and the story that God is writing in our own lives.

The truest of stories always have this moment in the story that gets really tense. It's a moment when the obstacles seem insurmountable and the stress really intensifies, and then you wonder how in the world is this going to turn out. Like the story of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He is anticipating the cross, wholly righteous without sin, going to become sin, anticipating becoming our sin. And on His face before the Father, this seemingly insurmountable obstacle in front of Him, "If it's possible, let this pass away, not My will, but Thine." It's like death is the insurmountable obstacle for all of us. But not for God. Jesus, we know, ascends the cross; He dies our death. And God conquers the insurmountable. He raises Jesus from the dead so that all who have faith in this Jesus now share a resurrection life and resurrection power. So the God who breathed life into Jesus, who raised Him from the dead, breathes life into us. And it's a life that we begin to live the moment we confess our faith in Jesus Christ, and it's a life that is ongoing, so that no matter where we are, no matter what the obstacles in front of us, no matter what challenges we face, there is always, for the follower of Christ, there is more life to live.

So it is with the apostle Paul in the book of Acts. The book of Acts starts with the world of Jesus telling us that He's going to give His Spirit to those who confess faith in Him, and that His Spirit would resource the follower of Christ to do what only God can do, in us and through us, that we would witness to Him and of Him and that we would take His Gospel from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the uttermost parts. And the Book of Acts is the telling of that story. The telling of the story of men and women, and children as well, who submitted, yield by faith to this Jesus Christ. And they become a part of the Jesus story, and then Jesus begins to rewrite the story of their life. So He did with the apostle Paul. The book of Acts is the telling of God's story; it's the sharing of resurrection life with the rest of the world. It has a rather abrupt ending, which we're going to get to in a little bit in Acts 28. The ending is so abrupt that it leaves us wondering, "Wait a minute, what's next?" Well, it ends the same way it began, with the telling of the Jesus story. But in between, God dramatically intervenes in the face of insurmountable obstacles so that the apostle Paul finally gets to the place and to the destination that God had envisioned for Him all along.

In Acts 23, the apostle has angered a mob of religious leaders in Jerusalem. He had shared with them that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament, that He's the one we've hoped for; He is the only legit, real hope for humanity, that He is the fulfillment of the prophets, that He is messiah who had to suffer and who had to die. And that really upset the religious elite, so that the Roman commander had to intervene and rescue Paul who's a Roman citizen. So imagine you were in protective custody, you've got these angry people who subsequently--they try to assassinate you; there are repeated efforts to assassinate Paul.

So, he's in protective custody, and it's in the middle of the night. "Is this what you envisioned for me, Lord? How did I get to this place of darkness, with all of the hostility these people who used to be my friends, who knew me when I was a boy, and now they want to take my life? I feel betrayed. What do you want from me, Lord?" And Jesus, in an extraordinary act of compassion and grace, He appears to Paul in Acts 23, and He tells Paul, "As you have been faithful to Me to share the story of the resurrected Jesus, so I will be faithful to you." You're not done yet,

there's more life to live. He tells him in verse 11. *"On the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, 'Take courage, for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.'"* I love the image of Jesus showing up to Paul. And He's with him, and His words are powerful words of comfort, that Jesus is with him, that Jesus isn't finished with him. C. S. Lewis captured that image in *The Chronicles of Narnia* where it has this Jesus-like figure, Aslan the lion, who speaks to Lucy in a moment - this little girl - speaks to her in a moment of great tension and great struggle and great difficulty--he says to Lucy, "Courage, dear heart." So, Jesus says to Paul, "Courage, Paul. I'm with you; I'm not done with you; there's more life to live. I'll be faithful to you; keep living for Me. Someday you're going to go to Rome. Don't give up; keep going."

Then Paul's escorted out of town for his own safety by cavalry and soldiers. And he is taken to Cesarea, the nerve center of the Roman garrison, and it's there that he's going to sit in a jail for two years. He's going to be tried; his prosecutors are going to be the religious leaders and the lawyers from Jerusalem who come over to Cesarea, and they appeal to one Roman governor after another to put Paul to death. Finally, in that third trial, it looks like this guy wants Paul to go back - or in the second trial - he wants Paul to go back to Jerusalem, where Paul knows, if I go back to Jerusalem, I'm going to be killed, I'm going to be killed by the religious leaders in Jerusalem. He knows them well. So he appeals to Caesar. And so the Roman governor says, "Then to Caesar you will go." So now we've gone through three different governors and three different trials, and Paul is going to go to Rome.

He's going to go to Rome. and the story is told as he gets aboard ship with a bunch of other prisoners and he starts sailing to Italy. There is a Roman centurion, a leader, a commander of men who is charged with making sure that all of these prisoners make it safely to Rome. And so they began inching their way toward Italy, and they encounter a storm. And the storm pushes them way off course, and the storm takes place over a number of days. And as they're drifting off course, you wonder now, "Is the apostle going to die?" Jesus had said, "You're going to go to Rome." He's had assassination attempt after another; he's been accused of

breaking the law; he has survived everything to date; he spent two years in prison, and now this storm has driven them off course. And the sailors take desperate measures; they're dead and they know it. It's just a matter of time. The story is told in Acts 27, if you would turn to Acts 27:22-23, in which again God, in an extraordinary act of kindness and grace, He sends a messenger to the apostle. And the messenger tells the apostle, tells Paul. "This is what's going to happen." And now Paul turns and he shares what this messenger from God has told him about their future. And the account begins in verse 22. *"I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, just the ship."* Just the money. All you're going to lose is the cargo. You're not going to lose your life. Verse 23, *"For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong--"* That is so beautiful and powerful. I belong to Him. *"The God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you and all those sailing with you.' Therefore keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on a certain island."*

And so the storm drives them toward this island, turns out to be the island of Malta. They're looking for a sandy beach to run the ship up onto the and, and they find one, and they start heading for it, and they hit the rocks, and then the waves begin to break up the ship. And then the soldiers begin to do what they are trained to do. If they are tasked with guarding a prisoner and they lose the prisoner, then they pay the price; they suffer the consequences. So they are just about ready to kill the prisoners when the Roman commander intervenes. And the centurion says, "No, we're not killing anybody today." And then he says to those who can swim, "Go to the beach." To those who can't swim, "Grab a hold of some floating debris." Everybody lives. They make it to shore. The people of Malta are welcoming and hospitable and helpful.

It's cold. It's wet. They start a fire. Paul helps build the fire. He goes to get wood and he reaches into a pile of wood, and a poisonous viper bites his hand, and the text says that this viper is dangling from his hand. Now I'm going, "Time out, time out. Dear Jesus, you told me I was going to go to Rome. Yeah, I believe I'm going

to go to Rome, but you didn't say anything about snakes. I can do shipwrecks, but I don't do snakes." Well, God has made a promise to Paul, and Jesus is going to keep His promise. But along the way, Paul experiences insurmountable obstacle, one after another. He not only survived the assassinations attempts, he not only survived drowning, he survived what the soldiers would have done - the normal protocol to kill the prisoners - and now he's made it to shore and he's survived a poisonous viper, because God has a purpose for him. He's not yet finished living. And so he leans into who Jesus is; he steps into who Jesus is, to fulfill the purpose of Jesus Christ.

They find another ship from Malta; they sail to the west coast of Italy; they land near modern-day Naples where they discover brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul didn't plant or inaugurate or start the church in Italy. When they arrived in the bay of Naples, they find these brothers and sisters in Christ who somehow--God leads them to each other and they connect, and these brothers and sisters in Christ are warm in their hospitality. These guys have just finished this long, hard journey, and what's over the hill is Rome and Caesar and who knows what else. And these believers--they gather and they encourage the apostle and those who were traveling with him.

Seven days later, they start for Rome. They start making their way toward Rome, and they receive another surprise. The word has gone ahead of them to Rome. And the word is that Paul and his traveling team are on their way to the city, and so these Christian, these followers of Jesus, they leave Rome and they go out quite a ways in advance to connect with Paul. He doesn't enter Rome alone. He enters Rome in the companionship of other followers of Jesus Christ. He enters Rome in the company of the redeemed. Verse 15-16 of Acts 28, it says this, "*The brethren, when they heard about us, came from there as far as the Market of Appius and the Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.*"

That is the power of a follower of Christ, to so encourage somebody else who is in deep weeds or stressful circumstances, that these believers would take the initiative

and the effort to go out to meet him after this long and arduous and dangerous, high-risk journey, all the way to Rome where he's going to be again in a very challenging and difficult venue and environment. And when these followers of Jesus, when their presence is with him, he thanks God, and he encourages them. That's the privilege of every follower of Christ, that in our presence--that we can encourage others. One of the great benefits about encouraging others is for the moment. It takes our eyes off of our own predicament, or our own struggles, or our own worries or anger, or whatever else is firing off inside of our heart and our minds. So now these people, they make the effort to meet him. And now, like a victory parade, the redeemed walk together into Rome. And Paul finally arrives where Jesus had predicted he would someday arrive.

So Paul arrives in Rome, and he's guarded by elite troops, but he's allowed to have his own lodging for which he pays, and he's also allowed to have visitors. So he takes a vacation for all of three days after this trip; he takes a little bit of a break. And then he invites the local Jewish leaders in Rome to visit him. So these would be people who would be trained in the Law and the Prophets. They would be people from Paul's tribe, who's language he speaks, who's history he knows as well as do they. He calls these Jewish leaders into his presence; they come. And he says to them, "I was falsely accused by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. I was falsely accused of breaking our laws, but the Romans found me not guilty and they wish to set me free. But, threatened by the Jews, I appealed to Caesar, and so I arrive in Rome a prisoner. But I don't hold a grudge against our people. I am, though, a prisoner because I shared with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem about the hope of Israel. I shared with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem about Jesus the Messiah who suffered and died and is raised from the dead."

So we see the account in 17-22. *"After three days Paul called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they had come together, he began saying to them, 'Brethren, though I had nothing against our people or the customs of our father, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there was no ground for putting me to death. But when the Jews objected, I was*

forced to appeal to Caesar, not that I had any accusation against my nation. For this reason, therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel.” Now they respond to him. *“They said to him, ‘We have neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren come here and reported of anything bad about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect’”* - the Christians - *“it is known to us that is spoken against everywhere.”*

In other words, in Rome, word on the street is that the Christians were not respected; even worse, they were despised. There is an ancient Roman historian named Tacitus, who was born in 80 AD. That’s approximately twenty years or less after the ending of the book of Acts. The book of Acts ended probably somewhere between 60-62 AD. And Tacitus wrote a history of Rome - it’s called *The Annals* - in which he would have been able to interview people who were alive in Rome in 60 or 62 AD. And Tacitus writes of Nero, who was the emperor of the day, that there was a group of people living in Rome who were quote: “despised by the populace.” They were Christians, so named, he says, “after Christus, who was executed under Pontius Pilate.” So in 60-62 AD, there is this sentiment in the city against believers. Persecution was not yet organized by the government in 60-62 AD. It was just this organic bias against followers of Jesus. But Nero, to blame the burning of Rome on the Christians, launched an organized and horrific, nightmarish persecution in the mid 60’s against Christians and tried to exterminate believers in the worst of ways. So the organized persecution of Christians had not yet begun in Acts 28, but it is soon to begin. Meanwhile, what you have is this organic sentiment among the citizenry of Rome against followers of Christ. So essentially these religious leaders, they say “We’re going to give you an opportunity to persuade us, but you’re starting from a deep hole, because we already know about these other Christians in the city, and they’re not well thought of.”

So they make an appointment and they set a day. They set a day to bring the Jewish people to Paul’s lodging, and they’re going to give Paul an opportunity. And he takes the opportunity and starts early in the morning, and he tries to persuade them late into the evening. And we find exactly what he tried to persuade them of

in verse 23. *"When they had set a date for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening."* He talks to them about the kingdom of God; the King has arrived; the King has come. The High King of Heaven has come to earth and He has begun the kingdom on earth in the hearts of men and women and children and students who confess their faith in Jesus Christ. So He has announced His kingdom; the King has arrived; His kingdom is growing, expanding. The day is yet coming, yet future, when His kingdom will be visible on earth. So Paul explains the kingdom, the King to those who long for the King. They hope for the Messiah. They pray that the Messiah will arrive. He explains about the kingdom, and he tries to persuade them about Jesus. So, from the law, he could have talked about Deuteronomy and that figure greater than Moses that is fulfilled in Jesus, Jesus Messiah. He could have talked from Psalm 22 about the suffering Messiah, which is this blow-by-blow description of the cross that Jesus was hung on, crucified on. He could have gone from Isaiah 53, from the Prophets. The whole Old Testament is packed with all of these definitive statements about the Messiah that were made centuries before the arrival and fulfillment of the Messianic Promise in and through Jesus Christ. So Paul tries to persuade them.

The response is in verse 24. *"Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe."* And verse 25, *"When they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, 'The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the Prophet to your fathers.'"* So what we have is some of them were persuaded. That means they became followers of Jesus Christ. But still a critical mass of those who were listening, they rejected; they willfully chose not to believe the Gospel that Paul had communicated from the Bible, from the Old Testament, and they have willfully rejected Jesus. So they're walking out the door, and Paul says, "Just a minute. I have one final word to say. It's nothing new. It was said by the Holy Spirit almost 800 years ago, and it was said to the prophet Isaiah."

There is a moment in Isaiah 6 where Isaiah the prophet has this encounter with the glory of God. And this encounter with the glory of God so cuts him to the bone, so terrifies him, that he falls on his face, aware of the greatness, the goodness, the glory, the beauty of God, and aware of his own brokenness, aware of his own sin. He knows that God wants a messenger to send to God's people. And Isaiah says, "I'm not qualified. I'm not qualified because I'm a man of unclean lips. My mouth is not clean enough to share the good news of Your Gospel with Your people." In His grace, God sends an angelic messenger with a burning coal, touching his lips, cleansing his mouth, so that he can be set aside to be used for God's purposes. And so Isaiah says, "You want somebody? Here am I; send me."

Now Paul quotes what Isaiah said. Paul now quotes what the Spirit of God told Isaiah to say of His people. And this shows us the terrifying, tragic judgement and consequence of choosing to reject Jesus Christ. When people repeatedly refuse God's offer of grace and salvation in and through Jesus, they experience, eventually, a judgement that Isaiah describes, that Paul now announces on these people who've heard about Jesus and are walking out the door. And that judgement is, because you have rejected Jesus, your understanding will be limited; you won't see; you won't hear. *"Go to this people," - to Isaiah - "and say, 'You will keep on hearing, but you will not understand; and you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them.'"*

Most important action any one of us in this room can take, anyone listening online can take right now, is to say "yes" by faith to God through his Son Jesus Christ, not to close the door of your heart, not to turn away from Him. Continued rejection of God's grace leads to a divine judgement and hardened hearts. The Gospel of God is summed up in Jesus Christ. And God is going to send His Gospel to people who will listen, to people who will open their heart, that will confess their faith in Jesus, that will respond to God's salvation offer, summed up in and through Jesus. This Jesus who died and who was raised to share His life for us. So Paul announces in 28 and

29, *"Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen." When he had spoken these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves.*" Some of those Jews have confessed their faith in Jesus and have a right and true relationship with God. They walk out the door; they're going to be a witness to who He is in their world and their life. But now God announces that this mission, this Gospel summed up in Jesus, is going to go to the world. It's going to go to people who will hear, who will experience God's call and conviction, and lean into who Jesus is and respond to who He is.

So here's how the book ends; here's how the story ends, verse 30-31. *"He stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered."* The book ends the same way that it begins. Jesus is going to send His Spirit to do the work in us that only God can do. He's going to send people who are cooperating with the Spirit of God, and the Word of God, with the Gospel of God summed up Jesus around the world to the uttermost part of the world. Jesus has kept His promise to Paul; He has kept His promise to the apostles, and He is still keeping His promises to us.

Well, what happened next? I want to know the rest of the story! What happened to Paul? He's been in prison two years. Well, the Patristics, those early followers of Jesus, they also wrote records of what they understood the rest of the story is. So the end of Acts, Acts 28, happens at about 60-62 AD. Well, next week, we're going to start the book of I Peter. And I Peter, written by the apostle Peter, it was written about the same time, within a year or two, of Acts 28. The Patristics, they say that when Nero launched his organized government persecution of Christians, that the apostle Paul was let out onto the Appian Way, and there he was beheaded. And that the apostle Peter was crucified, but crucified upside down, as Jesus predicted he would be crucified, that Peter would be crucified in John 21; it's later fulfilled. Only Peter says, "I'm not worthy to be crucified right-side up," This is what the church fathers say about the death of Peter. But that didn't happen for another five or six years. So the Patristics, they believe that the apostle spent two years here in prison

in Rome and was released, and they then - well, Paul - went to Spain, to the Western regions of Spain, later returning to Rome where he was re-arrested in the organized persecution against believers. And that's when the apostle wrote II Timothy to his protege, and II Timothy 4 are the last recorded words of the apostle, who says, "*I have fought the good fight. I have kept the faith. I have finished my course.*"

But Paul doesn't waste the opportunity imprisonment gives to him. During his two full years, he's telling anybody and everybody who's going to come, "Come, come in here, come and see, come and listen, this is who Jesus is." But he's doing more than that. He's starting to write letters, letter after letter, letters that were inspired by the Spirit of God. They're called the Prison Epistles. Epistles like Phillipians, And they tell us Paul's mindset in prison. They tell us what he's doing, and how he would have us to think, and how he would have us to live, so that the prison epistles offer all this insight into this two-year period that we can learn these lessons from the apostle who is prisoner of Christ. What kind of lessons? Well, turn with me to Phillipians 4 and I'll just share a few that are so timely and appropriate to us. The book of Phillipians is about joy, he writes it from prison during this two years period. He tells people to rejoice, to rejoice in the Lord, not just today, not just yesterday, but always. He says it again and again and again, "*I say to you rejoice.*"

So what can we learn from Paul about his two year stint in prison? Well, first, we can learn this: Pray about everything. Phillipians 4:6-7, "*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and mind in Christ Jesus.*" Pray about what? Pray about snakes and shipwrecks. Pray for others, pray about others, pray for the Gospel of God, pray for people's hearts to be soft and yielding and responsive to the Word of God and the Gospel of God. Pray for our government. Pray for leaders and those in positions of authority, so that we can live a peaceful and quiet life. Don't be anxious for anything. Be grateful for who God is. From prison. Thank God for His goodness to us.

Second lesson that we can learn from the apostle who is prisoner of Christ is: think right and pure thoughts. Verse 8, *"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."* This is the cure for Covid, right here. There is a lot we can't control. There's a lot that others say and do that we have no influence over; we can't shape it. But we do have control over our thoughts. We do have control over what we read and what we watch and what we listen to. We have control over what we think. Be wise in what we see, what we think, what we hear. Bathe in God's Word. God's Word, God's thoughts, God's Spirit is encouraging. life-giving, corrective. So that we can think that which is right and true and good and, he says, that which is worthy of praise. Praise to God for the good that He is and the good that He does.

What else can we learn on Paul's dime from prison? Well, we can trust God to help us obey His will. Verse 13, *"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."* So many of us abuse this verse. I have. I have abused it. I was in highschool; I was a triple jumper. And I'd stand down at the end of the runway, getting ready to take my jump, and I'm rocking back and forth, and I'm praying that God will help me, and I'm praying this verse, that I can break the school record, "God, You're going to help me fly!" And that's not what it's about. It's about verse 12. In verse 12, he said, "I have learned to be content in times of abundance." When he's just flush. He is flush with life, with food, with housing, with all of these tangible blessings and the goodness of God, and he doesn't covet what anybody else has; he doesn't want more. He is content. He is content in times of abundance and then in times of loss. Loss--relationships, people we love, income. He has learned to be content, whether he's flush or hurting. That's what verse 13 is about. Whatever, wherever God leads me for His purpose and His cause, I can do it. I have the Spirit of God within. I have the Word of God. We have other followers of Christ. So Paul, in prison, not limited by the chains that he wears, *"I can do all things."* I mean, he's not complaining about this. *"I can do all things."*

Fourth lesson, let's trust God for our true good. Verse 19, "*And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*" We don't understand all that God is and does. It's normal for us to wonder, "God, why this? Why now?" God knows; God is good. God always does that which is good for us, and the good He does for us is not at the expense of the good for other followers of Christ. His good is understood by Him and His intent for us, and He knows what our needs are in the moment so that He will provide all of our true and legitimate good. Paul didn't waste the opportunity that prison provided. He shows us that, in spite of circumstances that would make it so easy for me to complain about, in spite of those circumstances, he leans into who Jesus is. And He is God with us. He is with us. He provides for us, and He provides for us out of the super-abundant riches and goodness of Jesus, so that we can trust Him because of who He is. That we can trust Him with all we are and all we have, not just for our own good, but also for the good of others, also for the good of the Gospel, and for the glory of God.

Will you bow with me please?

Father, thank You for Your kindness to us in and through Jesus. Thank You for sending Jesus. Jesus, thank You for being obedient and loving to the Father and loving to us, and thank You that You are with us right now. Though we can't see You, we love You. We look forward to life with You in Your presence, but now we ask You, would You strengthen us for the day. That You would soften our heart, that we would speak with gratitude and words of praise, that we would thank You for the good that You're doing, and that we would be people of courage that would be faithful to you today and everyday while we still live. We pray for our country, we pray for the choices before us as a people and as a nation. We ask that, in spite of our broken human condition, that You would humble leaders, that they would seek You, that they would seek Your wisdom, that they would be courageous in the doing of that which is right. And that You would give us wisdom to know how we can as citizens do our part. Thank You that we're ultimately citizens of Heaven. That we have a sure and certain hope of a life with You. But thank You for the life that You give right now in this moment. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Ben Rico:

Amen, would you stand with us as we praise the God of strength who opens hearts, who allows us to hear and understand and know the salvation in Christ.

[music: "Mighty to Save"]

Amen. Go in peace, experience the peace that guards the heart of the followers of Christ.