

A Divine Assault

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[0 : 0 0] weeks in Philippians chapter 1, so that's where we'll continue today. And it'll be starting in verse 12. So turn your Bibles there or in your worship guide. I'll be reading from the English Standard Version, but read from what your version is or from the worship guide. But for those who are visiting, first of all, welcome. Thank you for being here. If you don't know a whole lot about us at Cheyenne Mountain, we're a Reformed church, which means we talk, means among other things, we talk a lot about the sovereignty of God. And why do we do that? Well, first of all, because it's true. And we remember, well, for instance, we remember the catechism question, question 11. What are God's works of providence? God's works of providence, maybe by the end of this morning you'll have this memorized, God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions. That's what we mean by the sovereignty of God. The sovereignty of God is what provides for us, for his people. And that comes from the Bible. The principle that we get from the catechism comes from the scriptures. Hebrews 1.3, for instance, he upholds, Christ upholds the universe by the word of his power. And in Matthew 10.30, Jesus put it in more earthy terms. He said, even all the hairs of your head are numbered. And if it's true, it should be comforting to us, right? If a good God is ruling all things, that ought to be a comfort to us. Because after all, God reveals his sovereignty to us for the purpose of our comfort. But it also has two sides to it. There's a positive side and a negative side to God's providence. And for this reason, I think sometimes it's not all that comforting when you're going through suffering to be reminded of God's sovereignty and his providence. We have a hard time being comforted with this sometimes. The positive side, of course, is easy to remember.

It's what we talked about two weeks ago, Philippians 1.6. Paul says, I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus. But there's the negative side. What the word of God also said to Paul, and this was to Ananias, before Paul's experience of conversion, where God stopped him on the road to Damascus, God revealed to Ananias, the preacher who was going to preach to Paul, what was about to happen to Paul. And this is from Acts 19. This is God's providence to Paul. The Lord said in Acts 9.16, I will show him how much he must suffer for my name. And Paul reminded that to us, to the Roman church in the first century, where he said in Romans 8, we are the children of God, provided that we suffer with him. So that aspect of God's providence, God's preserving and governing, sometimes is not all that comforting. But in this passage, Paul is telling the church, he's saying, in my suffering,

I've seen both sides. I've seen the positive and the negative side. And the Spirit of God desires for us to see it too, that through Paul's life, we can understand both sides of God's providence when we go through suffering. Paul wrote this letter, sharing his testimony to the Philippian church, so that they might be steeled for the time of suffering. We know intuitively that it's easier to understand and bask in God's providence before we go through a time of suffering, rather than in the time of suffering, when your well-meaning Christian brothers and sisters say, this is all for a purpose.

This is all in God's hands. We understand the difference, don't we? In one case, I find it more easy to be comforted. In another case, I might actually be annoyed because I don't see God's hand.

I don't understand what God is doing. But Philippians 1 teaches us, using the example of Paul, that the Lord is governing your suffering and he's preserving you in it. I like the way John put it.

[3 : 54] Sometimes God doesn't calm the storm, he calms his child in the storm. Preserving and governing are both aspects of God's providence. So let's look at the passage here, Philippians chapter 1.

It starts in verse 12 and I'll read through verse 18. This is the word of the Lord. I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am 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. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed. And in that I rejoice. May the Lord add his blessing to the reading and to the careful hearing of his word today. Amen. So what happened to Paul in verse 12? He doesn't go into details in the book of Philippians, but there's a lot that happened to Paul in his life and ministry on earth. Let's just start a little bit of a list from Paul's own record. He was whipped five times by the Jews, beaten with rods at least three times, and stoned once by the Gentiles.

He was shipwrecked, left adrift at sea for a day and a night. He was imprisoned at least twice, probably three times. So what is Paul referring to here when he says, what has happened to me has served to advance the gospel? The context around Philippians and where Paul is in prison, probably in Rome, around 62 AD, that imprisonment started, the record started back in Acts 20, where he went to prison in Jerusalem because the Jews inside of the Romans saying that this guy Paul was teaching another king besides Caesar. So that imprisonment really started several years ago in Jerusalem, and Paul was a prisoner all the way to Rome to where he writes this letter. So what has happened to Paul is probably this, his imprisonment starting from Jerusalem up to the time of his writing. While imprisoned by the Romans on charges that the Jewish leaders couldn't prove, he made an appeal to Caesar. That's why they brought him to Rome. That was his right as a Roman citizen. Remember, this is an important fact for Philippians. Paul was a Roman citizen, right, which changed the talk, changed the dynamic, changed the way he was in prison. He was in prison in a form of house arrest, right, given the privileges of a Roman citizen. So he was sent to Rome, shipwrecked on the way, and it's from his imprisonment or that house arrest that he writes of what happened to him.

And he says about that in verse 12, I want you to know that what's happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. And it's explained how that gospel is advanced in verses 15 and 16, where he says, essentially, my imprisonment had the same effect on my adversaries and on my brothers and sisters, because both were emboldened to proclaim Christ. And that's kind of a perplexing effect, isn't it?

Only God's providence can do a thing like this, right? Advance the gospel through Paul's enemies and through the brothers and sisters who are actually in Christ. So they were, first of all, in verse 15 and 16, those who loved Paul were proclaiming Christ more boldly and without fear.

[7 : 29] And why would that be? Well, the principle I think we can draw from this is that when others see your devotion, it has the effect of strengthening them. Though Paul was removed from his brothers and sisters, they were strengthened. They no longer had their evangelist. Paul was the apostle given the gifts of evangelism in Philippi and in Rome. He was removed from them. But what did the brothers and sisters do? They didn't say, I don't have an evangelist anymore. What do we do? No, they were emboldened. The Spirit of God was in them too. They didn't have the same gifts as Paul did, but now they had a vacuum, a vacuum that the Holy Spirit can fill, though their apostle was not present with them.

So when others see your devotion, it has the effect of strengthening others. So when you face perplexing difficulty, but you still see God's graciousness in it, you embolden the rest of us.

For instance, when you see a brother or sister who loses their job or loses a promotion because they hold on to their integrity, I look at that and I'm strengthened. I'm emboldened because I saw your strength giving glory to God. When you see a brother or sister forgive at great personal cost to them, and keep in mind, real forgiveness always, always comes at personal cost, and then their forgiveness is rewarded with further insult, but they persist in forgiving, well, that emboldens the rest of us.

We are able to forgive more boldly and better when we see you doing it. When you face degenerative illness, when you face the death of a spouse, and you remain an example of praying and encouraging others, you embolden us. You embolden your brothers and sisters in Christ when we see you, when we see God's grace working through you. So those who loved Paul were emboldened by his example. Paul was holding fast in prison, and it had the effect of strengthening the brothers. And then on the other hand, there were those who envied him. They preached, Paul says, for ambition's sake, for envy's sake, and to afflict him.

It's like they were preaching in order to goad Paul in a negative way, to afflict him. Now there is reason for this, for those in power in Roman Philippi to be envious of Paul and his influence.

[9 : 58] Paul had cultural influence. Remember how Paul and Silas were treated in Thessalonica? This is from Acts 17, if you want to turn there. I'll read it. But Paul and Silas were in Thessalonica preaching and starting to gain influence, not only in the synagogues, but among the Greeks and the Romans. I'm going to read Acts 17. This is starting in verse 4.

And some of them, the them is the Jews in the synagogue in Thessalonica, were persuaded by Paul's preaching and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous. And taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.

And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the authorities, shouting, These men have turned the world upside down and have come here also. And Jason has received them. And they're all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king, Jesus.

This is a crime in Rome, right? To say there is another king. But they say they're acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king, Jesus. And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And the city authorities in Thessalonica were rightly disturbed. Paul and Silas were undermining the whole system of Caesar worship in the Roman colonies.

Now, was something like that happening in Rome? It seems as if it is. It stands to reason that it's something like this, given Paul's words. So while he was in prison, Paul's adversaries, as we saw in Thessalonica, would try to stir up the people by drawing them to the offense that Paul was preaching.

[11 : 37] They would say something like this, Do you know, have you heard in the marketplace or in the imperial guard, have you heard this preacher, Paul, this Roman citizen, and what he's been saying? He says, The divine Caesar has no right to call himself Lord. That there is another king, this Jesus.

And he talks about all these Jewish prophecies, supposedly about this Jesus. Now, the Romans were superstitious. They were into prophecy. So that would have caused a stir when he says, there are prophecies about this king Jesus. And that usurps all the Roman prophecies that say, this Caesar is Lord, right? All the omens that the Romans worshipped that all wound up somehow supporting Caesar worship. And he says, they would say, this man, this Jesus, having been crucified. And again, crucified would have a particularly emotional meaning for the Romans.

Many of them had seen crucifixions. They knew the shame of the crucifix. He says, this man, having been crucified, rose from the dead and appeared to him. So they said all these things, or things like them, in order to stir people up, to get them angry about the usurpation of Roman worship that Paul was advocating. But what were they doing to do it? They were proclaiming the truth of the gospel, weren't they? They were proclaiming Christ in order to get at Paul. And did the guards who were chained with Paul in his imprisonment, this is a form of house arrest, remember, did they challenge Paul about that controversy? When they heard the talk, did they ask Paul, did you actually say these things? Did you as a Roman citizen just reject Caesar as your Lord? So what a beautiful opportunity for someone like Paul to share the gospel. Oh, for those opportunities for us, when there's no formulating and agonizing over the strategy for opening up the conversation to spiritual things, you don't have to have a strategy, they just start coming to you. Did you really defy

Caesar as Lord? And what does a guy like Paul say? Well, yes. Yeah, I guess I did, right? I did defy Caesar as Lord. And let me tell you why. And then as Paul was wont to do, he explained the word of the Lord to them. And there were brethren in Rome among the population. They were emboldened as well from verse 14. They heard the talk, and people in the marketplace, and people, brethren, in Caesar's household would hear that talk, and the Romans would come to the brethren and say, did you hear?

Do you hear what's going on? Did you hear about this preacher who is imprisoned and he's defying Caesar? They would respond to those people in the market and in the imperial guard, well, yes, I've heard that. And I say it as well. I defy Caesar as Lord. I worship this King Jesus. Let me tell you why.

[14 : 30] So you can see how that would embolden the people. They don't have to find a strategy for opening the conversation. The talk is the talk. The talk is about the apostle and his message. And in essence, those brethren, they didn't have the evangelistic power, the talents of Paul, but all they had to say was, yeah, me too. I worship this King Jesus. They could more easily overcome their intimidation by just identifying with Paul. When you say, you know what Paul said. You know what he said about the prophecies, about this Christ who was crucified and risen, who is the true King, the one true King.

And I, too, call Jesus my only Lord. We don't know exactly what that talk was, but we do know that in God's providence, his amazing providence, he strategically set up Paul in a prison.

So not just the brethren, but the gospel's enemies would be emboldened. Because in both cases, the Lord is working it out that the gospel was preached more broadly and more boldly than before.

So we might say that God actually governed Paul's imprisonment for the express purpose of advancing the gospel. Now, how unfair does that sound? That you're the servant, the chosen instrument of God, chosen to be imprisoned. Is that a good way? Is that the way a good God treats his instruments?

Shouldn't the sacrifices involved in serving God be rewarded by him with blessing? Well, good question. It was one that the Philippians were asking. They were asking about, why have we lost our beloved apostle? How can this be advancing God's purposes? If our apostle, the one who is preaching to the world, converted Philippi, Thessalonica, the Jews everywhere in the synagogues, now he's in prison. He's taken away from his mission of evangelism. How can this advance the gospel? Well, there's at least one family that Paul wrote to in Philippi. They knew exactly what the Lord was doing. They knew exactly how God could use an imprisonment. When Paul told the Philippians that it's become known that my imprisonment is for Christ, verse 13. There was this one family in the Philippian church that could testify to those strange and amazing ways that the Lord uses his servants. Let me tell you a story from Acts chapter 16. Several years before Paul's imprisonment in Rome, Paul was in prison with Silas in Philippi, and there was a jailer. After Paul and Silas were causing these riots, the official said to the jailer, lock them up tight. These are rioters. So he was given a strict charge by the magistrates to keep the rioters secure in prison. So he fastened them in the stocks and put them in the inner room of the prisons to keep them extra secure. And he did his job well. He held them fast in the stocks in the inner prison. Then in the darkest part of the night, the Lord sent an earthquake, and he shook the prison to the foundations, and the prison doors broke open, and Paul and Silas's bonds were unfastened. The prison guard, the jailer, thinking that his charges were just escaping, ran in to check on them, and he knew immediately that these prisoners were under the care of the

[17 : 46] God of creation. And what was the simple, beautiful response of the Philippian jailer when he saw what had just happened? And these apostles, Paul and the disciple Silas, were still in the prison.

Seeing this, he begged, sirs, what must I do to be saved? And he wasn't talking about being saved from the Romans by, you know, letting prisoners loose. He became known, the power of God became known to him. And he responded, sirs, what must I do to be saved? And on hearing the word of the Lord from Paul and Silas, that jailer and his whole family were baptized. They became part of the church in Philippi, and it stands to reason that they're sitting there as Paul's letters being read to the church in Philippi with a knowing glance, as the rest of the church in Philippi struggles with why would our God put his apostle in prison? Well, the jailer knew, didn't he? How do you think this jailer reacted to Paul's words when Paul says, what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel? And it has become known that my imprisonment is for Christ. Do you think a knowing smile kind of crossed his face? Do you think he said to the brothers and sisters in Philippi, I remember when

Paul was my prisoner. I remember what God did with that. And praise God that the Lord's apostle was shut up in my prison because it changed that jailer's life. It changed the life of his family. It was the greatest day of their lives. They were brought into the kingdom of God as a result of the apostles imprisonment. Was he able to encourage the rest of the church at Philippi? When they heard the letter and they were in anguish, Paul is in prison. What's going to happen? Did the jailer say, just relax?

Let's see what the Lord does with this. It's happened before. He more than anything and anyone else knew that the Lord he now knew could bring Paul out of prison at any time he wanted. And he more than anyone else knew that prison walls and shackles were nothing to the God of creation. So if Paul was in there, it's because God wished it to be so. If Paul remained in prison, it was by the plan of God.

Just watch what happens, the jailer might say to his brethren. He could have written the words that we read this morning that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, for the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

[20 : 17] In other words, watch. Watch what the Lord seems to take in these hopeless circumstances and bring about a salvation that you could not have predicted. But as for the rest of the believers in Philippi, they probably had a little more trouble taking encouragement from Paul's words. It didn't seem like the ideal circumstance, the way a sovereign God would work to them. Even the preaching of the gospel was being done by selfishly ambitious rivals, and they were winning, right? Remember how Paul's story ends. His rivals actually win, right? They get him executed. The hard part for the Philippians and for us is that in order to watch and wait for the Lord to reveal his glory and his purposes through suffering, we have to stare it in the face. We have to prolong, take a look at suffering, staring it in the face, waiting, waiting in the midst of suffering for God's glory to be revealed. You might be waiting for the length of Paul's imprisonment, which was probably a couple years or less. You might be waiting the length of time that Daniel waited in Babylon, a seven-year wait for God's glory to be revealed in an imprisonment. In Matthew's series on Ruth, we understood that God takes our suffering and uses it for his plan of redemption. And after hearing Paul's testimony, we also can say now that

God sometimes makes our suffering specifically for his plan of redemption. Paul knew it well. The Lord announced it. As I said before, on the day he brought him low on the road to Damascus, when he was speaking to Ananias, the one who shared the message with Paul that laid his hands on Paul, and healed him. The secret that he revealed to Ananias, that he was about to reveal to Paul, was I will show him how much he must suffer for my name. That was the sovereign plan of God.

Then what did the Lord do? On the road, he took Paul, he knocked him off his horse, metaphorically speaking, I don't know if he was riding a horse, and blinded him. But this, I'll call it a divine assault, was the greatest day of Paul's life, in retrospect.

But in that moment, it was just the beginning of a life of suffering. Imagine what an experience like that does to your perspective. In one moment, Paul knew exactly what he was to do with his life.

He had the letters from the synagogue, he had a mission, he knew exactly what he was supposed to do, and he was on that mission. With certainty. The next moment, his face is in the dirt, and his certainty has just evaporated.

[22 : 59] Oh, and he's blind. That's the way God changes our perspective. What kind of advance of God's kingdom was that? Well, it was impossible for Paul to know, but we have a phrase in our modern times to describe it.

It's called a road to Damascus experience. Coincidentally. Not coincidentally. It's when the, we have a name for it, and that name means when the Lord advances his agenda by setting you back on your heels.

But what it also is, it's the thing that the Lord does when he wants us to stop worrying about what's likely to happen and remember what the Lord is able to do.

In Rome, what was likely to happen to Paul? What was likely to happen is his adversaries would eventually win. Because remember, Paul was what they accused him of.

He did commit the crime, namely proclaiming another king besides Caesar. And the people, the Romans, were stirring him up, stirring up the Roman officials, and that's a pretty good strategy.

[24 : 04] It was bound to work. But Paul now had this knowledge, this experience, that shaped his present attitude in the circumstance. How did he react? What was his attitude?

Well, it wasn't what his adversaries were doing, envying and afflicting. There was no envy. There was no envy for those who were gaining influence, gaining influence at his expense while he was in prison.

There's no consideration even for his own affliction. He didn't describe to the Philippians that, you know, the shackles, the sores, the hunger, the filth. None of that is in the letter of Philippi.

There's just encouragement to his brethren. He didn't remember himself in his affliction, even knowing the irksome fact that the accusations that were brought to him were actually true. He did deny Caesar as Lord, and that meant his adversaries were likely to win.

They sought his death, and they would probably get it. But in reality, what Paul also knew is his death was already done. He wrote to the Galatians with these words, Galatians 2:20, he says, I have been crucified with Christ.

[25 : 08] It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

For Paul, his life was already over. What life remained to him belonged to Christ. So Paul took heart simply that God is using that life well.

He's using it to advance the gospel, whether it means good times or bad for Paul, and he had a lot of both. Okay, so that's fine for the road to Damascus types, right?

But what about those of us who live a more mundane Christian existence? When God does his work through our affliction, let's admit it, his hand can feel heavy.

He will work his power through our affliction, and his hand will feel heavy upon us. Romans 8, verses 16 to 18, reminds us, the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided that we suffer with him, in order that we may also be glorified with him.

[26 : 23] For I consider the sufferings of this present time not to be worthy to compare with the glory that is to be revealed in us. So you see, God's hand is so heavy that according to Paul's words in Romans, we can't even call ourselves part of his kingdom unless we're willing to suffer with him.

But did Paul, like us, ever feel like he was being crushed by the weight of what God was doing to him? Another way of asking that question, was Paul still human?

Did he still have the why me question come into his mind, occasionally at least? Because God did actually have a sort of conspiracy to advance his mission through his enemies, through Paul's affliction, and through who was his enemy, Saul of Tarsus.

Remember this again, what Paul, what the Lord spoke about his enemy at the time Saul of Tarsus, I will show him how much he must suffer for my name. Does God ever prepare an assault like that for us?

If so, it's the very best kind of assault we can hope for. It means that God's care for us is of this kind, that he will take it upon himself to overwhelm us by force, to make us effective instruments for him.

[27 : 44] Remember, before Paul was assaulted by the risen Christ, he was, as Acts 9 describes him, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. So for his own sake, for Paul's own sake, he desperately needed to be overwhelmed.

He desperately needed to be set back on his heels in a road to Damascus experience. And he'll do that for us. He'll throw us off our horse in a manner of speaking.

If that could be true of Paul, it can be true of us. He'll yank from us our evil ambitions. And in that vacuum, he will replace in us a heart that is never satisfied with enough love for its new master.

He'll replace our satisfaction in our evil ambitions with a dissatisfaction that never has enough love for our master. We may find ourselves suffering under this kind of divine assault.

So be prepared when it happens and when unbelievers come to ask you, like the Imperial Guard might have asked Paul, do you really believe your God means you to go through this?

[28 : 54] You, right upstanding citizen, you, compassionate person, you who comes to worship, you who speaks of Christ all the time, do you really believe that your God means for you to go through this?

Now, you're probably not the evangelist that Paul was and the good news is you don't have to be. You don't need eloquence or a quick wit. Your unbelieving acquaintances, they'll come to you as it became known about Paul that my imprisonment is for Christ and they'll ask you how you can suffer and endure with joy.

So be ready. Be ready to stare suffering in the face because you are patiently expecting God's glory to be revealed in some way. Without knowing how patient you have to be, without knowing how long it's going to take, that's your lot.

Your role is just to be patient and expect. Expect in faith knowing that it's going to happen. In seven years or 70, God's glory will be revealed.

Paul says this to the Corinthians, but we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We're afflicted in every way, but not crushed.

[30 : 10] We're perplexed, but not driven to despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed.

Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. The brethren Paul wrote to were afflicted, but not crushed.

Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed. Because Christ was crushed. He was forsaken.

He was destroyed to the point of death. And our sufferings are what carry the body of this death, the death of Jesus, so that others can see the life of Jesus as well through us and have life in his name.

So can God use evil to accomplish his redemptive work? Well, yes. And not only that, it's the singular expression about how God's sovereignty actually works over all events of history.

[31 : 18] And that's really when we mean God is sovereign over everything, it's easy to believe God is sovereign over what is good. What takes effort and takes concentration and takes submission and takes the Holy Spirit is to believe that God is sovereign over the things that are not good.

When we say God is sovereign over all events of history, it's the evil ones that we stick on. So I can't look around the world and say, well, that's good. I can see God at work there.

And then this is evil. God is not here. If I don't see God at work in either case, well, perhaps I can't.

Perhaps I can't see what God is doing in good or evil. But let's not be so naive as to say, God is at work here in the good but not here in the evil. Because if he's sovereign over all, he is sovereign over all.

In fact, Paul's measuring stick as he shows us in Philippians in terms of whether to respond with joy or mourning in any circumstance, whether that circumstance was good or evil, was not the good or evil of the circumstance.

[32 : 22] It was this. Does it cause Christ to be proclaimed? It was a simple formula. Good or evil, does it cause Christ to be proclaimed? And in that, he took joy.

Whether it was from goodwill or evil, does it cause Christ to be proclaimed? Because our Lord specializes in taking great evils and turning them around for his glory.

Remember, the greatest of all evils was what Paul wrote about, what happened to Christ. And this is the meaning of what happened to Christ as Paul gives it to us in 2 Corinthians 5:21.

He made him who knew to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might have the righteousness of God. God took the most offensive evil, the most offensive sin ever committed by man, the murder of God's own son, and ordained it for his glory.

If that doesn't show proof positive of God's sovereignty over evil, there is nothing that does. Because God took the most evil in the world, manifested in one act in the first century, and turned it around to the greatest glory that any of us will ever know.

[33 : 37] So take your cue from our Lord's suffering. Because our Lord also considered suffering his own personal anguish as small compared to the purposes that God was revealing in them. Jesus, when he was speaking to his disciples, his crucifixion was coming.

But what was on Jesus' mind when speaking about his coming crucifixion, he told his disciples, don't let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms.

If it were not so, I would have told you that I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself that where I am, you may be also.

That was on our Lord's mind when he was about to suffer this affliction. That's the spirit that he gave Paul to encourage the church when he goes through suffering so that we, the Philippians, as well as we, might be emboldened.

And let's be clear that I'm not saying that all suffering is good. This letter to the Philippians is not telling us that all things that we endure are good, only that we can trust the Lord in his providence to govern it, even for his glory.

[34 : 47] Because Paul endured some bad suffering. What Jesus endured was the greatest injustice humanity has ever exacted on another person. And we also may endure bad suffering.

But I will say that in this suffering, it's a step forward in God's plan. It's not a retreat. In Paul's case, the Lord didn't look down from heaven and say, oh, Paul's in prison.

What do I do now? I have to work this somehow in order to accomplish my purposes. He didn't say that. He ordained it. He ordained it before the foundation of the world and he governed it.

He governed Paul's imprisonment. It was his means of growing his kingdom. And it's not just true for apostles and special people. It's for us. It's our encouragement to look suffering in the face because God's providence is there.

God is governing all the actions around us. What are God's works of providence? His holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions.

[35 : 50] And when I look at myself as a creature and my actions, I have a mix of both, don't I? And if we're honest with ourselves, we have to look at that principle of the catechism and say, if God is sovereign over all our actions, well, he's sovereign over sin as well.

He's sovereign over the suffering that I endure, the suffering that I impose because of my sin and the suffering that I am a victim of that afflicts me. So we can look suffering and adversity in the face knowing that every moment of it is ordained by God's providence if we can lift our eyes from our own miseries taking the example of Jesus and from Paul, lift our eyes from our own miseries and hope for what the Lord will do through his kingdom as a result.

Paul finishes this thought in verse 18 where he says, what then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.

So what then, Paul says, is as if to say, the kingdom is advancing in a way that causes much hardship for me. And what? What of it? What did you expect, Philippi?

What do you think carrying in our bodies the death of Jesus means? It's not just poetry. We are carrying in our bodies the death of Jesus. Death stinks. Death's unpleasant.

[37 : 11] Death corrupts. Don't think the Lord is waiting for your ideal circumstance for his kingdom to move because his ideal circumstance is the one that you're in right now.

He ordained this too. We can stare suffering in the face not because of some naive belief that our suffering is good but because we know that our king, Jesus, is using it as a step forward in his plan for his glory and for our good.

And yes, the governing of the Lord can be heavy on us. It's his preserving that we also need to remember as well. The hairs of your heads are numbered. We are afflicted but we're not crushed.

We are persecuted but we're not forsaken. We are perplexed but we are not despairing. As we pray for this message to reach our hearts, I would like to read Psalm 37.

That will be our closing prayer. Psalm 37 remembers from the psalmist who delighted in the Lord, David, we know his life in the midst of suffering.

[38 : 25] And he wrote these psalms throughout his affliction. And they're psalms, these are prayers given to us that we in times of suffering, we in times of doubt, whether it's a magnitude large or small suffering, we can be encouraged and emboldened by our brother in Christ, David, who also suffered.

And wrote these words in Psalm 37. Fret not yourself because of evildoers. Be not envious of wrongdoers. For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.

Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord.

Trust in him and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light and your justice as the noonday. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.

Fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices. Refrain from anger and forsake wrath. Fret not yourself, it tends only to evil.

[39 : 30] For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land. In just a little while the wicked will be no more. Though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.

But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace. Father in heaven, you are completely trustworthy. Whatever it is that you have in mind for the lives of your saints here, we receive it.

What's more, we want to eagerly accept it, knowing that through it you will give us hope in the promise you've already secured for us in Christ. But when we're not eager, heal our hearts so that we can have the joy that looks up from our own sufferings into the glory that you will reveal.

We ask this in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.