



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Philippians 1: 12-21

2013

"Fire In Chains"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Mike, and good morning. We are continuing our studies in the Book of Philippians. This is our third lesson, so we're in chapter 1, and we're going to look at verses 12 through 21.

Paul is writing from prison and he writes,

<sup>12</sup> Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that my imprisonment in *the cause of* Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, <sup>14</sup> and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. <sup>15</sup> Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; <sup>16</sup> the latter *do it* out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; <sup>17</sup> the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. <sup>18</sup> What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, <sup>19</sup> for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, <sup>20</sup> according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always,

be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:12-21

Let's pray,

Father, we thank You for this time together, and this opportunity to open the Word of God together as Your people on this LORD's day and read this great text of Scripture, and this great statement of faith, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." That is not simply the aspiration, the goal, the thinking of a super saint—that is to be our attitude, as well. We may fall short of it, we probably do. But our time in this text together should, by Your grace, draw us closer to that attitude and that approach to life.

I pray that that's the result of our time together; that You will give us a greater desire to know You, to be with Christ, to live for Christ. That was the controlling thing in Paul's life, his love for the Lord. So, wherever Your providence took him, (and You took him to some very, very difficult places in life; shipwreck, beatings, imprisonments, imprisonment when he wrote this letter and spoke so glowingly and so joyfully of his circumstances, and how they were turning out for the Gospel, and his readiness to live or die, whatever was Your will for him), he rejoiced in it. That's an unusual attitude but it's the attitude and the approach to life that we can all have by Your grace. And I pray that our time together this morning will inculcate and cultivate that within our hearts and souls.

So bless us, LORD; build us up in the faith. Give us the mind of Christ, as the apostle had. We have that through the study of Your Word, so make this a profitable time for us.

Help all of us rejoice in Him and we pray Your blessing upon us to that end. So bless our next hymn, LORD, as we sing it and may all of this be used of You to prepare our hearts for a time of worship and study together. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

(Message) There's an old story that reminds me of Paul, the story of Prometheus. He was a Titan, a giant who stole fire from the gods and gave it to man. Zeus got even by chaining him to a mountain.

Paul wouldn't have impressed anyone as a 'Titan'; his name means *small*. Paul was 'Mr. Small'. In fact, there's an ancient description of him from the second or third century that describes him as that, 'a man of small stature.'

But if ever there was a giant in the earth, it was Paul, who was put in chains for giving fire to men. The fire he gave was the Gospel. He didn't steal it, he received it. But he was imprisoned for preaching it. He says that in verse 13, where he speaks of his "imprisonment in the cause of Christ". The Book of Philippians is one of the four books of the New Testament that Paul wrote from jail. These books are known as the Prison Epistles, or the Prison Letters. The others are Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Paul doesn't say where the prison was. We know from the Book of Acts that he was put in prison in Philippi, Caesarea, and Rome. But in 2 Corinthians 11, verse 23, he mentions his frequent imprisonments, so many locations are possibilities and a variety has been suggested. But the commonly held view is that this imprisonment was in Rome—and I think with good reason. In chapter 1 Paul mentions the Praetorian Guard. And in chapter 4, he sends 'greetings' from "Caesar's household."

That gives a strong indication of a Roman imprisonment—and of his chains. At the end of the Book of Acts, in chapter 28, when Paul arrived in the capitol he speaks of "this chain." He was wearing a chain as he was brought into the city and he says he was wearing it because of what he calls, "the hope of Israel", (vs20), —which is the Gospel.

I called it fire because God called it "fire". He told Jeremiah, "Is not My Word like fire, and like a hammer which shatters a rock?" (Jer 23:29). That's the Word of God. It is powerful. It is illuminating. It gives warmth to those who receive it. It gives illumination to those who believe it. —But it gives pain to those who don't. It is powerful; it can't be confined; it can't be controlled. You can chain a man but you cannot chain fire.

Paul witnessed that first hand in Rome. He reported to the Philippians that while he was locked up, the Gospel was free and spreading through the jail and the capitol like wildfire.

That's how he begins our passage in chapter 1. He wrote this letter in part to inform the Philippians of his situation—and he tells them, 'It's good'. He's in jail, he's in prison, but his circumstances are good. In verse 12 he wrote, "My circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel." And for Paul, who later writes, "to live is Christ," (vs21), that's what mattered. That's really all that mattered: The spread of the Good News, 'Christ in us!', that's what made him joyful. And his imprisonment did that. It facilitated that. It promoted the spread of the Gospel. How ironic, really!

He had long planned to visit the capitol. He expressed that intention in the Book of Romans, which he wrote from Corinth. And he was making his plans to come visit the church at Rome. But then he goes to Jerusalem, and you know of course, he was arrested there. He was imprisoned in Jerusalem and then he was sent down to Caesarea. And for two years he was there in prison in Caesarea; inactive and unable to go anywhere— seeming that his plans to go to Rome were put on indefinite hold.

And then, he's sent to Rome. He's sent to Rome to stand trial before the emperor. He got there. He got to Rome, not the way that he had planned. But then, 'man proposes, God disposes.' And Providence brought the apostle to the capitol, "in chains."

But because of those chains, the Gospel went to a significant part of Roman society. In fact, it went to a part that Paul might never have reached if he had been there and free—if he'd not come to Rome in chains. His imprisonment he says, "...became well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else." (vs13).

Now that is a fascinating statement. The Praetorian Guard was Caesar's bodyguard. They were elite. They were powerful. They could kill emperors and make

emperors—and they did. When Caligula was assassinated, the Praetorian Guard made Claudius the new emperor. They were king makers.

One of their responsibilities was to guard imperial prisoners, which Paul was. He was kept under constant guard by a soldier, one of the Praetorians, and may even have been chained to his guard. Guards would rotate with each shift and it wasn't long before Paul became well known to a large number of them—and they with him.

What an opportunity that was for the apostle to give the Gospel personally, individually, to these men. And if we can carry out our analogy, just as iron conducts heat, you can imagine that the fire in the apostle Paul was soon felt at the other end of that Roman chain. These men learned all about Paul's life in Judaism, his conversion on the Damascus road, how Christ spoke to him out of blinding light, changed his life, and then, of all things, sent him, this "Hebrew of the Hebrews", to the Gentiles with the Gospel. (Phl 3:5).

They heard about the cross and they heard about salvation through faith alone. Some believed, others didn't, but all of them no doubt gained great respect for this small man who had hope and joy, even in chains. Everyone throughout the Guard knew Paul, this unusual Jew who was a Roman citizen. A former rabbi who talked about Jesus being the 'King of Kings', the 'Son of God', and 'Savior of the world.'

But not only did Paul and the Gospel become known throughout the Guard, he became known to everyone else. That is, to those on the outside, people throughout the capitol city. In fact, we know from what Paul says at the end of the letter, that news of him and of his message reached even Caesar's household, probably by means of the royal guard, the Praetorians.

The Gospel cannot be stopped. It's like that lizard in Proverbs 30, verse 28, 'You can grab it with your hand', Agur says, 'and yet it's in kings' palaces.' It's impossible to keep them out. They're small, but they have a way of getting in. So does the Gospel. It entered through Paul, an unassuming, unimpressive, small man, bound in chains. But Providence put him there and the message crept into even the king's palace. Now that's the wisdom of God.

That's something you and I would never predict, would never plan, wouldn't foresee, but that's the wisdom of God. He had His elect there, in that Praetorian Guard, even in Caesar's palace—and He got the message to them in an unexpected, unusual way.

That's, as I say, Providence. And there's a lesson in that for all of us, and that is, 'Don't despise your circumstances.' As hard as they may be, they may also be an occasion for the Gospel. Your words and conduct in a hard place can be used by God in an amazing way. Don't despise your circumstances. Paul didn't.

And so Paul was eager to tell the Philippians about all of this, about his circumstances, how well things were going in Rome. Not only for the spread of the Gospel, but also for the encouragement of the church. His example, he wrote in verse 14, was 'emboldening' believers there in Rome to speak out. Some, unfortunately, were doing it out of "envy", he said; but others were speaking from "good will".

And we can understand that. We can understand how they are encouraged and why they would need to be encouraged; because it's often difficult for us to speak the Gospel—to tell others about Christ. We're intimidated by the circumstances, we're intimidated by the fact that we know that the Gospel is foolishness to the unbeliever; and so when they hear us give the Gospel they think we're foolish, a little bit weird. And so that's intimidating. And people don't want to do that and they're hesitant to give the Gospel.

And yet, there's something about courage—it's contagious. And Paul's example of boldness under very difficult circumstances gave vitality to many in the church. They realized that; 'Here's Paul in chains, giving the Gospel, speaking the truth, suffering gladly for the Lord', and that encouraged them to do the same. And so they started proclaiming the Gospel encouraged by him: giving the Gospel at work, in the marketplace, in their neighborhoods.

We understand that; but it's this first group that's hard to imagine—but then not really when we reflect upon human nature. Men who didn't like Paul got jealous of all

the praise he was getting. Ambition in the church is not unusual, so to get some publicity for themselves, they started preaching the Gospel. It's called professional rivalry.

John Wesley recognized it in his own day, and he wrote a letter to Methodist preachers to avoid it and oppose it. "Party spirit," he wrote, "has been the bane of all true religion.", (*factious, self-seeking cliques*). And I'm sure that Paul would have agreed with Wesley in what he said. It's common. It's not good—and Paul could even see it in the Philippian church. It's in every church. It's within all of us to some degree, this *jealousy, this party spirit*.

And he would have agreed, I think, with Wesley, but his response was not quite the same. In fact, it's quite different. He was just glad that the Gospel was being preached, whatever the motive, and whatever happened to him.

That's what he says in verse 18. "What, then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice." There are innumerable ways for lizards to get into houses—even kings houses. And God has innumerable ways of getting the Gospel where He wants it. In Rome He used Paul's presence to do it. He used Paul's chains to promote the Gospel.

I can imagine that when Paul was sent to Rome, that his enemies breathed a sigh of relief. They must have thought, 'Well, that's that. We got him shut up and quiet, finally!' And Paul might have wondered, 'Now how am I going to minister? How am I going to speak the Gospel imprisoned as I am? How am I going to minister in chains?'

But the Gospel can't be chained. And very soon, God used the very presence of Paul to galvanize the church in Rome, even using the baser motives of some to preach. —And the message spread like fire.

John Milton's best-known work is *Paradise Lost*. It's a long poem, (I've tried reading it and I've never gotten very far in it), but it's his most famous poem. Milton had some losses in life, some great difficulties. He went blind; and he wrote a shorter poem, (that I did read), and it was on that subject. It's titled, *On His Blindness*.

In it he reflected on his condition and disability, wondering what good is a blind man, what good can come of such a condition—and what would a blind man be able to do? So he wonders about this. And then he came to understand something about it and stated it in the last line, "They also serve who only stand and wait." There is service in simply standing. There is service in simply being a good example in a difficult situation.

Providence puts us in unexpected places; places and conditions that we would never choose for ourselves. And circumstances that we really don't understand, that leave us puzzled and, if we're not careful, maybe even bitter. Still, we're to be faithful in those circumstances. We're to know that God's in control; that He understands; that He has a plan. We're to be faithful.

And God will use those circumstances, just as He did Paul in his circumstances: He was in jail, he was in chains, he was confined. This was a man who crossed seas and continents to give the Gospel and establish churches. This was the great missionary, the apostle Paul. This was a man of action. There's been no missionary like Paul in the history of the church. This man covered continents giving the Gospel—and now, suddenly, he's made to stand and wait, not able to go anywhere.

But he rejoiced in that, "Yes," he affirmed, "and I will rejoice." (vs18b). Now that's a great witness to the truth, and encouragement to others, to be able to rejoice in the midst of affliction. It's easy to rejoice when our team wins or when we're experiencing health and prosperity and everything looks bright and happy—we rejoice! We should rejoice; that's a gift of God. That's a blessing from Him. Nothing wrong with rejoicing in that; we'd be ungrateful if we didn't. We understand that kind of rejoicing.

But what we don't understand is rejoicing in difficulties...because it's very difficult. In fact, I'd say it's supernatural. It's a fruit of the Spirit. Paul did it. He did it because it's supernatural, because it's a fruit of the Spirit; but he did it, as well, because he understood things; he understood the LORD. He understood the circumstances. He knew that the LORD is in control and would work everything to Paul's *good* and to the



Lord God's own glory. And Paul saw it happening, marveled over it, and it made him happy—even in chains.

But also he knew those faithful Philippians were praying for him—and he believed that prayer matters. It's not just an exercise in piety, something we do. No, it has an effect, it has a purpose. It has an effect, it makes a difference.

God answers our prayers. So we need to pray. We need to pray diligently. The Philippians were doing that. They were a church of prayer. Paul knew that, and he was convinced that through their prayers and through the provision of the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, that he would be delivered.

But in what sense would he be delivered? Was Paul expecting to be physically, literally released from captivity, from his jail cell? Possibly—and it seems from later letters that he probably was. So that may be his meaning here.

But his meaning may also be suggested from what he says in verse 20, where he says that he hoped to be delivered from being put to shame, referring to a hope of vindication at his trial.

And so in verse 20, he speaks of exalting Christ with all “boldness.” That was his great concern; that was his main concern. Not really getting out of jail but making a good stand for the Gospel; being a good witness there in Rome.

He couldn't know if he would be released from prison or not. In fact, he recognized that death was a real possibility and he hoped that, if it were to happen, he would ‘exalt Christ’ in that just as much as he would if he were spared and set free. And he was confident that he would do that; that he would be a good witness. And he was confident due to their prayers.

Prayer has been called ‘the language of dependence.’ And it is that. Prayer can only be effective if God is absolutely sovereign. There's no point in praying to God if He's not sovereign. If God doesn't control everything, from the smallest detail to the greatest

event, why would we pray? We pray because God is sovereign. And that's why prayer is effective; it shows one that we're completely dependent upon Him, and that He answers prayer.

He answers prayer: That's the means that He has given to us to obtain the blessings that He has for us. If we don't pray, we won't receive those blessings. So we've been given great promises, great blessings, and we're told, we're instructed to, "pray without ceasing," (1Th 5:17), to be men and women of prayer.

The LORD answers our prayers, and He answers them in a variety of ways. He answers through providence; through events and circumstances. And He answers them through the provision of the Holy Spirit. That, too, was the reason for Paul's confidence here.

In Mark 13, the Lord warned His disciples that they would have a hard ministry. They weren't at that time, (in their relationship with the Lord and as they walked with Him), quite aware of all of that. They were thinking, 'Well, it won't be long before we're sitting on thrones, ruling over the nation Israel with Christ.' But He has to explain to them, forewarn them so to speak throughout His ministry that, 'No, this is going to be difficult.'

And toward the end there, in Mark 13, He tells them, 'Your ministry is going to be difficult. You'll be arrested, you'll be brought into "court", you'll be put on trial, you'll stand before the Sanhedrin, you'll stand before "governors and kings", He said, "for My sake" because of the gospel.' (vs9).

But He also told them, 'Not to worry.' That seems like something to worry about; going into jail, being arrested, being put on trial. But He says, 'Don't worry', and 'Don't worry about what you will say because what you are to say will be given to you.' "It is not you who speak", He said, "but the Holy Spirit." (vs11).

And Paul knew that. He knew that instruction. He knew that counsel. And so he was confident that he would stand before Nero with boldness and he would make a clear defense of the faith. And do so in such a way that Christ would be exalted—that's

what he cared about. And he had that confidence based upon the prayers of the saints, his own prayers, and the confidence that the Spirit of God is reliable and would take care of him.

As I say, it's his testimony, his profession before the world that he cared about, as he explains in verse 21, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Paul's life was defined by Christ. Everything was for Him. Jesus was the motivation of his life, He was the goal of his life.

Later, in chapter 3, he explains that his great ambition in life was to know Christ; to know more about Him—but to know more about Him by getting to know Him personally, to know Him more intimately. I find that interesting; indeed, that's quite fascinating. His great ambition in life was not to get to Spain with the Gospel; not to get to Rome with the Gospel; not to continue spreading the Gospel, (now that was his aim and goal to one degree, that's certainly true). His chief aim in life was not to gain great accomplishments in this world in the service of the Lord but to *know* the Lord; to just simply, personally, *know* Him and experience the Lord's life: 'the resurrection life' as he speaks of it in chapter 3, verse 10. Knowing Christ was his chief interest and incentive.

2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 14, "The love of Christ controls us, having concluded...that one died for all, therefore all died." And what he means by that when he says, "the love of Christ", is Christ's love for him; His love for us. That's what motivated Paul to live wholly and fully for Him. He had died for Paul. He had saved Paul. He'd saved Saul of Tarsus. He was a debtor to mercy.

Paul knew that. Paul, (who had been a self-righteous rabbi who had persecuted the church, had killed Christians, hated Jesus, wanted to wipe His name from the memory of mankind), had been saved by that same Christ! Why? Why?!

Why would Jesus love such an enemy—such a hater? The only answer that can be given to that question; Why Paul? —or why you, or why me, or why anyone?, is very simple: Grace. It's God's unconditional love, undeserved love. So Paul said that love, that unconditional, uncaused, undeserved love that caused Christ to go to the cross for him

and save him, even when he was Christ's foe, that love motivated him to live for Christ. It *controlled* him. It *constrained* him.

That love is what Thomas Chalmers described as “the expulsive power of a new affection.” The place that Christ occupied in Paul's life, the love he had for Christ, crowded out all other interests, all other affections; interests that were bad, interests that were neutral, whatever, Christ filled his life. And as He filled Paul's life there was less and less place for other things—and less and less place for Paul himself, for self-interest. A love of Christ controlled him.

Now, I can imagine someone, (not any of you I'm sure), but I can imagine someone hearing this and saying, ‘Oh, come on. Isn't that just a bit imbalanced? I mean, a healthy life is a balanced life, isn't it? Wouldn't that kind of life, a life that's devoted to one thing, or one person, one interest lead to fanaticism? And wasn't Paul a bit of a fanatic?’

No, he wasn't; and no, that doesn't lead to fanaticism. A person whose life is filled with Christ will live like Christ—who didn't live for Himself but who lived for the Lord God and who lived for others. Christ put all of that, and put others, ahead of Himself. That's love; and that's only good.

Jesus Christ does not produce fanatics. He produces people who think like Him; think His thoughts—who think and live purely, caringly, selflessly. And that was Paul.

Now some did call him a fanatic, or words to that affect. Festus did, the Roman governor. Paul gave a defense before him and King Agrippa. In fact it was quite an occasion with lots of pomp when he came in before the king with his sister and consort Bernice, and the Roman governor, and all of these royal officials, and soldiers, and just this quite impressive array of people described in Acts 26. Paul stood before Festus and gave a defense of the faith, explained his life, and how Christ had appeared to him and changed him.

And Festus, the governor, listened until he just couldn't take any more of it. The Gospel is an offense to the unbeliever. It's a savor that's pleasant to the believer, but it's unsavory to the unbeliever, and it was to Festus; finally he interrupted Paul and shouted out, "Paul, you are out of your mind! *Your* great learning is driving you mad." (Acts 26:24).

And I can imagine, (and I think that is the case), that Paul's response was one of complete calm in which he said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth." (vs25). They were words of life—they were words of eternal life.

No one in that room, no one in that auditorium was more sane than Paul. No one lived a fuller life and a more reasonable life than the apostle Paul; because the more we know Christ, the wiser we become, the more reasonable we become, the better we live. We become better husbands, better wives, better businessmen, better friends. The Lord gives us a sound mind.

The Holy Spirit produces fruit in our life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. That's not fanaticism. That's certainly not being 'out of one's mind' to have patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control. That's the full life that the Lord gives us.

Paul had that and that's what the Praetorians saw. He lived for the One who had died for him. And because he loved Christ, he was ready to die for Him, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (vs21). It is gain because Paul would then be in the presence of the Lord. And there was no better place to be than that, in the very presence of the Lord God, the Lord Jesus Christ—that's where Paul longed to be.

Now if that fails to resonate with us, (and I suspect that it does with all of us to some degree, I include myself in that), if dying does not seem to be gain but loss, it may be because we don't know Christ very well. Or maybe because we know the world too well. And I can understand that; we all can understand that. This world is what we see.

This world is our experience. This is what we know. And the world itself is very alluring, very attractive.

Nevertheless, we know Paul is right, don't we? We know down in our souls that what he desires is what we all should desire—that our desire should not be for this world but for the world to come. Our desire should not be for the 'things' of this place but for Jesus Christ and being with Him. We know that. In our souls, we know that to be the case.

But we know, so often, that it isn't the case. So how does it become the case? How is it that we get where Paul was? How do we get this love for Christ that he had—a love that enabled him to accept his circumstances; and not just accept them but to rejoice in them and use them for the Gospel and look forward to leaving this world and being with Him?

Well, we do that by doing what Paul has been commending here in this passage: We pray. We ask God for knowledge and strength. He did that throughout his epistles. For example, in Ephesians chapter 3, verses 14 through 21, he records one of his prayers for the Ephesians. And in verse 16 he prayed that God would grant them 'to be strengthened with power through the Spirit so that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith.' That's how we get to that place in life, where for us as well, "to live is Christ to die is gain." We ask the LORD to empower us. We ask the LORD to give us the strength to live, to do as we ought, to think as we ought, and to love as we ought. We ask Him to do that: To cause Christ to dwell in our hearts and have a controlling influence in our lives.

'That happens', Paul says, 'through faith.' And 'faith comes through hearing, through the Word of God.' (Rom 10:17). So very simply, we have Paul's attitude, we have Paul's mind through prayer and study. The more we see Christ with the eyes of faith and the Word of God, the more we will know Him and desire Him and love Him. You'll never grow in your knowledge of Him and your affection for Him if you don't see Him. And we see Him in His Word.

And the more He lives down deep in our hearts the more we will know He loves us, the more we will understand Him, and know that He leads us well—always, providentially—that no circumstance of life, however difficult it may be, is by chance. It's all for a purpose, it's all according to a perfect, wise, loving plan.

And then we can rest in that. And then the Gospel will go out as it did in Paul's prison, among those guards who witnessed Paul's calm demeanor, and listened to him, and heard from him his joyful words, his confident words in such a dangerous place.

The Word of God, the Person of Christ in us, growing through His Word, changes us.; it transforms us. The more we learn, by God's grace, the more Christ grows in us. And the more He grows in us the more He controls us and the more He's reflected in us—in our thinking, in our speech, and in our behavior. And then our circumstances won't control us. We may not control them, in fact we can't control circumstances, but we can control ourselves in the circumstances and see them as an opportunity to glorify God and promote the Gospel in our attitude and conduct as Paul did.

Men could put Paul in chains but they couldn't keep the Gospel chained. That's the power of the Gospel. It can't be stopped; it changes lives; it makes us into a new creation.

It is supernatural, I've said that before, but I don't know that I can say it enough. This book is unique; this book is supernatural. There's nothing like it. This is what God uses to change lives. This is what the Spirit of God uses to transform lives.

And so again, the more we know Christ, understand who He is and what He has done for us, the more we will love Him, the more we will be compelled to live for Him and for others—to live for eternity, not for time—to live for heaven and not this world.

But that takes some time and effort, and it's really this simple: It takes applying ourselves, disciplining ourselves to pray and study the Bible; to take time to get on our knees, daily, and to sit down with an open book and read it and pray about it, and put ourselves under the instruction of the Word of God.

This place is important for you and for me to be. This is where we need to be; we need to be instructed in God's Word. If we don't put ourselves in that place, if we don't become, or continue to be men and women of prayer and study, then we will drift and we'll take our minds off the things that are important...and put them on the world.

Our minds are going to be on something; either what they should be on or what they shouldn't be on. And if they're not on the Word of God, and they're not on the things of God, they'll be on the world—and we'll start thinking like the world and living like the world, (and not like the Lord).

Scripture and prayer are the means of Christ dwelling more deeply in our hearts and controlling us in every circumstance so that even when we are in a hard place, we can rest in that and have joy. That's the *fire* that Paul gave to men all across Asia and Europe—and that spread through the Royal Guard, across the capitol, and into Caesar's house. No chain can hold that fire.

Blaise Pascal was scientist and a philosopher in the 17th century who had an encounter with God one night on November 23, 1654. He wrote about it, wrote it down on a piece of paper, and then sewed that paper into the lining of his coat. It wasn't discovered until after he had died. He wrote, in large letters, "Fire, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and the scholars, Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, total submission to Jesus, I will not forget thy Word. Amen."

The two disciples on the Emmaus road had that experience. After speaking with the resurrected Christ, and reflecting upon it, (they didn't know who it was at the time), but when they realized who they were speaking to, they said, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us...?" (Luke 24:32). And the more we look to Him and trust in Him, the more we encounter Christ through His Word, that will be our experience.

That's what kindles the fire and causes the heart to burn. It's talking with the LORD and letting Him talk to us. And then we will be able to say, "For me to live is Christ



and to die is gain." And the more we can say that, the more we'll be able to say, "My circumstances", (whatever they are), "have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel." (vs12).

And then, regardless of our situation, even if we can only, "stand, and wait", God will use that—and we will rejoice. That's the *fire* that I want. It's the *fire* that Paul had; it's *fire* that controlled his life and circumstances.

Well, that's what every child of God has: We have Christ in us and we have a love for Christ. And as we look at Paul we should know that that can be our experience—and it should be our experience—and it will be our experience as we apply ourselves to our relationship with Him. And that's what we should do. We should seek Him and we should seek to cultivate that relationship and have Him grow in our hearts—and increasingly control our hearts. Ultimately that happens by the grace of God. May God bless us in that way.

If you're here without Christ you don't have Him in your life—but you can. You can have the very life that Paul is talking about here, one that is not controlled by the circumstances but is controlled by the Lord God. And it has a glorious future; and a glorious end. It's very simple; you simply believe in Him, you come to Him through faith, trust in Him who died for sinners, the worthy for the unworthy.

And He promises to give us the very best. Our sins are all forgiven. Our future, as I said, is glorious. And in the present, the Lord dwells within us, giving us joy in spite of the circumstances. And the fact is, He gives us lots of wonderful circumstances, as well. That's the life that He gives us. He's generous, merciful, and kind. Come to Christ.

And you who have, (I hope it's everyone here), rejoice in Him. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for this text of Scripture and the testimony of the apostle Paul, and all that we see in his life, just from these few verses. The circumstances he was in were very difficult: Imprisoned, chained, with an uncertain future, at least temporally,

as to whether he would live or die, and yet he was content. That is supernatural, but it's due to the supernatural illumination of the Word of God, which enabled him to see things as they really are—that You're in control. And as we see that, we're able to rest and have peace. Give that to us, Father, and give us an increasing love for our Triune God.

We pray these things in the name of Christ. Amen.

*(End of Audio)*