

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND YOUR ADVERSITY PHILIPPIANS 1:19

Adversity is inevitable in a fallen world: a bad report from the doctor; the break-up of a marriage; disappointment in a teenage son or daughter; a business deal goes sour; the loss of a job; not getting the promotion you deserve; the death of someone you love. This is part and parcel of fallen people living in a fallen world. The question is not, "Will adversity come?" You don't live long before experiencing the answer. A better question is "How will I respond to the adversity?"

"For I know that...what has happened to me..." (NIV). What had happened, is that he was under house arrest. While not in a dungeon (that would come later), he was under arrest without the freedom to go and come and do as he wished. Yet, he speaks of deliverance. **"What has happened (being under arrest)...shall turn out for my deliverance" (NIV).** Don't miss the paradox which frames the truth of this verse and much of this book: the adversity produces the blessing. Paul speaks of being liberated at the very time he is incarcerated. But even more striking, he says the arrest itself shall "turn out for my deliverance." It is through the arrest that he will know deliverance.

The scholars differ on what Paul means by "deliverance." He could mean the deliverance from imprisonment (vs. 25, 27). He could mean the ultimate deliverance that comes through death (vs. 23). I think Paul had in mind another kind of deliverance. Could he be speaking of the deliverance of his heart -his mind and emotions, the core of his being- from the naturally negative consequences of this adversity? Paul was too much a realist to think that he could be delivered from the sufferings that go along with life. But could he be speaking of being delivered from the usual reactions to adversity such as self-pity, doubting God's love, disillusionment, cynicism, anger, fear? I think so. Paul had come to experience not just that his heart could be set free in the adversities of life, but that real freedom often came through the adversities themselves. He had learned to live on a higher plane.

This is the reason he can say in verse 21, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Paul knew something. God would use the adversity of his arrest to set his soul free. Amazing! Paul experiences

- deliverance because of detention
- liberation because of incarceration.

This is not an isolated thought in this letter. It is not coincidental that this is the letter in which Paul writes so much about joy and rejoicing: (1:25; 2:2; 3:1; 4:4). Chuck Swindoll entitled his book on Philippians *Laugh Again*, with the subtitle, *Experience Outrageous Joy*. Joy! Rejoicing! While under arrest! What did Paul know that enabled him to rejoice in adversity? This chapter indicates three things. First, he had the "real knowledge" (vs. 9) of God's love for him. I discussed the importance of this knowledge in the *Grace To You* study entitled "Abounding Love." (You can read this study at www.refmin.org <<http://www.refmin.org>> under "Bible Studies.") Second, Paul had profound confidence in the sovereignty of God. Paul knew that God was in control *no*

matter what, even in the most difficult adversity (vs. 29; See II Corinthians 11:23-27). Third, he believed that God was working in his life through the adversity (vs.20). This is the reason for the “rejoicing,” “expectation and hope.”

How can you respond like this to adversity? You man not be not faced with major adversities like those in the opening paragraph, but there are always those persistent, nagging aggravations. What will enable you to respond with joy rather than the usual litany of grips and complaints when adversities hit? Wouldn't it be good to be able to rejoice from the heart rather than a grin and bear it resolve? Is this just religious talk to give you hope for a few minutes only to crash in the next traffic jam or when the phone rings?

No. Living like this can be a reality. How? When adversity strikes three truths will help:

1. A “real knowledge” of the abounding love God has for you,
2. Steadfast confidence in the sovereignty of God, and
3. An awareness that God is doing a work in your life through the adversity.

With a deep belief in these three truths, you can experience the paradox of defeat bringing you deliverance, limitation bringing you liberation. If you believe and remember these truths, you will still get discouraged (Paul did.), but you cannot be defeated. You can feel your heart soar into a another dimension. You will know freedom!

By the way...the next time you see or hear of me acting like Chicken Little, remind me of these truths. Like so many, I tend to forget them when the pressure is on.

Grace to you,
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