

Paul's Imprisonment

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Well, grab your Bibles and let's go to 2 Timothy 4 and this will likely be our next to last message out of our exposition of 2 Timothy, we started in 1 Timothy calling it "Beautifying the Bride," as the Apostle Paul is writing to give instruction to Timothy about how to organize the church, how the church should be run, what the priority of the church is, who the officers of the church are, how to deal with problems in the church, and in a redundant sense, you might say, how to make sure you guard the church from error and false doctrine. He hits that theme over and over again.

Miss Pam and I were vividly taught the necessity for that as we were walking through the ruins of Philippi, they would call it our Phillipi, as we would call it. And, um, the the tour guides were all Greek Orthodox because if you're born in Greece, you're Greek Orthodox. They sprinkle you and your won, okay? And, um, in their thinking, in their view of Christianity, everything centers on a building. You have to have a a church building. There has to be a priest there. You have to go in that building and see those priests and perform those rituals and do those sacraments and all of that is Christianity. Well, Miss Pam and I were walking around through those ruins thinking about Paul preaching the gospel in the agora, the marketplace, and people believing, and as they were believing, they were the starting of a church there. But the Greek Orthodox guide would imply that the church began when the first Greek Orthodox building was built in that area, and the earliest ones were like 500 AD, five hundred years or 450 or so years after Paul's ministry. So they keep saying, "Well, this is one of the earliest, earliest churches. It's 1,500 years old. It's about 500 AD." And finally, I told the tour guide, I said, "Do you know in the whole New Testament there's not the mention of a church building? There's not one instruction about build a building. Nothing wrong with that, but there's nothing." And she thought for a moment and these guides are very well trained and they're worth their money to to get a tour guide. She thought for a minute, she looked at me very inquisitive and said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yes. The church began when Paul preached the gospel and by grace, through faith alone, people were believing on Christ and becoming a part of the local church family." The building later on is when the corruptions came in. They started building buildings and they started bringing in priests and they started actually, pragma, I'm trying not to get off on this. Actually what they were doing was they became pragmatic in about 3 to 400 AD. Here's what they would do. They would say, "Oh, the culture loves polytheism. Well, we have many gods too. We worship Mary. We worship Paul. We worship God the Father. We worship..." What they

were doing is trying to give the culture some comfort with Christian truth, and they perverted Christian truth to match the culture. Have you ever heard me preach against that before? It's an old thing. It's been going on from the beginning and the Scripture warns of this. So Paul thoroughly warned Timothy, "Stay on track. Fight the error. Correct it. Remove it from the church, and keep the church pure." And brothers and sisters, can I tell you something? As a pastor, that's a full time job. Satan is always insidiously tried to creep in with perversions.

Um, so Paul writes to Timothy, he's saying those things, but now he shifts gears and he talks about his own situation in verses 16 through 18 of 2 Timothy 4, and, uh, I simply entitled the exposition of this section "Paul's Imprisonment." We begin in 2 Timothy 4:16. Paul writes, remember, this is a letter, so it flows like a letter.

16 At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. 17 But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Now, a little background information. We know we've just journeyed out of chapters 3 and 4, and the latter parts of chapter 3 and into the early parts of chapter 4, Paul is giving Timothy that solemn, powerful charge to preach the word. And he tells Timothy, "You're going to have to do it in season and out of season, Timothy. You got to keep laying out the truth from God's word in the format of preaching when it's easy and when it's not, when people will hear you and when they will not, when people will come but when people will leave because of it." He said, "The time will come when they won't endure your sound doctrine, Timothy. They'll want to find them some clever, creative, humorous, funny preachers out there that will furnish them with the latest fads." That's what tickling the ears means. "Well, Timothy, I charge you don't waver. Stay with the stuff. Keep preaching the word no matter what." And now one of the things Paul is doing in these latter verses here, verses 16 through 18 particularly, is he's saying, "I'm going to illustrate again, Timothy, to you how I also kept the charge. I stayed faithful in my Christian service to our Lord." And we find out here how he lived out the charge, and there are some rich insights for all of us on how we are to live out and the motivation we're to have for living out our Christian duties and our Christian service.

Well, let's outline it this way. I. Paul says he received no human support at least in a very specific way, and we'll unpack it from the text. But let's think about why he's in prison. This is his second imprisonment. As you know, I've told you that his execution is probably scheduled at this point. I don't know that for certain, but the way he writes, he knows it's just around the corner. So what is the charge against Paul? Well, we know from trustworthy first century writers that there were several serious crimes that Christians were accused of in the first century. First of all, they were accused of atheism because they would condemn the idolatry of all the worship of these, uh, many gods, the

polytheism of the ancient Greek culture. Uh, one of the things that you read about in in Greek culture is how these great warriors like Alexander the Great and even the the warriors of other kingdoms would come and consult the Oracle of Delphi and to find out should I attack these people? Should I go to war against these people? Would we be victorious? And the Oracle always gave a or a guidance that was hard, and sort of like a riddle, you couldn't figure it out. You know why? Because they didn't know what was going to happen. They wanted whatever happened, they could say, "Oh, we told, that was in there," you know. "We didn't really tell you exactly because..." And actually the Greek word that we get our English word ambiguous comes from the Oracle of Delphi where they would give this ambiguous kinda sorta guidance. So all of these pagan beliefs and and religions of the day and Christians stood against them and said, "There's only one true God and his Son is Jesus Christ and salvation is through Christ and Christ alone." So they actually accused them of being atheist for denying the worship of all the many gods of ancient Greek mythology.

Also, they were accused of cannibalism as the culture and the leaders of the culture would put a spin on Christian teaching of taking the body of Christ through the Lord's table and the blood of Christ. We all know that's figurative but just like in today's world, those who hate God and hate our truth put a spin on everything we say and do to try to make us look like something we're not. So they accused the early Christians of teaching cannibalism.

They also accused them of hate crimes because Christians condemned the pleasure of sin that the ancient Greek and Roman culture were built upon. Drunkenness was a form of worship in many of their temples. Fornication was rampant. Homosexuality was rampant. But it is interesting, in the ancient Greek culture, homosexual behavior was rampant but they wouldn't call themselves homosexuals or born this way. It was just another way to have a sexual perversion or relationship. They they they wouldn't call it marriage because they knew from the natural order of things marriage had to include people who could come together and have offspring and build a family. So while they, while they participated deeply in these sins, it's interesting that they didn't come up with the kind of, uh, qualifications and descriptions and and structures for it like we do in our day.

Nevertheless, immoralities abounded. Pedophilia was very common. That that's one thing I'd like to say to some of the the liberal professors in our schools and other places, as they laud before us the glories of ancient Greece, their architecture and their literature and their prose and their philosophy and their armies, and they did have the first democracy, about 500 BC, and there's some credit there, but they don't tell you that they built their kingdom on slave labor, that their wives and daughters were treated like property and worse, and they had pedo pedophilia practiced throughout the country. They leave that out. You know why? Because they want to have confidence that man can once again be something great. Man never was great. God is great, and when we're like God, then we become great but we're not great on our own apart from God.

So Christians are charged with all these things, but it's most likely that it wasn't atheism or cannibalism or hate, it's more than likely that it's just that Paul was the starter and the

head of a "an illegal religion." The Romans have taken over Greece at this time, of course, and they didn't want any problems out of anybody and they tolerated a few major religions, but then they grow, drew a firm line in the sand. "We're not gonna have any troubles out of these new religions popping up, these new sects popping up." So they make Christianity illegal and saw Paul as the founder of this illegal religious movement and, boy, how Rome had it wrong on that one. Paul didn't found Christianity. Christianity did not begin with the Apostle Paul. It began in the heart of God and Rome couldn't stop it. And no one can.

Well, down to the specific thing I'm talking about when I said in I, he received no human support. He says in verse 16, "At my first defense no one supported me." A. T. Robertson, the Greek scholar, says it literally means no one took my part, no one came to my side as Paul stood before the Roman tribunal or a Roman court, possibly before Nero himself and inevitably, whatever Roman ruler or judge he stood before, they must have thought their ploy was working because here they've arrested Paul, they've put him in prison, and now he has no one who will come forward and stand with him in court. So we must be successful in diminishing and removing this religion by arresting Paul. Little did they know, Christianity didn't stand on Paul. It stands on the Rock, Jesus Christ and he always stands.

So there Paul stood, humanly speaking, before the absolute power of Rome with no associate, no advocate, and no friend with him, no one to plead his case, no one to testify of his character or plead his innocence of the charges before him. This just causes me to think on the fact that when our Lord was crucified he stood before the heavenly Father's throne and he was all alone. All of the Lord's disciples, all of his followers at that point had fallen away. Even Peter denies him three times in the garden. Seems like that's a pattern. Every pastor, every faithful Christian minister, and truly every faithful Christian must reckon that there may be times when people don't stand with me, when people will not support me. I tell young pastors a lot of times when you're reforming the typical Baptist church to be more biblically healthy, which means more in line with Baptist history because we've left our forefathers' teachings and practice, "I haven't taught you to do anything that's radical. I've gone back to the old stuff our forefathers lived and many of them died for." But when you're reforming the church, you have to be patient because the people who are against you will be very loud and the few that really are with you are learning new stuff. They've never seen a solid church, so it's it's it's curious to them too, so they're not against you, but they're silent very often until they learn more, until they see it better, and it can cause you to feel like you're all alone because as far as outward support you may be all alone. That seems to be the pattern of faithful Christian ministry.

Paul elaborates further, not only did they not stand with me, he uses the phrase, they deserted me, verse 16. But then, he says, "may it not be counted against them." Paul had a magnanimous spirit. But not really. He had a normal Christian spirit. Forgiveness is the hallmark of Christian virtues. Are you listening to me, church? You cannot be a follower of Christ and hold bitterness and anger and unforgiveness in your heart. The Apostle Paul describes himself on one occasion as the chief of sinners. He said, "When I look at my life and the wayward path I was on, I was persecuting the church and and voting against

them when they were being stoned to death or locked in prisons and," and on and on he could go and in so many ways he looked to his Judaistic religious works as his salvation. That was so sinful and wrong. And on and on, but Paul just saying, "Now look at me, I see the greatest sinner I've ever seen. So if Christ would forgive me, why couldn't I forgive others?"

So he has a forgiving spirit, "may it not be counted against them." Paul saw their desertions not as wickedness but as weakness. I might say momentary weakness. There's no such thing as a child of God in an ongoing purpose and pattern opposing the truth of God in the man of God. That can't happen, but there can be moments or seasons of weakness. We have to juggle through that as church leaders and as Christians sometimes when somebody falls away, are they, are they really not of God? Often they are not. The Bible teaches that, but sometimes they're they're men and women of God, but they're weak and haven't been taught, and they they just can't go along with what's right at this moment and we should have some compassion on them and see them perhaps not as wicked every time, but as weak. You see, we're to be like our Father in heaven in Psalm 86:5. The Bible says, speaking of God, "You are good and ready to forgive." Is that not a great verse? Are you listening to me, sinner out there today, transgressor of God's law, weak one, one who is but of dust? It's good news that our God is good and ready to forgive.

So we must be good and ready to forgive. Paul was like his Lord and Savior who when he was dying on the cross prayed, Luke 23:34, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." How are you on the forgiveness meter this morning? Are you like Jesus? Are you like God the Father? Are you like Paul? "Lord, forgive them."

I had quite a pilgrimage of my own heart of getting to this place and I'm not saying I'm batting 1000, but I'm doing a lot better than it used to, where when I see those who rise up and they're angrily demeaning of our work, or whatever it might be, I'm very able today to say, "Well, God, to the end that it glorifies You, bless them and help them and show mercy to them because You've shown a lot of mercy to me." Amen, church? Doesn't mean we support what they're doing, now that's different. Some of you sometimes may get the warped concept that when somebody is just really in open rebellion and sin, if if we forgive them we're supposed to sort of bless what they're about. No, we're not. We're just not to hold it against them in an angry and unforgiving spirit.

Well, Paul, um, had no one to stand with him in his first defense, that's the idea of his first court meeting, his first time he was called forth to face the charges before him, he was all by himself but he had a very forgiving spirit for those who wouldn't come and stand with him. Secondly, II, let's notice that he rested in God's support. He did rest, and I don't mean rest by doing nothing, I mean as he continued in his ministry, he he had a settled, contented rest in God that God was with him. Look what he says, um, at verse 17. "But," what a great conjunction. There's a lot of great conjunctions in the Bible. "They didn't stand with me, but the Lord stood with me. The Lord stood with me." Stand there literally means to stand by my side. None of his friends stood by his

side, none of his associates stood by his side, none of those he was discipling stood by his side at that first defense, but God stood right there beside Paul.

This brings to mind other strong truths. The Greek word that's used for "stood" here is the same idea, a similar word to the word that's used for the Holy Spirit. In John 14, a verse 16, Jesus said, "I'm going to go away and I'm going to give you another helper," same Greek word there for helper. "He he's one who will stand beside you. He'll stand with you and he's a helper, and he's a comforter." Child of God, no matter where you go or what happens if you're faithful to Christ, God the Holy Spirit stands with you. That's good stuff. I've always said when you stand under fire, your heart stays warm. There's something about being where Paul is and you say, "Well, I don't, pastor, I don't know if I can go in a Roman prison and be in that squalor and suffer. I love Jesus but I don't know if I could do that for Jesus." You hadn't had to do it yet. You'll get the grace you need for that level of persecution when it happens and the Spirit of God would become so much more powerfully real to you. So when he says the the Lord stood with me, we know that the the parakletos, parakletos more accurately, means the one who comes along beside. That's the word here for the helper. Then also Jesus, 1 John 2:1. Jesus, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate," that means one who stands beside us and pleads our case, "an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." So, concerning the Holy Spirit, he stands with us as a comforter and a help, and Jesus stands beside us also a comforter and a help, and to plead our case before the Father, as our, as our mediator between us as sinners and God as the Holy One.

So here Paul stands saying, "Yeah, it hurt me that no one stood with me. Oh, but let me tell you about who did stand with me. Let me tell you about him." Thinking on this, I thought about the the Lord as he was abandoned on the cross because when our Lord Jesus was abandoned and all deserted him – are you listening to me? The Father deserted Jesus on the cross. The Father turned his back on the Son, Christ, and would not look upon him with favor or blessing or love or acceptance, but only in wrath and retribution because he was standing in our place as sinners. Perhaps that's part of what Paul was thinking, "I've been abandoned, but I'm not abandoned like my Savior was abandoned. Everybody turned on him." The gospel song says, "God turned his back on his Son, despising our sin." Jesus entered the room of God's justice in our place. It was our room, and while bearing our sin, he went before the Father, and the Father turns his countenance of love and acceptance away and turns toward him the frown of harsh judgment and wrath. And Jesus entered the black darkness with the Father's justice upon him and he entered it in our place, and there he was abandoned by man and by God, an experience and abandonment beyond what any man could ever know. Abandoned by God the Father bearing our sin. You say, "Pastor, how do you know that's what Paul is thinking?" Because everything I've taught you comes from Paul's writings. Everything about the atonement and Christ standing in our place come from Paul's pen as he writes to these churches. But tying into Paul knowing that I didn't have any person, any human, but I had God with me, you see, Jesus was abandoned so that his children would never be abandoned. Do you get that? Jesus took the pain of the separation and the the chasm of gulf between God and man, he took it on himself so that we, the children, those who

believed on Christ, would never ever, ever experience abandonment. Christ took the abandonment so the children are all now safe.

The Spirit stands beside us, and the Lord Christ stands beside us and pleads for us, and we can rest in that. I don't care what you're facing. I know some of you are hurting today. When I came in for my trip, my desk is full of cards, full of cards of people who are hurting, lost loved ones, sickness, whatever it is. I do my best to pray for and send cards to every church member that faces something. So I know there's a lot of hurting, but no matter what we face or or what we're called to go through, you're never abandoned. God stands with you.

Now, Paul said it's better than that, it's again, it's one of those places where Paul says, "I've just gotta, I've got to add more to it because it's so wonderful what I've experienced." He says in verse 17, "Not only did the Lord stand with me and strengthened me." Literally it has the idea, "He poured his power into me. I just got the power poured into me." This emboldened Paul to continue even while here in Caesar's household to continue his ministry of preaching the word and building God's church. Matter of fact, study the New Testament, that's all Paul knows, preaching the word, establishing churches. Preaching the word, establishing churches.

Then another wonderful thing he says that was faithful on the Lord's behalf, verse 17, "and He rescued me." Let's see, is that, yeah, the end of the verse, "and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth." Now scholars debate over what that means, and they all agree we don't know exactly what that means. Early church fathers said the lion there has to mean Nero. Miss Pam and I saw a great marble lion there in the northern regions of Greece where the ancient Romans had set up that lion as a symbol of their authority and of their kingdom. So it could be Nero. It may have been that, um, Paul was scheduled to be thrown into the lions in the amphitheaters. Everywhere you go across Greece, there's these amphitheaters. The Greeks built the amphitheaters for theater, for plays. When the Romans took over, they said, "That's dull and boring. Let's make it more exciting, let's throw people in there and let lions eat them." Literally, that's what they did. "Let's let gladiators come in there and fight to the death." So it could mean that Paul was scheduled, as other Christians were, to be thrown to the lions in the amphitheater, but he was saved from that. We don't know. I think most likely it means that the general enemies and circumstances that unceasingly worked to thwart Paul to stay faithful, God rescued Paul from their diminishing effects. Paul kept on being faithful in the midst of the opposition. That's what I think it means, being rescued out of the lion's mouth.

Well, yeah, verse 18, Paul continues because this thing of God being for us, who can be against us is so wonderful, "And the Lord, verse 18, "will rescue me from every evil deed." Paul is saying that, "Any and all efforts of the world, the flesh and the devil to divert me from being faithful to my Lord and finishing my course is taken care of. It didn't knock me off track. It didn't get me. It didn't cause me to quit or to rest. Every step of the way instead I was resting in the support and in the strength of God." Not charge you, child of God, to do that. Just determine right now, "Lord, I don't know what it's going to be, I don't know what it's going to be like, but I determine this morning as my

pastor is preaching to me that You'll give me the extra dose of grace and strength and the extra understanding of Your presence with me because I'm not gonna turn back to the world no matter what happens. I'm going to stay faithful in my service to Christ." The Lord will stand with you and Paul rested, he rested on the Lord's strength.

III. Paul remained glory of God focused. He kept the purpose in front of him. He says in verse 17, the middle part there, in other words, "The Lord stood with me, the Lord strengthen me, so that or to this end, that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished. God had those I was to proclaim the gospel to and He's enabled me to get through all these difficulties so I could finish that course specifically and that all the Gentiles might hear." So the sole mission of Paul was to bring about to God the harvest that he deserved and therefore the glory he deserved among the Gentiles. Paul's heart reverberated with the reality that, "Our Savior must be honored among the Gentiles and the Lord strengthened me in all my difficulties to get that done." Matter of fact, this is exactly what the Lord said he was going to do with Paul after his conversion as recorded in Acts 9:15 and 16. "But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he,'" that's Paul, "'he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.'"

So suffering, now listen to me, suffering was prescribed as a part of Paul's ministry. Suffering was as much a part of this prescribed plan for Paul's ministry as staying in wealthy Lydia's home, or wealthy Philemon's home where he had the best of everything. And he knew it wouldn't always gonna be Lydia's house and wouldn't always going to be Philemon's house, and he wouldn't always going to get gifts from the Philippians where he had everything in abundance, you could even say in extravagance. If God gives you those times and service, rejoice in them and thank God for them but if being faithful calls you to suffering, then you walk in that door too.

God must receive glory from the Gentiles and this was Paul's mission. He was the man to blaze that trail. Paul's missionary journeys had covered much of the known world. The Roman Empire covered much of the Roman world, the known world in that day, and Paul had spread the gospel and established churches in wide places and now, toward the very end of his ministry, he's spreading the gospel in high places, Caesar's household, the very epicenter of the Empire, and possibly he stood and testified before Nero himself. I believe he did, just don't know from the biblical text.

The sufferings and persecutions and now this imprisonment were not obstacles but providential means to guide his footsteps and direct his ministry. Child of God, do you not understand the difficulties in your marriage, God is superintending those to bring you to the right place. You just don't quit. You don't quit. You know what you do? Ask brother Matt. He can tell you because we say this to each other all the time, you do the next thing. It's difficult but you do the next thing. You're fearful, but you do the next thing, according to the book, according to what I'm called to do. Mom or Dad or husband or wife or parent or child or whatever, you do the next thing. And that's what Paul did over and over again. He never never veered from the the tracks. He preached the gospel, generally speaking, to the known Gentile world.

Then he says something glorious here in verse 18, the last part, the very last phrase, no, not the very last phrase, the middle phrase, "and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom." Paul is saying, "The place of final just reward and my glorification is the heavenly kingdom that's ahead. I I I'm not here for any, any token, or any measure of certain pleasure or reward or fulfillment. Banish that from your minds." That's not why we're here. We're not here to be happy, we're here to serve Christ, but we find great happiness while we're here doing that. And Paul is saying, "I look out ahead to the glory, I'm focused on that coming glorification in the heavenly kingdom." This world and the rulers of this age could not see the vital importance of Paul's work but all will be made clear in the heavenly kingdom. The hidden labors will be shown to be worth it all and Paul based his life on that. He stayed glory of God focused. Romans 8:18 reminds us, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Stay glory of God focused, that we want him to receive all the glory and honor and praise from our lives and from our corporate church life, and ultimately we will share in that glory with him in heaven.

Then he comes to that foundation stone of, I believe, his heart and motivation, the very last phrase verse 18, "to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen." The apex purpose and driving motivation that held Paul on course so that he remained faithful to the end was a glory of God focus. May he get glory and this must be the apex purpose and driving motivation that keeps us faithful. The entirety of Paul's life in ministry with this one supreme overarching purpose, that men would come to see God and God alone as worthy of all honor and praise.

I believe Paul couldn't sleep at nights thinking, "More Gentiles, more Gentiles must repent of the false mythological gods and turn to know the one true God and want Him to be honored and praised." Actually, that's the idea behind this Greek word for glory. It's used very often in the New Testament. It's the idea of opinion and in the ancient world, this this Greek word could mean a positive or negative opinion, a good or bad opinion, but the New Testament writers, like they did so many words out of the Greek cultured age, they'd bring it over in the Bible and it only means a positive or a good opinion. What it means is God is glorified when your heart's changed and you come to a new opinion of who God is. You now see him as one worthy of all honor. Now, you kind of knew that in your mind before your conversion, but now you embrace it with your heart, that he's the God that's worthy. "I've come to the opinion." Well, God brought me to the opinion. Amen? The gospel did it and the Spirit of God regenerated my heart and now I can glorify God. I want, as your pastor, for more and more people of the Shoals to come to the heart-embracing opinion that our God and God alone is worthy of praise and honor. That's glorifying him.

Ephesians 3:21 says, "so that the manifold wisdom of God," in other words, God's wisdom which is part of his glory, "might be made known through the church." God is not, shall I say, primarily, maybe not. God is not only for sure interested in individual salvation. He's not only or primarily, I did use it, didn't I, concerned with individuals "getting saved." He's concerned about forming a people. Isn't that what he did in

Israel? And you go all over the Greek world and you know what you find? All over the Greco-Roman Empire and Asia, local churches. His people. A collection of his people. God's glorified when we get saved, yes, but his glory expands even greater when we come together as the saved ones in his love, following his truth and working together for his kingdom's advancement in the world. God's not just concerned about individual salvation, he's concerned about forming a people. That's why it says there very clearly, "might be made known through the church." The collective whole.

Romans 5:17, "Therefore accept one another just as Christ also accepted us unto the glory of God." When we come together, accept has the idea of you're one around the truth. You you knock off all the stuff that would divide us, and you all say the thing that brings us together is infinitely greater than anything that would separate us, and we're in unison together, and when the body of Christ comes together to love, to joy, to exhort, to encourage, to care for each other, then God's glory is seen through the church and Paul says, "That's gotta happen among the Gentiles. It's gotta happen among the Gentiles." And that was his devotion, but he was glory of God focused.

Ephesians 3:21, "to Him," Jesus, "be glory." I'm sorry, "to Him," God the Father I should say, "be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." May God be seen as he does the work of saving individuals and constituting his churches, may God be seen as the all-powerful, all-wise, all-beautiful one that he is. That's why your work in small groups isn't just something to help people. It's about the glory of God. Bringing your tithes and offerings and we gotta pay those bills, that's true. That if that's all it is, keep it. It's about the glory of God. You know why? That'll keep you all the way. The other stuff will fade out. Just helping people, being nice, and we want to help people be nice, amen? But above it all, it's glorifying God. May we be a part of bringing people to the opinion that God and God alone is deserving of all glory.

Now how are we gonna, how are people gonna have those opinions changed? Well, there's got to be the preaching of the word. Paul did that all the way to the end. This has got to be the Spirit regenerating the heart, the new birth evidenced by repentance toward God in faith in Jesus Christ. Paul brought many to that place. And then the development of the people, local churches, so that through forming these people God will bring himself glory, and as Paul says it here, forever, last part of verse 18, "forever and ever." Then you getting in on something that doesn't just last for a little while. When you do the church work as we've laid out from the Scriptures to do the church work, you're not just getting in on something that's a good thing to kind of give your life to. No, this is the thing that lasts forever and ever. Other stuff's not gonna last. This is the thing that will last forever and forever.

This is why Paul did what he did. He was glory of God focused. He was laser-beam fixated on the glory of God. He wanted God to receive glory from his offering among the Gentiles. You see, in grace God saved Paul. In grace God called Paul to preach. And in grace God sent Paul specifically to the Gentiles. He goes West from Asia. He he gets into the region of Europe and he gets to Philippi and its on, man, it's on. Can I say he's on like Donkey Kong? It's on. If you've played Donkey Kong, son, it's on. Paul was glory of God

focused. He was on it. He goes down to Athens and goes up to Corinth and goes to Thessalonica, and goes to Berea and on it on. "I'm glory of God focused. God's going to be glorified among the Gentiles." We ought to have a passion that God's glorified to the ends of the earth.

Final thought. This thought came to me thinking on this text while I was in Athens and that is the great axiom of Christian service for a conclusion for practical application. The great axiom. The idea of axiom means it needs no proof, it needs no explanation. It's self-evident. What's what needs no proof, no evidence, just self-evident about Christian service like Paul was serving the Lord. Two parts to it, and I want you to think. Now I know you've been listening a while and I know breakfast is wearing off, but I want you to think for just a moment with me and we're done. Two parts to this great axiom of Christian service.

The first one is a fundamental promise. This takes, oozes, bleeds with the great fundamental promise of the Christian servant. Verses 17a 17:6 and 18a, that is, that God will stand with us, strengthen us, rescue us, build his church, and bring us safely to the heavenly kingdom. That's a fundamental promise for Christian servants. God will stand with you. He will strengthen you. He will rescue you when necessary, and through your labors in the midst of all of that, he's going to build his church and you're getting in on that, and then one day bring you safely home to the heavenly kingdom. That is a fundamental promise. That's not kinda gonna sorta may happen. That's going to happen. But that fundamental promise is built on the foundational principle, the foundational principle is God will glorify his own name.

Now listen, the promise cannot fail because it rests upon the principle that cannot be abridged. You can scream all you want. You can wallow all you want. You can cry all you want. You can protest all you want. You do all you want. Listen to me, God will glorify his name. He's gonna do it. He's doing it now. And he's gonna do it all through eternity. Now he's saying, "Would y'all get in on this one thing that really matters with Me and be like Paul, a faithful Christian servant all the way to the end?"

The fundamental promise: God will stand with us, strengthen us, rescue us when necessary, and build his church and then bring us safely to the heavenly kingdom, and it's built upon the foundational principle that God will glorify his own name. That's not the end of the text. One last word. "Amen." Now Paul ends with "Amen." Woo, good stuff. Amen. Now look, when men say "Amen," it means "so be it." That's a good thing. You ought to say it more. Amen? But when God says "Amen," it means "it shall be." It shall be.

The axiom of Christian service. Praise God. Isn't it, isn't it great to be a part of something that even you can't mess up? I mean, do you not remember the Apostle Paul saying, "I was in, I was, I was in, I was in a bad place. I had this thorn in the flesh." Don't know exactly what it was, but it was bad. And he said, "I figured out God gave it to me to humble me, in effect, in essence," this is Jeff Noblit Amplified Translation, "in effect, so I would be the best and most faithful minister I could be." So Paul viewed all these

difficulties as part of God's prescribed plan so that he could get all the way to this end and say, "Phew, I finished my course." Boy, I want to be able to say that. With all my heart as your pastor, I want you to, well, some of you gonna beat me to heaven maybe, but those of you that are left say, "He finished his course. Well, he wobbled a few times. He went to Greece and goofed off with Miss Pam awhile, but he stayed his course." And I want to be able to say that about you. And the last word, Amen.