

# Let No Root of Bitterness Spring Up

## Part 3: Paul and Jesus

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### I. Summary of Last Lesson

#### a. Fixing rotted windows story

- i. Big problem, didn't know how to fix. Rotting wood. Carpenter ants. (Do I need to replace the entire window sill?)
- ii. Conversation with Chris and Chuck: "That's easy. This is what you do...."
  1. Cut out the rotted wood
  2. Pour wood hardener onto remaining wood
  3. Apply layers of wood putty to build back up
  4. Sand and paint
- iii. And it worked! I simply did not know how to solve my problem, meanwhile letting the windows rot, getting worse and worse. Now they are fixed! Need the right tools get the job done.

#### b. Bitterness is rot of the soul.

- i. We need to understand "God's tools" to deal with bitterness in our hearts.
- ii. This is the third and final lesson on dealing with bitterness.
- iii. "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled...." (**Hebrews 12:14**)
- iv. We are looking at examples of men and women in Scripture who should have been bitter and were not, or may have struggled and overcame. Why? How did they overcome? How can we learn from them to deal with the temptations of bitterness in our own lives?

#### c. Examples so far

##### i. Naomi

1. Loss of husband and two sons, and acknowledged that God had dealt with her bitterly.

2. Naomi returns to Israel “for she had heard... that the Lord was watching over His people by giving them bread.” (**Ruth 1:6**)
3. “Blessed is he of the Lord, who has not forsaken His [God’s] kindness to the living and the dead.” (**Ruth 2:20**)
4. But not bitter toward God!
5. **Great faith.**
  - a. Returned to God’s people
  - b. Self-less
  - c. Spoke faithfully about God.
  - d. **Recognizes that a loving God scourges His children. (Hebrews 12)**
6. God blesses Naomi (and Ruth) with a redeemer, a provider, and a grandson (King David’s grandfather!)

ii. Job

1. Terrible loss of family, wealth, his health.
2. “In all these things that happened to him, Job did not sin with his lips against God.” (**Job 2:15**)
3. Satan as 3<sup>rd</sup> actor. God allows evil, injustice.
4. Job struggled with this. Ultimately faces God. God reminds Job who He is.
5. **Humility.**
  - a. Job covers his mouth, will say no more, **recognizes God’s wisdom is beyond his own.**
  - b. “Who will tell me what I knew not, Things too great and wonderful, which I did not know.” (**Job 42:3**)

iii. David with Saul

1. Was being unjustly hunted down.
2. **Great faith.** Does not retaliate. Confronts Saul instead of remaining in hiding. Was not David’s to avenge. No bitterness despite great injustice.
3. **Recognizes God will be “judge and jury”, in His time.**

iv. David with own sin

1. Cain and Judas when confronted with their sins, give in to bitterness, anger, and destruction (murder/suicide).
  2. David's sin is wicked: adultery, cover-up, murder.
  3. **When confronted by a Godly man, David acknowledges his sin, humbles self before God, confesses, repents, is restored.**
    - a. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your great mercy; And according to your compassion, blot out my transgression.... Against You only have I sinned And done evil in Your sight...." (**Psalms 51**)
- v. These examples give us the spiritual tools to deal with bitterness in our hearts, so that we and others are not defiled and turn away from God!
- vi. Today, we will look at Paul's example, and how he turned suffering, a source of bitterness for many, into a display of God's goodness and great power.

## II. Paul's Example

- a. Intro: Paul faces great trials and suffering
  - i. Paul speaks of his trials, defending himself, as other church leaders attack his authority as an apostle. We get a glimpse of Paul's trials and suffering as he makes his defense.
  - ii. Read **2 Corinthians 11:22-33**
    1. Consider Paul's trials, let's not underestimate or "laugh these off". (Timothy's canoe trip example.)
    2. Paul's suffering:
      - a. Physical suffering (pain from torture, sleepless nights, etc.)
      - b. Emotional suffering (Loss of relationships/his people, loneliness, boredom, anxiety, fear, etc.)
      - c. Spiritual suffering (What is God doing? Has God left me? Weight of churches, etc.)
  - iii. Paul tells us how he viewed these challenges

1. "If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity." (**2 Corinthians 11:30**)
  2. "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I will take pleasure in my infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (**2 Corinthians 12:9-10**)
- iv. **Questions:** How did Paul "take pleasure" (and not bitterness) in his infirmities, reproaches, needs, persecutions, and distresses for Christ's sake? How can we do the same?
- v. Let's not super spiritualize Paul, a man just like use. May we humble ourselves and learn from his example.
1. "I can't relate to Paul. He is so spiritual...."
  2. My windows. "I could never do carpentry and home improvement like Chris and Chuck." (So I won't take their advice and follow their example, be humble and learn?!)
  3. I could never memorize a Scripture every day like that brother?
  4. I could never be as loving as that sister....
- b. *Paul realized he had been forgiven of the very wrongs done to him.*
- i. Picture Paul being beaten by rods. What is he thinking about? Perhaps the following....
  - ii. Stephen's stoning: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Now Saul was consenting to his death.... As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison." (**Acts 7:59-8:1,3**)
1. Paul persecuted the Church! There was a great sense of justice in some of his suffering.
  2. As he was being tortured, did Paul think about those he tortured?
  3. Read **Luke 7:40-47**.
    - a. The woman who showed such lavish love to Jesus, had been forgiven much and loved much.

- b. This seems to be Paul's heart – understood how much he had been forgiven, and loved at great cost, but freely, joyfully.
    - c. "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." (**1 Corinthians 15:9**)
  - iii. Forgiveness is the antidote to bitterness
    - 1. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." (**Luke 23:34**)
      - a. Jesus' ultimate example on the cross. Criminals at his sides, being insulted, crucified, tortured.
    - 2. "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (**Matthew 6:14**)
      - a. Jesus speaks plainly. The blessing/promise (when we forgive), and the warning/consequence (if we do not forgive).
      - b. So much in Scripture on forgiveness and lack of forgiveness. Great study. Encourage you to study this out.
  - iv. As Paul was being beaten with rods, he recognized he had been forgiven of the same. Extends forgiveness to his Jewish brothers.
- c. *Paul realized he must walk as Jesus walked, as a suffering servant*
  - i. Paul suffered like Jesus
    - 1. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus... made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant... He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (**Philippians 2:7-8**, written while in prison)
    - 2. "He was a man in suffering and knew how to bear sickness. His face was turned away, and He was dishonored and not esteemed. He bears our sins and suffers for us, yet we considered Him to be in pain, suffering, and ill-treatment. But He was wounded because of our lawlessness, and became sick because of our sins. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His bruise we are healed." (**Isaiah 53:3-5**)

3. Paul as a suffering servant: sleepless nights, persecutions, dangers, emotional stress and pressure, preaching/serving without pay, suffering for Christ. Not with bitterness, resentment, self-pity. Sense of joy, hope, gladness, love.
  4. Let's not be suffering for our own sin, our own foolish decisions, etc. Instead, our suffering should be on account of our obedience to Christ.
- d. *Paul put his suffering in perspective with the future glory to come*
- i. Read **Romans 8:14-17**
    1. We are Sons of God, adopted children, heirs of God and of Christ.... But a condition:
      - a. "... if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."
      - b. Estate planning: people typically leave all their estate to their sons and daughters – everything. They love them. Want to give them all the blessing they can. Perhaps people are like God in this way. **Out of His great love, God wants to bless His children with a glorious inheritance, prepared for us.**
  - ii. Read **Romans 8:18-21**
    1. Sufferings of this present time not worthy to the glory which shall be revealed in us.
    2. That day when the sons of God will be revealed.
    3. Into glorious liberty of the children of God.
  - iii. Paul is able to see suffering in its proper light/place. Suffering is not even worthy of the glory to be revealed/received!
  - iv. Suffering, indeed, can cause us to look ahead to the future glory. This is a great blessing, to get our eyes off of this world, to ponder, consider, hope for the return of Christ and the resurrection of our bodies and the glory to be revealed.
  - v. Imagine Paul, in a prison cell, alone, cold, hungry. Where do his thoughts go? To that future glory that shall be revealed!
- e. *Paul grasp of God's love for him NOW also overwhelms his perspective on his current suffering and those who cause it!*
- i. Read **Romans 8:35-39** Love of God

1. Paul's attitude: Great... we are just sheep waiting for the slaughter. God's love is so amazing!
2. Remember: Satan is bringing death, destruction, evil, injustice. It is not God doing this. Paul realizes that God has fully demonstrated His love. Paul does not blame the injustice and suffering he is facing on God.

ii. Read **Romans 9:1-5** Love for enemies

1. The Jews were trying to kill Paul. The Jews are the ones that are stirring up the Romans to arrest Paul.
2. Yet Paul's attitude toward his enemies: I wish I myself could be cut off – if they only would be reconciled to God!
3. Remarkable example.
  - a. Yes, turned and preached to Gentiles.
  - b. But heart for "his people" was that they might be saved. Seems he would do anything he could to see this happen.

*f. Paul trusted the Holy Spirit's wisdom regarding his ministry, which included danger and suffering!*

i. Read **Acts 20:22-27, 21:3-15**

1. Spirit is warning Paul that chains and suffering await.
2. "They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem." (**Acts 21:4**)
3. He is determined to go. Not only willing to be bound, but to die.
4. Compare to what others thought (**Acts 21:7-15**). Lots of reasons (in my mind) that Paul going to Rome seemed like a bad idea:
  - a. 22 years since conversion
  - b. 3 missionary journeys, planted many churches, converting people.
  - c. Letters: Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans

d. You've been so effective Paul. Let's do more of the same! We need you here with us.

e. ***What good can result from being in prison?***

5. However, Paul was determined that the Spirit was leading Him there. Was it? Let's see what happens....

ii. Effective evangelism, inspire courage with the brothers

1. Arrested in Jerusalem. (**Acts 21**)
2. Paul appeals to his Roman citizenship and released. (**Acts 22**)
3. Commander sends Paul to the Sanhedrin where he is struck. Paul gets the Sadducees and Pharisees arguing about the resurrection.
4. Read **Acts 23:10-11**.
  - a. God encourages Paul: just like you did in Jerusalem, go and testify in Rome!
  - b. "Be of good cheer, Paul."
5. Jews plot to murder Paul. (**Acts 23**) Plot revealed by a young boy and Paul escorted by 200 soldiers to safety to appear before Felix, the governor in Caesarea. (But imprisoned)
6. Paul testifies before governor Felix, but imprisoned for 2 years as Felix hopes to get a bribe from Paul.
7. New governor Festus leaves Paul imprisoned to do the Jews a favor. (**Acts 24:27**)
8. Paul appeals to Caesar and sent to Rome. But first is able to testify to King Agrippa, the ruler of Galilee, who he seems to almost persuade to become a Christians. (**Acts 25-26**)
9. Sails to Rome, storm and shipwreck. (**Acts 27**)
10. Imprisoned in Rome for 6-7 years, free for a few years, in the middle of that time, then executed.
11. Holy Spirit was correct: chains and suffering awaited Paul.
12. **Question:** What was accomplished in this time? (~10 years) Was any good done through this fool's errand?



- iii. Paul writes from prison/house arrest from Rome that God is using him to bring people to faith in Caesar's household and emboldening the brothers and sisters to proclaim the Gospel (**Philippians 1:3-8**)
  - 1. "But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, have become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." (**Philippians 1:12-14**)
  - 2. "All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household" (**Philippians 4:19**)
- iv. Paul's peace (not terror/bitterness) in persecution would be a sign against God's enemies and confirm the faith to the Church.
  - 1. Read **Philippians 1:27-30**
  - 2. "... And not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to the a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God."
  - 3. "to you it has been granted ... to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me...."
- v. Paul knew how powerful his example would be for others and this example was needed.
  - 1. Read **Philippians 4:4-9**
    - a. So powerful, knowing he is writing this from prison.
    - b. Consider how helpful for the Christians who would also be imprisoned during Paul's day. Also those who would be imprisoned 5 years later. 20 years later. 2000 years later.
    - c. What inspiration and a model to comfort us in our suffering.
    - d. We can use this passage for every worry in our life (including in our suffering and persecution). This is a go-to for me. I use it ALL THE TIME. I present each of my worries to God.
  - 2. Read **Ephesians 3:1-4:3, 25-32** (imprisoned in Rome as recorded in **Acts 28**)

- a. His perspective: here to proclaim the mystery of Christ.
- b. To help others understand the width, length, depths and height of God's love.
- c. To urge them to have a humble, gentle, long-suffering, loving spirit; to put away anger, bitterness, wrath. To be kind, forgiving one another.
- d. "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace on its hearers." (**Ephesians 4:29**)
- e. Again, a tremendous example/model for those who would go after him (imprisoned, suffering, etc.)
- f. Do you see what Paul is doing?
  - i. Setting an example for the Church.
  - ii. Me: when I went through a long, many-year illness: I'm going to set an example for my children, who face their own sickness/poor health someday.
- vi. God uses Paul in prison to help resolve a conflict between brothers.
  - 1. Read **Philemon 1-14**. Paul brings reconciliation between a run-away slave (Onesimus) and his former master (Philemon).
  - 2. Remarkable! God can use us anywhere, in any situation to accomplish His purposes!
- vii. Conclusion: Paul trusted the Holy Spirit's wisdom.
  - 1. **Paul's first 22 years (~35-57 A.D.)** Three missionary journeys, church plantings, writes Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans.
  - 2. **Paul's last 10 years (~57-67 A.D.)** Arrested in Jerusalem, trials, prison in Caesarea, journey to Rome, imprisoned in Rome, short period of release, imprisoned again and then killed. What can one do held for God when held captive/imprisoned?
    - a. Sets an example for other believers
    - b. Proclaims the Gospel, inspiring the Church

- c. Writes the letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus. 5 of these letters from prison!
    - i. In 1675 in Bedford, England, the famous puritan preacher and writer **John Bunyan** was arrested and imprisoned for 12 years. Wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*, an allegory of the Christian life, during his time in prison!
    - ii. This has spread the Christian message throughout the world, one of the most significant works of English literature, considered the first novel, and translated into 200 languages.
  - d. Paul's letters were arguably his greatest legacy: his example and the Words of the Holy Spirit have helped spread the Gospel for the past 2000 years!
- g. Lessons and inspiration for us:
- i. Paul's afflictions would have caused many to become discouraged, angry, bitter. Paul turns afflictions/sufferings on their head.
    - 1. "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I will take pleasure in my infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (**2 Corinthians 12:9-10**)
  - ii. Paul was confident that the Spirit was leading him into trials, in order to powerfully proclaim the Gospel.
    - 1. Paul took "pleasure" in these trials, as he understood that God's power was made perfect in weakness.
    - 2. Paul did not know how this would all play out or how the Gospel would be advanced, but listened to and followed the Spirit.
    - 3. Paul did not give way to fear or bitterness.
  - iii. May we be inspired by Paul's example and close with his words in **2 Corinthians 4:5-18**:

"For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus our Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is God who commanded light to shine out in darkness, who has shone in our

hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsake; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you.

And since we do have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believed and therefore I spoke,' we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God."