

Pulpit Curriculum 22 March 2020

“Our attitude converts our adversity into advantage.” – Pastor Kurt

Sunday morning, Pastor Kurt went over the story of God sending the apostle Paul to Jerusalem. That story begins in Acts 20:17 and carries through the next eight chapters to the end of the book. While there, Paul was arrested and imprisoned, and he appealed to have his case heard before Caesar. The Holy Spirit let Paul know ahead of time what would happen, so he knew this was all part of God’s plan. Over a period of years, Paul traveled in chains from Jerusalem to Rome, endured shipwreck, worked miracles in God’s power, and shared the gospel before some of the most influential people in the Roman Empire. That included people who might otherwise have been insulated from the gospel, like Caesar’s Praetorian Guard in Rome.

Paul also wrote several books of the New Testament during this time, creating blessings for the church that have lasted from Paul’s time to the present day. Pastor Kurt quoted from one of Paul’s prison epistles.

Who will read Philippians 1:12-14?

¹² I want you to know, brothers,[or brothers and sisters] that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard[praetorium] and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

[Optional point] Pastor Kurt also referenced John M. Barry’s book, *The Great Influenza*. Barry described Einstein’s great genius as identifying what matters – what was both true and significant – out of a vast amount of data, pursuing it vertically and connecting it horizontally. Barry was talking about truth in science, but we have a great opportunity to apply that method to truth in faith – pursuing God vertically and connecting people to Him horizontally.

[Lifegroup Questions]

- In the midst of this pandemic – and really, in the midst of everything else going on in your life, because not all of those things have stopped -- are your circumstances reigning over you, or is the sovereignty of God reigning over you?
- How are you making your circumstances serve you, and more importantly, the Lord?
- How will you, going forward from this moment, use these circumstances to pursue more Christ in your life?
- How will you use these circumstances to pursue more community – with your family, with your church, with those in your neighborhood, with those family and friends far way, and especially with those in need?

- How will you use these circumstances to pursue the Great Commission?

In the epistles, Paul asked for prayers that he would share the gospel boldly and that God would open hearts. We don't think of Paul as someone who needed help with boldness, but that's probably because God answered those prayers with a resounding "Yes!" Like Paul, we can pray for open hearts, for opportunities to share and to serve others, for vision to recognize those opportunities, and for boldness.

People in fear are probably more likely to be open to someone talking about God than at any other time. Even people who don't believe will be more sympathetic to other's need to believe, and consequently even the most ardent atheist or pagan will probably let you talk about Jesus. Let's take advantage of the opening that COVID-19 has blown in the enemy's defenses to gain and secure ground for the Kingdom of God.