

# Pioneers Wanted

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[ 0 : 00 ] More than anything else, the Apostle Paul wanted to be a missionary and preach the gospel in Rome. That was the hub of the Roman Empire, the great empire Rome, and it was the key city of its day.

And if Paul could conquer it for Christ, it would potentially mean reaching millions with the gospel of Jesus. And it was critically important to the Apostle Paul's agenda.

That's where he wanted to end up. He wanted to end up in Rome. He said in Acts chapter 19, he said, After I have been there, speaking of Jerusalem, he said, I must also see Rome.

And from Corinth, he wrote in Romans 1.15, he says, So much as is in me, I am ready or eager to preach the gospel to you that are in Rome.

Now, Paul wanted to go to Rome as a preacher, but instead he ends up in Rome as a prisoner. And that's what we see in these prison letters that we are in the book of Philippians.

[ 1 : 16 ] As we are going through this book, he could have written a long letter about all those things that took place and that happened to him and his experience as a prisoner.

But instead, in verse number 12 of Philippians chapter 1, where we're going to begin this morning, he sums it up as the things which happened to me.

All of these years, these couple of years that were transpiring and was going, leading up to the things that take place, Paul said, the things that happened to me.

Now, the record, for those of you who are following along in our Philippians journal and are doing some of the back story and some of the history as we continue with this, if you'd like to know Paul's progress from first being improperly imprisoned all the way through where he gets to Rome, that's recorded in Acts chapter 21, verse number 17, all the way through Acts 28, verse 31.

So all those chapters are chronicling Paul's journey as he goes from being imprisoned, he leaves on the ship, and he ends up there. Now, the Jews thought that Paul had desecrated their temple by bringing some Gentiles in, and the Romans thought he was an Egyptian renegade who was on their most wanted list.

[ 2 : 51 ] So from a religious perspective and from a political perspective, the apostle Paul was a wanted man. And that's why we find that he was illegally imprisoned.

And so Paul becomes the focal point of the religious as well as the political plotting for a couple of years.

He finally appealed to Caesar, and that was the right of every Roman citizen. They didn't realize he was a Roman citizen. So the moment he says, I would like to appeal to Caesar as a citizen of Rome, then all of a sudden they get troubled and they immediately ship him off to Rome.

And in route, he was shipwrecked. As a matter of fact, that is one of the great portions of Scripture, the account of Paul's faith and Paul's courage.

And one of the most dramatic accounts in the Bible, it's in Acts chapter 27. If you would like to read about Paul's shipwreck. And after three months of waiting on the island of Malta, Paul finally embarks on another ship and he heads to Rome for the trial that he had requested for Caesar.

[ 4 : 07 ] So this is some of the back story in the background of all that happened to me. Now, to many, this would have looked like a failure. Paul wanted to go to Rome.

Paul wanted to preach the gospel. But instead, he's in chains. He gets stuck on a desert on an island in Malta for three months. He is shipwrecked, or he's shipwrecked, ends up on an island, finally goes to Rome in chains.

What a failure. That's some missionary. But not to this man who had a single-minded desire to spread the gospel all over the known world.

So to Paul, it was not a failure. Because Paul didn't find joy in ideal circumstances. He found his joy in winning others to Christ.

So however it took to win another person to Jesus, that's how Paul found joy. Whether it was in freedom or in chains, Paul said, my joy is in Christ. And he said he wanted to win others for the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 5 : 12 ] And if his circumstances worked out to the furtherance of the gospel, then to Paul, that was really all that mattered. Now, as we look at the word furtherance, we're going to get into verse 12 in a moment.

The word furtherance that we see the apostle Paul used as furthering the gospel, his imprisonment, his chains being bound 24 hours a day in six-hour shifts to a Roman praetorian guard, was furthering the gospel.

That word furthering is a Greek word, a military term, that referred to the army engineers that would go before the soldiers, and they would prepare the way.

They might build bridges so they could cross a river. They would be like the Corps of Engineers. They would be the ones that would go and they would build the infrastructure. The engineers that would go in and build things so the army could go.

So they were the advanced team. They were the pioneers. They were the ones that went first and got things done so the rest could come in and accomplish what they wanted to.

[ 6 : 23 ] So instead of finding himself confined as a prisoner, Paul discovered that his circumstances, in fact, opened up new areas of ministry.

So he looked at his imprisonment as an opportunity to have a different ministry, an opportunity to do something and to really reach people that he could have never reached otherwise.

Think about it. Would Paul have had an opportunity to share his faith for roughly 24 hours a day with four different guards in a 24-hour period and ultimately make his appeal to Caesar and to get the gospel into the official Roman court.

Not too many people can get a meeting with the president, but Paul did. And so that is the way he looked at his being imprisoned. Now, doesn't that cast a different light on the things that we think slow us down, on the things that we think, Well, God, this is terrible.

This is not what I expected. And how in the world could you saddle me with this illness or this problem or this difficulty?

[ 7 : 35 ] Well, the way Paul looked at it was, Well, it's not what I would have wanted, but I'm going to do what I can in the way, in the area that God has given me.

Now, everyone, I'm pretty sure here, has heard of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. But what you probably may not have been aware of was that his wife, Susanna, they were married, early in their married life, Mrs. Spurgeon became an invalid.

And so for many, they thought really all her ministry could have been was to encourage her husband and pray for his work. That would have been what any rational person, and even Susanna herself, would have thought, All I can do is stay home and support Charles when he gets home and pray for his ministry.

But God gave her a burden. Spurgeon was a very popular preacher in Britain at the time, and he spoke to thousands. He also had his sermons.

His sermons were printed, and he had many books that were out there. And so God gave her the burden to share her husband's books with the pastors who weren't able to afford them.

[ 8 : 58 ] And so she started what was called the Book Fund. And the Book Fund provided thousands of pastors with tools to support them in their work as they studied the Word of God.

Many of them had not had any formal biblical education. And so all this was supervised by Mrs. Spurgeon from her home.

It was a pioneer ministry. And we hear of others. I've told this account before, but when we were in the church in Bessemer in Alabama, one of the fellows who preached there was saying that his mom couldn't get out.

And she was older. She was elderly. And since she wasn't able any longer to have the ministry that she had before, and because she basically was an invalid, she took the Birmingham phone book and started at A.

And she called. And she would give her name, and she would say, this is not a wrong number. I just called to see how I could pray for you. And he said she had already gone all the way through, and

she was on her second time going through the phone book.

[10:20] And if any of you have ever seen the Birmingham phone book, it is a huge phone book. And so that was her ministry. That was her pioneer ministry, going through and using the telephone, because that's all she was able to do at the time.

We also had a lady at the time in our Awana ministry. She was 88, I think, 86 or 88 at the time. And she could barely see, so she had to read with one of these big magnifying glasses. And we were starting the Awana program when we were there at the church.

And she said, is there anything that I can do? I said, well, we need people who are listeners and can listen to the clubbers tell their verses that they've memorized.

And so she said, I can do that. And so we did ours on Friday evening. So every Friday evening, she would come, and someone would pick her up. She would come, and she would sit there with her magnifying glass and her Awana book, and she would listen as the children recited their verses.

[11:30] She loved the kids. The kids loved her. That's what she could do, and that's what she did. God still wants His people, God still wants His children to take the gospel into new areas.

He wants us to be pioneers, and sometimes He arranges circumstances to kind of force us into a pioneering ministry, something that we would have never expected, something that we would have never done on our own, but yet He places us in a pioneer ministry.

That's how the gospel originally came to Philippi. Paul had wanted to go into other territory, but you remember God repeatedly shut the door, Acts chapter 16, verses 6 through 10.

Paul wanted to take the ministry eastward into Asia, but God said, no, I want you to take it westward into Europe. Can you imagine how different things would be today if Paul had his way, and the gospel would have gone to Asia, but instead the gospel went to Europe, and we know what happened because of those who became the missionaries on their own, and ultimately they came to the United States, and we are a product of, I believe, tracing back, we're a product of the Apostle Paul's ministry when he went to Europe.

What a difference it made in history. God sometimes uses some strange tools to help us pioneer the gospel. In Paul's case, there were three tools that we see in his letter in verses 12 to verse 26, and what we see is these tools were, first of all, his chains, his critics, and his crisis.

[13:12] This morning, we're going to look at that first tool, and that was his chains in verse, beginning with verse number 12. So we can take our Bibles this morning.

Philippians chapter 1, beginning with verse number 12 through 14. Paul writes, But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me, we mentioned that, that's how Paul condensed all of the history that brought him to this point, and he says, The things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance.

That's that military, advanced military term. It has been the furtherance of the gospel, taking the gospel into new territory, a pioneering ministry, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, the whole praetorian guard, and to all the rest that my chains are in Christ.

Meaning it's a God thing. And then number 14, And most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident in my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

The same God that used Moses' rod, the same God that used Gideon's pitcher, and David's sling used the apostle Paul's chains to advance the gospel into the Roman court.

[14:36] And that is what God can do in our lives. And that's what God wants to do. He wants to use us to advance his gospel all over the world. Little did the Romans realize that the chains that they had affixed to his wrist would actually release Paul instead of bind him.

Even as he wrote later in his imprisonment, in 2 Timothy 2.9, He says, I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even unto bonds, but the word of God is not bound.

We cannot hold God's word back. People have tried to burn it. We've had leaders that have tried to eradicate the word of God, but all they did was fan the flame. And God's word went even further.

And so we see that God wants us to advance the gospel. He didn't complain about his chains. You know, Paul could have done that.

Paul could have said, Oh, woe is me. And I am so confined. I wish I could get the gospel out further, but, you know, I'm stuck here, and I only have four different guards that I can share the gospel with in a 24-hour period.

[15:47] He didn't complain about his chains. Instead, he consecrated them to God and asked God to use them for the pioneer advance of the gospel. And God answered his prayers.

To begin with, these chains, these hard times. I want to show us two things this morning that Paul tells us were accomplished in his chains.

The first thing is we see these hard times gave Paul contact with the lost. Paul's chains gave Paul contact with the lost.

There are many who go through their day and don't have contact with the lost. You know, they might run around the sphere of the saved and have very little contact with those who don't know the Lord Jesus Christ.

And sometimes God puts us in circumstances where he surrounds us with people who need to hear about Jesus. And that's what God did with the apostle Paul.

[16:50] His hard times put him in contact with the lost. Verse number 12, Paul says, But I want you to know, No, brethren, that the things which happened to me, being shipwrecked, appealing to Caesar, being sent here, being imprisoned, being stuck here.

He was under house arrest at the time. He had his own rented house, but he was still under guard. He says that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.

He was chained, as we said, to a Roman Praetorian soldier 24 hours a day. The shifts changed every six hours. So, which meant Paul could witness to at least four men every day.

Imagine yourself as a Roman guard, chained to the apostle Paul, chained to a man who, the Bible said, prayed without ceasing, who was constantly interviewing people about their faith, and was constantly writing to churches about their welfare and throughout the Roman Empire.

You know, it wasn't long before some of these soldiers trusted Christ as their Savior. Can you imagine listening to the powerful preacher Paul sharing his faith with you, sharing the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ?

[18:17] It wasn't long before the Holy Spirit began working on these guys. And guess what they did when they unlocked the key on their wrist and put it on their relief?

They would go home. And what do you think they talked about when they went home? Honey, you would never guess. I got stuck with this job today. This prisoner, all he does is talk about Jesus. He sings. He prays. He writes letters to churches. And he asked me, did I know Jesus as my Savior?

And he kept on and on and on and on. And it sounded like he knew me. I mean, it's like he talked like, you know, he talked about things that, that, you know, that go on in my head, but I never told anybody.

And that's what the gospel does. That's what the Holy Spirit does. So every day he was sharing the gospel. And it wasn't too long before these soldiers were putting their faith in Christ.

[19:19] And Paul was able to get the gospel into this elite praetorian guard. And something that he could not have done if he were a free man. But the chains that Paul had gave him contact with another group of people, the officials in Caesar's court.

He was able to bring the gospel to the lawmakers. He was able to bring the gospel to the people who were in the government administration of his day.

He was in Rome as an official prisoner. And Paul's case was an important one. The Roman government was going to determine the official status of this new Christian sect.

And was it merely another sect of the Jews? Or was it something that was possibly dangerous? So these Roman lawmakers had to decide, what are we going to do with this new religion?

And is it harmless? Or is it detrimental to Rome? Imagine how Paul must have been pleased how he was knowing that these court officials were forced to study the doctrines of the Christian faith.

[20:30] You know, as they were saying, well, we need to know what this is about. Well, this is what they teach. And this is Jesus. He claimed to rise again from the dead. And, you know, these are all the witnesses that saw him after he was buried.

And, yes, you know, we put him to death. And these soldiers attested to the fact that he died. And so they were reading about the doctrines of the Christian faith.

Sometimes God has to put chains on his people to get his gospel where he wants it to go in order to accomplish a pioneer advance.

That could never happen any other way. Sometimes we might feel chained. I know sometimes young mothers feel chained to home and can't get away when they want to.

But God can use those, quote, chains to reach people with a message of salvation. Susanna Wesley was the mother of 19 children.

[ 21 : 37 ] Can you imagine? That was before the time of our modern time-saving devices. And moms, that was the day before disposable diapers.

Can you imagine? Let's see. How many minutes or hours between diaper changes? Multiply times however many were in diapers at the time.

So 19 kids. You know, Susanna Wesley could have felt chained to those kids. But out of that large family came Charles and John Wesley, whose combined ministry shook the British Isles.

That's what we see. At six weeks of age, Fanny Crosby was blinded. But even as a youngster, she determined that she would not be confined by the chains of darkness.

In time, she became a mighty force for God through her hymns and through her gospel songs. And many of them continue to be sung today. What the world would have thought as being chained in darkness with being blind, Fanny Crosby used it to imagine what God was like and to pen all those mighty hymns.

[ 22 : 59 ] So the secret is this. We have to have a single mind. Further the gospel. God first. And no matter what happens to us, we're going to further the gospel.

We would look on our circumstances as God-given opportunities for the furtherance of the gospel. And here's the key. I believe here is the key.

That we would rejoice at what God is doing instead of complaining about what God did not do. Let me say that again. I believe the key in having joy in pioneer ministries is that we rejoice at what God is doing instead of complaining about what God did not do.

And we see a lot of times people will do that. We do that ourselves. We complain about a circumstance. Whereas the apostle Paul, and I'm sure Paul got down at times, and Paul looked at his circumstances as being difficult and hard and wished his circumstances would change.

But at the end of the day, Paul looked at them as opportunities rather than as disabilities. And so if we look at the things that happened to us and thank God rather than complaining and saying, God, why do you have me here?

[ 24 : 25 ] I see that's hitting home, isn't it, for some people? God, and I've been there. I've been there where, God, I would rather not be here. There are other things that I would rather be doing.

But guess what? God might have that one person that he's placed you in contact with every day that needs to know Jesus as their Savior. And you could make an eternity of difference because we thought we were chained.

But God said, I want you to be a pioneer, and I want you to speak for me wherever you are. So it's a matter of attitude, joy that was found in what God was doing rather than in what God chose not to do.

So Paul's chains gave him contact with the lost. But they also, we see in verse 13, he says, So that it has become evident to the whole palace guard and to all the rest that my chains are in Christ.

They also gave courage to the rest of the believers. So Paul's hard times not only gave him contact with the lost, but Paul's hard times encouraged the rest of the body of Christ.

[ 25 : 45 ] His hard times encouraged gave courage to the saved. We see that in verse number 14. And most of the brethren in the Lord. So Paul says, So we might ask ourselves, How might Paul's imprisonment have emboldened the rest of the believers?

By the way, that's one of the questions in your post-Sunday content. So I won't give you the answer to that, let you figure that out for yourself. And really, there's no right or wrong answer. It's, think about how would Paul's imprisonment, how would hearing that this Roman guard got saved, have encouraged you to share the gospel in the midst of your circumstances?

And if God was using Paul in prison, who was illegally in prison for preaching Christ, well, how much more could Paul use me, you know, being maybe stuck here on this job?

Well, God could still use you. So many of the believers in Rome were taking fresh courage when they heard Paul's faith and Paul's determination. In verse 14, they were, as we see, much more bold to speak the word without fear.

That word speak, by the way, doesn't mean preach. It just means everyday language. It's everyday talk. You know, the marketplace, the people you meet over coffee, that kind of speak.

[ 27 : 34 ] Speak the word without fear. Just talking around the neighborhood. It means everyday conversation. And no doubt, many of the Romans were discussing Paul's case.

I mean, this would have been like O.J.'s trial. Everybody talked about it. And there were many other trials since then that they were in the newspaper.

They were in the TV. Everybody talked about it. And, well, what do you think? What do you think about this? And people said, well, what do you think about this Christian faith? Well, I don't know anything about it. Well, you know, it's about just Jesus.

And I believe Paul was excited that his trial became the talk of the community, the talk of the town, so to speak. And legal matters were of a primary concern to this great Roman Empire.

They liked talking about things. They liked reasoning out things. And so people were probably talking about all of this. And the Christians in Rome who were sympathetic to Paul probably took advantage when they met someone in the marketplace.

[ 28 : 44 ] You know, we heard that such and such about this Paul's case. And maybe a Roman believer would have said, well, how much do you know about it?

And then maybe they would have taken the opportunity to share the gospel with this person in town. So discouragement has a way of spreading. We all know that. But encouragement can spread as well.

As a matter of fact, if we're excited about something, it can be contagious. Have you ever been excited about a movie, excited about something, excited about your hobby, or excited about something else?

And all you can do is get excited and talk to everybody about it. It can be encouraging. As a matter of fact, that's what got me into golf years ago. There was a guy that was so excited about chasing that little white ball around the cow pasture.

It got me excited about golf. And now I play once a year. Used to play more often when I was in Alabama. But something like that can get us excited about different things.

[ 29 : 45 ] So enthusiasm and excitement is contagious and can be contagious. The believers in Rome took fresh courage when they witnessed boldly for Jesus Christ because of the Apostle Paul.

And I'll close with this. Dr. Warren Wiersbe went through a serious, came home from a serious auto accident and he was recovering.

And Dr. Wiersbe says he received a letter from a total stranger who seemed to know just what to say to make his day brighter.

He said, in fact, he received several letters from this individual. He says, and each one was more encouraging than the one before. And when he was able to get around, he said he met him personally.

He was amazed to discover that he was blind, a diabetic, and handicapped because he had to have a leg amputated.

[ 30 : 49 ] And he said later on he had to have his other leg amputated because of his diabetes. He lived with and cared for his elderly mother.

He says, if a man ever wore chains, this man did. But if a man was ever to pioneer the gospel, he said this man was.

He was able to share Christ in high school assemblies, before service clubs, at the Y, and before professional meeting, before professional people in meetings that would have been closed to an ordained minister.

So this guy, he was blind, diabetic, and ultimately a double amputee, caring for his elderly mother, had more opportunities to preach the gospel sometimes than the preacher can.

And so this man's chains of his physical limitations were actually ways to further the gospel as a pioneer minister of the Lord.

[ 31 : 59 ] So our chains may not be dramatic as this. Our chains, and I use air quotes, might be the little ones that God has placed you over at home.

Your chains might be what you consider a job that is less than what you would think you want at this time.

It might be your physical limitations. It might be whatever you fill in the blank in your own life. Our chains may not be dramatic as this letter writer here.

But instead of complaining about what God did not do, let's rejoice at what God is doing. So in conclusion, let's learn how to rejoice at what God's doing instead of complaining about what God did not do.

Let's let that be our action step this week. Instead of complaining about our circumstances and what God chose not to do, let's rejoice at what God can do and what God wants to do through us this week.

[ 33 : 11 ] And secondly, let's be willing to let God use our hard times to further the gospel. So as the Bible says, let's redeem the time.

For the days are evil. We know that the Lord might come back anytime. And so rather than saying, oh, woe is me and twiddle our thumbs until our circumstances change, let's use the circumstance to further the gospel and just talk about Jesus.

Share the love of Christ with others. And do you realize that when others see your hard times and expect you to be bitter and expect you to grumble and complain like most people do, but instead if you say, well, God has a plan and God's in control and I'm going to make the best of this situation and they will look at you and say, what is wrong with you?

What happened to you? Well, God did. It's a God thing. And who's to say that your circumstances may not change and it may open up and free other opportunities.

But just take the time that you have now and redeem it for God. Let's pray. Lord, we pray this morning that you would use your word this morning, that you would use the encouragement that we have from the Apostle Paul and the things that happened to him.

[ 34 : 47 ] His arrest, his imprisonment, his shipwreck, his being chained actually worked out to further your word.

And so, Father, we pray that you would encourage us today to look to you and realize that nothing happens without you being aware of no accidents with you.

So, Father, please lift us, encourage us, and empower us to be who you want us to be. We thank you.

We praise you. For it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.