

“When Our Purpose Seems Puzzling”
Philippians 1:12-14
11/16/10

Introduction: When a child works on a puzzle he or she is often given a picture of the entire image in order to help guide him or her towards the completed picture. In life, we will encounter several puzzling situations. It may be a hardship in the form of opposition from others, loss of a job, death of a family member, etc. Just as the child is given a visual image to keep in mind, we have been given a spiritual picture to remind us our purpose. Our purpose is to glorify God in every circumstance (**1 Corinthians 10:31**) (**1 Peter 5:10**) (**James 1:2-4**). Today’s passage will reiterate this aspect through the words of the Apostle Paul.

Verse 12

The Furtherance

This verse is teaching us that Paul’s circumstances (“the things which happened unto me”) caused the furtherance of the gospel. What is Paul referring to? He is talking about his journey to Rome and his first **imprisonment**. The use of the word “brethren” tells us that this was written to Christians, specifically to those of the city of Philippi (a Roman colony). The phrase “but I would have ye should understand” indicates that the church at Philippi had heard of Paul’s troubles. Therefore, he wanted them to understand the spiritual **significance** of his troubles. He was intending to encourage, comfort, and strengthen them. Like Paul, do we think of encouraging others while we are going through trials? Although the gospel is good news that brings peace and hope, it meets opposition from the devil and the world. The word “furtherance” is better translated as “for the progress”, which refers to the forward movement of something. In military terms, it refers to armies of men proceeding in spite of the obstacles, danger, and **distraction**. Paul is saying that though it appeared the enemy had gained a great victory in restraining his activity, by the power of God, even the devices of the adversary were used to spread the gospel (**Acts 28:30-31**). As was in the case of Joseph and here for Paul, no matter how difficult, puzzling or disappointing our situation may be, we serve a God who **specializes** in turning a bad situation into something good (**Genesis 50:20**) (**Romans 8:28**). Remember, the believer’s job is to believe on God. We know from our experiences that God has taken many horrible circumstances and proved He is a great God. We should not be surprised when trials come our way. These are to be expected (**John 16:33**). When trials come, we should be reminded that we have the Holy Spirit. So, let us not lose hope (**Galatians 6:9**).

Verse 13

The Evidence

Here the Apostle Paul is stating that his **chains** (“my bonds”) were seen as evidence (“manifest”) by others that he was no criminal and his suffering were due to his preaching. The word “palace” simply denotes either a special building (e.g., a commander’s headquarters, the emperor’s palace) or the group of men in the imperial guard. Because Paul was in a private house in Rome (“in all the palace”) it is probably referring to the members of the imperial guard who guarded Paul day and night (**Acts 28:16**). The text tells us that not just the guards, but everyone else in the city of Rome (“in all other places) who met and heard Paul understood that he had become a **prisoner** because of preaching the gospel (**2 Corinthians 4:5**) (**Ephesians 6:19-20**). Have we endured hardship in our lives because of our speaking of the Word? If we are not talking about Christ to those we work and live with, then we need to analyze our spiritual walk. Paul was given an opportunity to reach those whom he would have never had access to. His chains were meant to be a **hindrance** for the gospel, but it led to the furtherance of the gospel. God is able to use even the devil to accomplish His purpose. Despite his chains, Paul chose to look at things in a positive light (**Philippians 2:14**). He influenced those who were near him and far away from him. We also have a choice. During difficult times, we can be pitiful or **powerful**, the choice is ours. However, we cannot be both at the same time. Like Paul, when things do not look pleasant, the best place to be is in the will of God.

Verse 14

The Confidence

Paul’s hardship led other Christians to act with confidence. We are told that “many of the brethren” were influenced positively. Here, we see that Paul is showing others (and us) the purpose behind his **painful** and puzzling situation. Not only did God allow the preaching to take place in the palace, but also this caused other **believers** to respond positively. Paul’s patience and trust in God were evident to many. Paul’s example of being a powerful witness demonstrated God’s faithfulness to His persecuted children. They realized that their (“brethren”) own imprisonment would not halt the progress of the gospel. This encouraged others to be bold and not fear imprisonment. Let us train ourselves to focus on the good and our God, not the evil and the Devil (**Hebrews 12:2**). Ask God to **reveal** His purpose in our trials. Paul accepted a short-term sacrifice for a long-term gain (*winning souls for Christ*). The greatness of a person is not measured by his or her accomplishments, but by the **opposition** he or she has to overcome in order to reach his or her goals. When our purpose seems puzzling, we have to remember the Lord is still in control of every situation.