

Is Life Fair?

Judging our circumstances from God's Perspective



Life is not fair, it never was, it isn't now and it won't ever be (Matthew McConaughey).

Life is Not Fair! There are times when we feel that way. Something happens to us, and we say, ***This isn't fair. Why is this happening to me?***

We seem to be stuck in the same job. Other people get promotions or leave for better jobs in other companies. We work hard, we do good work, we get along with people, but for some reason, others who were hired after us seem to advance, and we don't. And we think, ***"This isn't fair. Why is this happening to me?"***

We have difficulty conceiving a child. Other people get married and seem to have children with no difficulty. But then, as we watched them raise their children. They are not very good parents. We are not the only ones who think this. Others feel that way too. And we know that we would be good parents. We think, ***"This isn't fair. Why is this happening to me?"***

There was a time when the apostle Paul looked back at what had happened to him. Looking back over the past several years of his life, he, too, could have been tempted to say, ***"This isn't fair. Why is this happening to me?"***

Whatever is Just

Whatever things are just,
in your mind let them sink in
for in the end it will be
God's justice that will win.

For, God is full of mercy,
and gave to us His ways
so that we may have hope
for more peaceful days.

Whatever things are just,
these things think about
and they will bring comfort
when your fears incite doubt.

For, God works are flawless,
all has a perfect order
and He will make things right
amidst the chaos and horror.

Whatever things are just,
let your heart hold on to
for God's moral excellence
will one day be coming true!

(Deborah Ann)



Paul's Present Circumstances

I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.

Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defence of the gospel; the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice (Philippians 1:12-18).

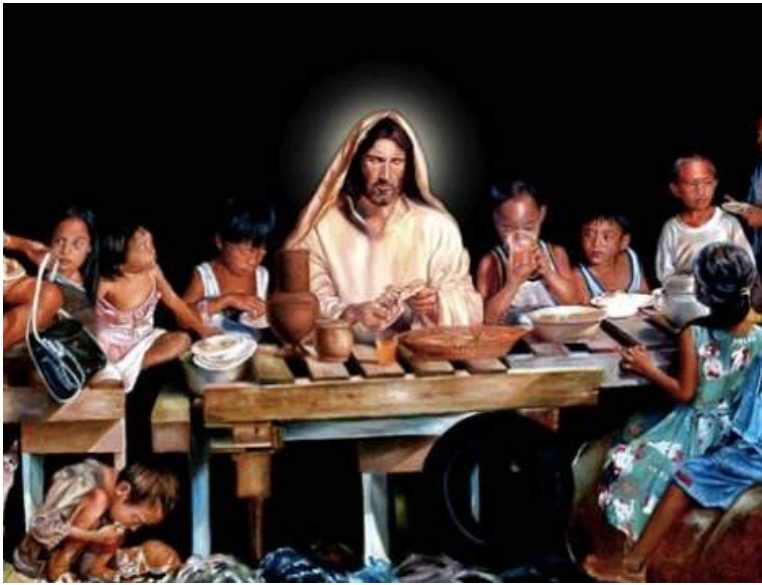
Paul was worshiping with friends in the temple in Jerusalem. Some Jews who hated him saw him there with his friends and started a rumour that Paul has brought a detested Gentile into the sacred Jewish temple.

The false rumour spread outside the temple and into the city. People believed it and got agitated. Some hotheads decided to do something about it. They instigated a mob and rushed into the temple. They dragged Paul out of the sanctuary and began to beat him in the courtyard. They intended to beat him to death.

The Roman commander who is responsible for keeping order in the city heard about the riot. He rushed to the courtyard with some soldiers and got there just in time to rescue a bloody Paul. He assumed Paul had done something wrong to inflame the crowd, so he arrested Paul on the spot. Then he tried to find out from the crowd what the problem was. Some shouted one thing, and others shouted something different.

The commander realised he wasn't going to get a clear answer, so he took Paul into the prison barracks. He decided that he will have one of his men interrogate the prisoner to find out what he has done. The method of interrogation was to tie the prisoner's arms between two posts and give him a bit of the whip until his tongue loosened and he told you what you wanted to know. As they were stretching Paul's arms out, Paul looked at the soldier in charge and said, "*Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who is un-condemn?*" (Acts 22:25)

Paul knows it isn't legal. If a man had Roman citizenship, he was protected from such abuse. If the soldiers flogged him without a trial and a verdict, they would all be court-martialled, and put in prison themselves. The soldier in charge turned white, told the others to stop right away, ran to the commander, and told him that Paul is a Roman citizen. Now the commander was worried, too. He had arrested a Roman citizen without any real charge against him. He needed to get a specific charge if he's going to protect his own career. So the next day, he brought Paul to the chief priests and the entire Jewish Council for a meeting.



Paul looked intently at the council and said, “*Brothers, up to this day I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God*” (Acts 23:1). The thought could have occurred to Paul: “***This isn’t fair. Why is this happening to me?***” Eventually, Paul was brought to the Roman court. Paul has still not yet been officially charged with anything, so the government allowed him to rent a small house. Still, he has to be chained to a guard 24/7 to ensure he doesn’t disappear until his case appear before Caesar. The Roman courts moved slowly, and Paul passed another two years under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30ff). Paul was able to receive visitors in the house, but the chains never left his wrists. Every six hours a new Roman guard took over. Paul can’t move unless the guard moves with him. When he sleeps, he has to arrange himself so that the chains don’t get under his head or his body. And even though he has no source of income, he still has to pay the rent on the house, or he will be put in a dungeon. For two years this went on, and the future is still very uncertain. Paul wasn’t sure what will happen if and when he finally does appear before Caesar. Paul knew Jerusalem would have been the end of him. Paul died as a martyr during the last year reign of Nero in year 68 AD. The thought might have occurred to him: “***This isn’t fair. Why is this happening to me?***” But that wasn’t the thought that occurred to Paul. During the two years of house arrest in Rome, a totally different thought came into Paul’s mind, a thought that brought a great grin to his face, and made him plain happy.

Paul asks a different question

When we look at what Paul wrote, we are going to see that the question he asked himself was not, “***Is what’s happening to me fair?***” No, he asked a different question. And the answer made him very happy. The question Paul asked was: “*What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motive or true; and in that I rejoice*” (Philippians 1: 18). As Paul looked over the past five years of his life, with the mob beating, the unjust imprisonment, the shipwreck, and now the round-the-clock chains – his concern is not “***is it fair?***” But “***Is it accomplishing anything for God.***” If you asked Paul, “*Was it fair, what happened to you?*” Paul would say, “*No.*” If you asked him, “*Has it been fun? Has it been enjoyable? Is it something you would have chosen for your life?*” Paul would say, “*Of course not.*” But in the midst of it all, he stopped and asked himself, “***Is what’s happening to me accomplishing something for God?***” And when Paul saw that the answer was “*yes*”- that mattered more to him than his personal convenience or the fairness of his situation. What happened to him really accomplished something for God, and that counted.

Paul has shared the gospel while in chains

Paul saw that what happened to him has furthered God's work. People are being won to the Lord - significant people, influential people, people who in the future can have a great impact for God. Because of what has happened to him, they are being won to the Lord. That's what mattered to Paul. Paul recognised the situation for what it is. And that mattered more to Paul than his personal convenience or the fairness of his situation. Is it possible that what happens to us might be God's way of really accomplishing something for Himself?

What about unfairness in our personal lives?

We feel like we are unjustly stuck in the same job, unable to change or get promoted. Is it possible that the reason has nothing to do with our competence or our ability to do other things? What happened to us really served to advance the gospel.



**"So the last shall be first,
and the first last."
(Matthew 20:16)**



We must learn to say with Paul, *"The question is not, is what's happening to me fair?"* but instead, *"Is what's happening to me accomplishing something for God?"* *"Is what's happening to me being useful to God in some way? Is it furthering His purpose in the world?"* And when we see that it is, we say, **"It's all about You, Lord. It's not about me."**

Paul has encouraged us while in chains

God does not promise that our circumstances in life will be fair. But He does promise that there will always be something in them that will serve Christ's purposes. There will always be a word to speak, a kindness to offer, a prayer to lift up. There will always be something for Christ in your circumstances. Look for it. What happens to us can serve to advance the gospel. And the joy of life comes when we can honestly say, **"It's not about me, Lord. It's only about you. It's all about you, Lord."** There is a lesson for us here. Paul knew nothing of personal jealousy or of personal resentment. All that mattered was about Jesus Christ. All too often we resent it when someone else gains a prominence or a promotion. Too often in ministry and church gatherings there is resentment against others because of what God is doing in their lives, which can often lead to rivalry; bitterness; jealousy and resentment. This ought not to be. Joy comes not from what happens to us, but **how we respond** - the kind of attitudes we have about those experiences. We need not feel like helpless victims of circumstance. No matter what predicament we are in, we should ask ourselves: "How does God want me to view it and feel about it?" Then we can choose with His help to have that frame of mind. A good illustration of this is Paul's life. If anyone in history could be excused for wallowing in self-pity and thinking "woe is me" because of frequent severe hardships, it would be Paul (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

Before God called him, Paul was hard-hearted and angry, persecuting and executing Christians. But after his conversion, he was transformed into a loving and joyous person - partly because he understood the magnificent generosity of God's grace and mercy.

Ironically, of all the books of the Bible, among the most joyful are the "prison epistles" - letters written by Paul while enduring an imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:16-31). They are the books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. A man whom we would expect to **need encouragement** was **giving encouragement!**

Paul referred to his intense suffering as "light affliction" compared with the "extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come to us." (2 Corinthians 4:17; see also Romans 8:8).

What a great attitude!

Contentment is a large part of joy. Paul wrote, "*Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have*" (Philippians 4:11).

Paul didn't tell us to rejoice only when the going is pleasant and easy. He said, "**Rejoice always**" (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

Let us also rejoice that whatever the motive that other believers may have, when they share the true gospel of Christ ... "**What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motive or true; and in that I rejoice**" (Philippians 1: 18).

"The man without a purpose is like a ship without a rudder - a waif, a nothing, a no man." - Thomas Carlyle



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