



A Spiritual Encouragement Message
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Overcoming Circumstances (Part 2)

by Randall Jarrell

James 1:2-4 puts it this way, “consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Paul says basically the same thing in Romans 5:3-8. “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

The origin of these trials and tribulations will vary and range from the persecution that comes from sinful people as we strive to live godly lives in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. [3:12](#)) to the natural consequences of life. But regardless of the origin, God is able to use such difficult situations in our lives to develop godliness in us as He matures us and conforms us into the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28,29). That is why both Paul and James say there is a cause of rejoicing even in the midst of trials and tribulations. God is not caught off guard and He will use even these things to bring about good results in the lives of all those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom. [8:28](#)).

The Bible is full of examples of this principle in action with the “hall of faith” of Hebrews 11 being one chapter in which many such examples are specifically given in demonstrating how their faith in God enabled them to overcome their circumstances. Again, circumstances, whether good or bad, when combined with a godly perspective will result in a cause for rejoicing.

In Paul’s case, he is in Rome, and he is reporting to the Philippians that he was imprisoned and that there were other Christians that because of bad motives wanted to add to his distress. While his imprisonment is not as bad as it could be, for Acts 28:30,31 describes his situation as follows, “And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.” His imprisonment is more of a house arrest than being confined and isolated in a jail, but Paul was not free to do all that would have been on his heart as he had expressed in his letter to the Romans some years earlier.

In this type of imprisonment, he was confined to his rented quarters, for which he would have been dependent on the charity of others to provide for him. He would also have been physically chained to a guard at all times. Paul speaks about his "chains" in both Ephesians 6:20 where he describes himself as an "ambassador in chains" and in 2 Timothy 1:16 he describes the charity of the house of Onesiphorus who "often refreshed" him and was "not ashamed" of his chains. Paul could never have any privacy, and he was not free to go where he would like. In the midst of all this, it was apparent that some Christians did not like Paul and sought to add to his distress by maligning him even as they also preached Christ. What is Paul's reaction to his circumstances? Paul overcame them by focusing on what God was doing even in the midst of them. As he states in 2 Timothy 2:9, though he was imprisoned as a criminal would be, the word of God was not imprisoned. Paul's circumstances were proving to be a means for the greater progress of the gospel, and so there was cause to rejoice. That does not mean that Paul enjoyed being in chains or maligning by others, but it does mean he kept a godly perspective and so found joy.