

Christ in Prophecy
Prophecy 69: Paul's Persevering Faith

© 2021 Lamb & Lion Ministries. All Rights Reserved.
For a video of this show, please visit <http://www.lamblion.com>.

Opening

Nathan Jones: Welcome to Christ in Prophecy! I'm Nathan Jones, Internet Evangelist here at Lamb & Lion Ministries.

So far, our series on how you can acquire an unshakeable faith opened with Dr. David Reagan's message focusing on the tough faith of Isaiah and Jeremiah. And, last week, I offered insights from Habakkuk on how you can have resolute faith. Now finally, for our last presentation in this series, we'll turn to the New Testament.

One of the most prolific writers of the New Testament was the Apostle Paul. He may have addressed weighty subjects such as theology and church doctrine, but he also lived out his faith under terrible persecution.

Tim Moore will now help us learn how to imitate Paul's persevering faith.

Part 1

Tim Moore's Presentation, *Exercising Tough Faith in Tough Times*

Tim Moore: When I lead pilgrimage groups to Israel, I always challenge them on day one to name a Biblical exemplar, someone whose character and faithfulness makes them a worthy role model. The only stipulation is that pilgrims have to pick someone other than Jesus because He is the perfect role model, and everyone would choose Him if they could.

You can imagine that there are typical favorites like David, and Ruth, and Peter. But one of the clear front-runners from the New Testament is Paul.

Why is this former Pharisee a highly respected Christian role model? Because of his life's testimony and the fact that he wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament. For that reason alone, we know more about Paul than most of the other Apostles. We understand how he thought and what motivated him throughout his ministry. And we are also inspired by his persevering faith.

Paul began life as Saul. He was a Jew's Jew, a Pharisee dedicated to the Law with uncommon passion. Saul is first introduced in Acts 7, during the stoning of Steven. (Acts 6:5) Although he was young at the time, Saul was present, and entrusted with holding the robes of the men who stoned Stephen, a man full of grace, and power, and of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 6:8) As the author of that book, Luke makes a point to say that Saul was in hearty agreement with putting Stephen to death.

Stephen's death triggered a zeal in Saul to hunt down and persecute Christians. Luke says that he began "ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women"

to put them in prison. (Acts 8:3) Of course, God used even this kind of persecution to cause believers to scatter and preach the word far beyond Jerusalem.

By Acts 9, Saul's hatred for the church was manifesting itself in threats of murder. He even sought letters from the high priest authorizing him to flush out Christians all the way up in Damascus. It was on his way to Damascus that Saul encountered the risen Lord Jesus Christ. But, blinded by his hatred and legalism, Saul did not recognize the Lord. He asked, "Who are You, Lord?" (Acts 9:5)

Jesus was gracious with Saul and gave him instructions to follow so that he would learn what to do next. But, befitting his former spiritual blindness, Saul was struck blind for the next 3 days, the same length of time Jesus was in the grave, unseen even by those who had followed Him.

We all know the rest of the story. Saul was led by the hand to Damascus, where he neither ate or drank for three days. Then, the Lord called a disciple named Ananias to go to Saul and heal his sight. Ananias was well aware of Saul's reputation. He answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." (Acts 9:13-14)

But God had a plan for and a call on Saul's life, "to bear His name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel." Furthermore, God revealed to Ananias His intention to "show Saul how much he must suffer for My name's sake." (Acts 9:16) Ananias was faithful and went to Saul to lay his hands on him and pronounce healing and filling with the Holy Spirit.

I love what Luke records as Saul shifted his zeal for persecuting Christians into passion for proclaiming Jesus. He immediately went to the same synagogues where he had intended to weed out Christians and declared that Jesus is the son of God. The text says that he increased in strength and confounded the Jews in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. What was their reaction to his impassioned preaching? Well, they plotted together to kill him. So, the disciples lowered Saul in a large basket through an opening in the wall of the city.

Humiliated by that unexpected let-down, Saul returned to Jerusalem and spoke boldly in the name of the Lord. The disciples there were understandably wary of him, but Saul's fervor could not be stifled. He began to argue with the Hellenistic Jews, those who had embraced the Greek language and culture, but they also responded by trying to put him to death.

Eventually, the early church fathers realized that Saul's preaching was merely stirring up unrest, so they brought him down to Caesarea and bought him a one-way ticket home to Tarsus. After Saul was gone the scripture says, "the church throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase." (Acts 9:31)

Do you understand what Luke is telling us there? Saul, who would later be known as the great apostle and apologist Paul, was completely ineffective when he first began preaching. Filled with passion, but not yet submissive to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, Saul had no impact in Damascus or Jerusalem, other than to stoke resentment and murder. So, the Apostles sent him away to wait upon the Lord, and to grow in the Holy Spirit.

Five years later, Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. By Acts 13, two-three years after that, Saul was still being mentioned as a helper to Barnabas. And then, while church leaders in Antioch were worshipping and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul

for the work to which I have called them.” (Acts 13:2) Relegated to the wilderness for a period of time to learn humility and obedience, Paul’s development was complete. He was now ready to go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit and to become the mighty evangelist that we know and respect.

But while Paul’s remaining life was dedicated to the Lord, it was not without headaches or heartbreaks. Paul came to know the shortcomings both within himself and throughout the church. He wrote, “wretched man that I am” not merely wretched man that I was. (Romans 7:24) Paul understood that his own heart was prone to wander, prone to leave the God I love.

And yet, Paul had tough faith. He overcame trials and tribulation, serving the Lord faithfully, and stands as a lasting exemplar of persevering faith.

Paul’s living and written testimony offers us four attachment points to anchor our own faith, ensuring that we too can exhibit tough faith in tough times: He taught us that salvation is dependent upon God’s grace, not our works. He said, the blessing of persevering in spite of trials that could otherwise deter us is critical. He also shared the importance of focusing outward, pouring into others both corporately and individually. And finally, he teaches us the confident expectation that we shall soon be with the Lord.

Point number one, Paul understood that salvation comes by grace, not works. How else could he have hope given his past persecution of Christians and his self-awareness as the “chief of sinners?”

You know it would be easy to look at Paul’s selfless life, and his sacrificial service, and conclude that he was motivated by some form of works salvation. But nothing could be farther from the truth. Paul wrote consistently about salvation by grace, not of works. So why did he serve so passionately? Well, to quote that great theologian Rocky Balboa, “Friends don’t owe; they do because they wanna do.”

I realize that in one sense we do owe God everything. But the very word “owe” suggests that we can pay Him back, or at least that we should be trying to do so. Endeavoring to pay back the Lord would be like trying to bail out the ocean one bucket at a time.

Paul was emphatic on this point. He said, “By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9) And to Titus he wrote, “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy...” (Titus 3:5)

So, why do we do? Why do we love? Because God first loved us. Because He replaced our heart of stone with a heart of flesh, reflecting His own great love.

Imagine for a moment that Paul believed that his salvation depended on his own accomplishments. Ignore for this exercise that as Saul he had already been an accomplice to the murder of Stephen, and the zealous persecution of other Christians. His own written confessions testify to the hopelessness of that idea. He did things he knew were wrong and did not do things he knew were right. His missionary plans were frequently upset and sidetracked, and the reception he received typically ranged from chilly to hostile.

The frustration inherent in a faith system based on works leads inevitably to despair. That is why so many people who are stuck in a works salvation mentality lack joy. They can never be sure

that they have been “good enough” to gain entry into Heaven. The threat of God’s displeasure or wrath hangs over them constantly, and unless they close their own minds and harden their own hearts the strain of such condemnation wears them down.

But Paul was never worn down, regardless of his circumstances, the reception he received, or the apparent fruit his efforts bore. As he said, “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and having need.” (Philippians 4:11-12) Summarizing his confident motivation, Paul said, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13)

And that brings us to point two, Paul did not allow trials to deter him. He persevered by waiting upon the Lord and consistently endeavoring to serve in his time.

Paul’s trials began as a believer at the moment of his conversion, while he was still known as Saul. And by the way, Paul was originally named after another son of the tribe of Benjamin, King Saul. By the time he became a missionary to the Gentiles and adopted the Greek version of his name, Paul, he had to recognize the irony of being named after a man who came from the least of the tribes of Israel, felt inadequate to the challenge of his own calling, and strayed badly when he did not stay grounded in the Lord.

So, when he first encountered Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, Saul was stricken blind. It was as if the Lord was telling him that the spiritual blindness that motivated his persecution of Christians would be highlighted by a period of physical blindness.

From that moment until Ananias laid hands on him, Saul was completely dependent on the love and compassion of others. It is often very hard for a prideful person to accept the help of others, but that was a lesson that Saul had to learn from day one of his Christian walk.

Once his sight was restored, Saul’s inclination toward great zeal shifted from hunting down Christians to sharing the Gospel. But motivated by his own personality and relying only on his own great intellect and persuasiveness, Saul’s valiant efforts produced no fruit. Instead, they only inspired hatred, tribulation, and persecution. (Acts 9:19-31) When the apostles sent Saul away, he was forced to learn patience as he waited upon the Lord, and grew in the Lord. Only when he was spiritually mature, having spent a season in a figurative wilderness, did the Holy Spirit inspire the brethren in Jerusalem to “send Paul.” (Acts 13:2)

From that point on, as Paul set out as a missionary to the Gentiles, he experienced trial after trial. At one point, he was stoned so severely that his persecutors thought him dead. Others he was shipwrecked. On more than one occasion, he was thrown into prison or held under house arrest. And yet in all of those situations Paul merely considered the detour part of the path God had planned in advance for him.

Did you get that?

Even as Paul’s intended plans were frustrated time after time, his dedication to the mission at hand did not waver. He merely preached the gospel to people in a manner and in a location that he had not expected.

I'm reminded of Pastor Walter Hoyer, Andrew Brunson, unnamed missionaries throughout the ages, and countless others who have found themselves persecuted, prosecuted, and even incarcerated, and yet remained faithful to "preach the word, being ready in season and out of season." (2 Timothy 4:2)

We take for granted that Paul just trekked around the Mediterranean basin and shared the Gospel. But travel itself was difficult and risky in those days. And although his Roman citizenship famously offered him protection in one instance, his Christian faith was seen as an affront and growing threat to Rome. Beyond that, his preaching provoked outrage from wary Jews, economically threatened merchants, and civic authorities charged with enforcing Roman peace.

Many Christians around the world are persecuted, prosecuted, and incarcerated today. And I believe the soft intolerance our own culture is manifesting toward Christianity will soon turn into abject persecution. Like Paul, we must remain faithful, preaching the Word in season and out.

Beyond these examples, Paul's experience offers us insight into the practice and purpose of God. Paul famously struggled with an undefined "thorn in the flesh." We do not know if it was a chronic illness, a physical defect, or a spiritual, or emotional burden. Some have even speculated that he could have been metaphorically referring to someone like Alexander the coppersmith, who certainly behaved as a pain in the neck and did Paul "a great deal of harm." (2 Timothy 4:14)

Still, Paul viewed his distracting thorn, what he described as a "messenger of Satan to torment me," as allowed by God. Why did he describe the annoyance he prayed to have removed as a blessing in disguise? Because he discerned that it was offered "to keep me from exalting myself because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations." (2 Corinthians 12:7) And, because it made him understand the power of Christ inherent in God's promise: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Therein lies the secret to persevering faith.

All of us who have had an affliction, whether temporary or permanent, physical or mental or emotional or spiritual, minor or extreme can understand the heartfelt and sincere request that it be removed. As Paul undoubtedly did, we might reason, "Oh, if only this annoyance were removed, I could be so much more effective, efficient, and focused." But our faith is toughened as we experience the sufficiency of God's grace and the perfection of His power.

In today's world, military recruiters, college admissions counselors, and human resource departments are looking for people with grit, an individual's determination to overcome obstacles or surmount challenges to achieve a goal. God does not promise us a path free from obstacles, He supplies the grace and power for us to overcome them all.

Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation, but take courage or as Sean Hannity's translation says, "let not your heart be troubled," I have overcome the world." Our trials and tribulations will multiply as the Day of the Lord draws near, just consider the 14 promises to overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3. Daniel also foresaw a day when evil would rise, culminating in the appearance of the Antichrist who will sway the godless toward a final orgy of wickedness. But then he writes, "But the people who know their God will display strength and take action." (Daniel 11:32)

This brings us to point number three, Paul recognized the importance of pouring into others both corporately and individually.

Paul's determination to share the Gospel with the Gentiles drove him to preach throughout a significant swath of the Roman empire. His dedication to encouraging and admonishing those newly-planted churches from afar gave us many of his letters. He demonstrated both a firm hand and a velvet touch as he spoke truth while modeling grace.

How else to interpret:

His letter detailing instructions to the church at Rome that he longed to visit in person. (Romans 1:7-17)

His exhortation to Christian unity and ministry in the church at Corinth. (1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 2 Corinthians 3:2-3)

His admonishment to the church at Galatia for so quickly abandoning Christ and following after a different gospel. (Galatians 1:6-10)

His encouragement to the believers at Ephesus to be imitators of God. (Ephesians 5:1-2)

His letter to the Christians in Philippi emphasizing joy in the Lord, written during his first Roman imprisonment. (Philippians 1:21, 3:7-8)

His warning to the Christians at Colosse to avoid philosophy and empty deceptions that would suggest they are not complete in Christ. (Colossians 2:8-10)

And his clarifying letters to the church at Thessalonica regarding their inquiries about the End Times. (1 Thessalonians 1:10, 5:1-6; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4)

Some of those letters were written while Paul languished in prison or was detained elsewhere. But his heart of love and service transcended his circumstances and led him to be poured out as a drink offering. (2 Timothy 4:6) Even when he was free, Paul made himself a slave to all so that he might win more. (1 Corinthians 9:19) Emptying himself, Paul did "all things for the sake of the gospel, so that he might become a fellow partaker of it." (1 Corinthians 9:20-23)

And Paul didn't just pour himself into groups of people and interact with new believers as a corporate body. He also poured himself into individuals, raising up new fruit-bearers who could join him in proclaiming the Gospel. He frequently sent greetings to or from individuals who were purposing to serve the Lord alongside him. As his letters to Timothy, and Titus, and Philemon demonstrate, Paul was intentional about raising up the next generation of Church leaders.

You know this past year has been trying for many of us. In any age or circumstance, it's all so easy to become fixated on the crisis at hand or the immediate challenges bearing down on us, so much so that we give little attention to the really long view. Ironically, this can be particularly true when serving the Lord. Given the urgency of sharing the Gospel, it is easy to focus on the now to the exclusion of the later. But Paul realized that the Gospel would still need to be proclaimed after he had finished the course. (2 Timothy 4:7) So, he raised up other fruit-bearers that would serve the Lord after he was gone.

The importance of ensuring that our faith is handed down through the lives of others is critical to the vibrancy of the Church. I'm reminded of the best answer I've ever been given when

interviewing officer candidates for the Air Force. I always ask, "What is leadership, and what makes a great leader?" One young man thought for just a moment and said, "Great leaders make the people around them into great leaders."

Without any stain of bluster or boasting, Paul could say, "be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1) Are you helping to raise up young fruit-bearers, ensuring that the kingdom of God is well-served as long as the Lord stays His coming? Are you challenging and encouraging them, and offering them a worthy role model to imitate? If you are called home, will your faith resonate in the lives of others who remain long after you are gone?

I am very grateful that David Reagan has been forward-thinking here at Lamb & Lion Ministries, even as he has proclaimed the soon return of Jesus Christ for over 40 years. Throughout the past four decades we've known that the Rapture could occur at any moment. But he has determined that this message must continue beyond his tenure in leadership, until Jesus comes. So, Lamb & Lion has encouraged other voices and supported other ministries sharing the message of Jesus' soon return. And David Reagan has poured into me, a literal Timothy who will soon follow in his footsteps.

Well, that brings us to point four, even as he recognized that he would soon go to be with the Lord, Paul was confident and full of expectation for the glory to come when we are united with Christ.

You know, we tend to glorify our own past, whether through selective memories that blot out the humiliating and the mundane, or through a favorable reflection on our own past attitudes and actions.

It's also a human tendency to romanticize the past, glossing over the real challenges and difficulties of people who went before. But we must remember that Paul served in an era when most people lived short and difficult lives. Someone who swam against the currents of Judaism on one hand and the Roman culture on the other as Paul did was bound to be battered.

And yet Paul consistently demonstrated tough faith. Unjustly imprisoned in Philippi, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns at midnight! (Acts 4:16) They were not bowed and beaten, but exuberant that, like Peter and other apostles, they were deemed worthy to suffer for the Name of Christ. (Acts 5:41) That unyielding confidence in his calling and trust in his Savior would mark Paul's ministry.

One time Paul recounted the trials he had endured. In his second letter to the church at Corinth, he wrote, "Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a day and a night I have spent in the deep, in other words at drift at sea. I have been on frequent journeys, and in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, the Jews, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the seas, dangers among false brethren. I have been in labor and hardship, and through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches." (2 Corinthians 11:24-28)

And yet, in spite of it all, Paul could testify, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Romans 8:18) He could affirm, "For momentary, light, yes, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far

beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

Paul was perhaps the most exuberant writer of Scripture because he lived “Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” (Titus 2:13) Recognizing that his own life on earth would soon end, Paul told his protégé Timothy, “In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:8)

Do you have that kind of confidence? Are you bearing witness to younger believers about the glory that awaits all those who put their faith in Jesus Christ and serve Him with all their “heart and soul and might or mind?” (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37) Are you filled with hope, eagerly awaiting, and anticipating His appearing?

Well, here we are in the midst of 2021. The fallout from the 2020 election continues to reverberate through our society. COVID is a lingering threat, whether to individual and public health, or to the freedom under the administration of heavy-handed officials drunk with power. Our culture continues on its accelerating march toward secularism and paganism. And threats to religious liberty are multiplying.

But our society is still not as dark and pagan as the empire where Paul ministered. To date, most of us have not been threatened, imprisoned, beaten, or stoned for our faith in Christ. Those trials may come. I for one believe that many of us will be at least threatened, imprisoned, or beaten for our faith in this country, if the Lord tarries much longer.

So, what should we do as the days grow darker and exercising our faith becomes tougher? And, oh, by the way: Tough times? Well again, they pale in comparison to the glory that awaits us and the joy that should be ours right now.

We should learn from Paul’s example, modeling our persevering faith after his. We can do that by **first resting in the blessed assurance that there is no condemnation for those who put their trust in Jesus Christ.** Our salvation is secure thanks to God’s grace.

Some will say, “But I don’t feel like I have an abundance of faith, let alone tough faith.” Brother or sister, it is not the quantity of our faith that is important. It is the quantity and quality of the One in whom we put our faith.

Second, we cannot let trials deter us. They will inevitably come, but we are called to persevere and overcome. Fourteen times in Revelation Jesus promises specific blessings to those who overcome. John defines an overcomer as one who has trusted in Jesus, but the word itself implies that we must endure regardless of circumstances. As Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said, “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” (Daniel 3:17-18)

Third, as long as we have breath we must pour into others. That means encouraging those who are in the midst of a trial, metaphorically “holding up their arms” as Joshua did for Moses. Praying for them, as Jesus did for us even at the hour of His greatest crisis. It also means

encouraging the body of Christ where we are placed through our presence, our words, and our actions. And it means helping raise up specific young fruit-bearers.

On that note, please make a conscious effort to nurture young Christians to bear fruit. Doing so in a meaningful way will take intentionality; it will not just happen. You may have to seek out a young fruit-bearer or engage with one that is not initially receptive. I'm reminded of a Jewish friend who is a passionate follower of Christ. The man who led him to Jesus prayed for over 20 years: "Lord, send me a Jew." When he first met my friend, who was an arrogant and brash young man at the time, he prayed, "Please Lord, send me any Jew other than this one!"

Well, finally, it means that whether we are young or old we have to live expectantly.

Expect that God will speak to us when we study His Word. Expect that He will work all things together for good, and that He can be glorified, especially when we feel inadequate. Expect that if our lives are cut short we gain, by stepping into His presence forever and ever. (Philippians 1:21) But, if we remain until the moment the Father tells Jesus to "Go, and get your bride," we will meet Him in the air and be transformed and glorified in the twinkling of an eye.

So, put your faith in Jesus Christ and rest in the promise that your salvation is assured. Embrace the privilege and responsibility of serving the Lord until He returns.

Make up your mind now not to be deterred in honoring or serving the Lord—in spite of persecution or affliction or thorns or even shipwrecks.

Focus outward and pour into the Church and individual young fruit-bearers.

And know that we will soon be with the Lord.

Then, regardless of what lies ahead in this life, you'll be able to persevere and testify as Paul did: "For this reason, I suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day." (2 Timothy 1:12)

Indeed He is.

Godspeed!

Closing

Nathan Jones: Can you imagine living in the pagan society Paul was evangelizing? I mean throughout the Roman world, rampant idol-worship led to confrontations with this "troublesome" Christian who promoted such counter-cultural ideas. You'd probably agree that in our day, we've certainly come full circle.

Even as the world grows more hostile towards the Gospel message—just as foretold in Bible prophecy—we can persevere in our faith by following Paul's example.

We pray this series has been a blessing to you, helping you gain an unshakeable faith.

Until next week, this is Nathan Jones speaking for Lamb & Lion Ministries saying, "Look up, be watchful, for our Redemption is drawing near!"

End of Program