

Sermon on the Mount Part XXIII

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[0 : 00] The message today is called Prayer, Simple, Profound, and Puzzling. And we'll be looking at some instructions which Paul gives us in 1 Timothy about prayer.

Please turn to 1 Timothy chapter 2 and we'll be looking at verses 1 through 8.

First of all then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgiving be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.

[1 : 35] For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle. I am telling the truth. I am not lying. As a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Therefore, I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands without wrath and dissension.

As Gary was reading that, I was struck particularly by verse 7.

And the temptation came over me to read verse 7 thusly. And for this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle. I am telling the truth.

I am not lying. Period. Period. Okay. We'll just go on from there. Wherever you are and whoever you are, there is simply no escaping it.

[2 : 40] You cannot pick up a daily newspaper published by anyone. You cannot turn on the TV and catch even five minutes of news without it being mentioned. And that is the Affordable Health Care Act.

Great deal of emphasis is being made about this. And it just has a beat that won't quit. It goes on and on and on. And virtually everyone, regardless of which side you are on, agrees as to the importance of affordable health care.

And where is all of the emphasis placed in connection with affordable health care? It is all placed upon the physical body.

And it almost gives one the impression that if you make provision for the physical body, that's all you need to be concerned about because that's all there is.

But that is not true, is it? At least it is not true for the believer who sees the scripture setting forth in so many different places, Old Testament and New, the reality that we are more than our body.

[3 : 59] Now, no one is suggesting that we ignore the body. It is very important that we maintain a balance between the spiritual and the physical.

And no one is depreciating either one. But it just has struck me how that all of the emphasis that is placed upon the body, virtually to the ignoring of the spiritual component of our being, is part and parcel of the way fallen man views things.

Christ addressed that very specifically when, in John's Gospel, he made the statement that man shall not live by bread alone.

Now, it's very easy to overlook that or to just kind of not pay that much attention, but it's very important. And the reason it's so important is because in making that statement that man shall not live by bread alone, Christ was at least inferring, and in other places much stronger than inference, but he was at least inferring that man is more than his body.

For if a body is all he is, if a physical makeup is all we've got, then we do live by bread alone. That's all there is.

[5 : 19] But he went on to say, man will not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. And what are those words that proceed from the mouth of God?

They are spiritual. They are truth-containing. They are filled with advice and directives and commands and all kinds of things that come from the mouth of God.

Christ said also, I believe, in John's Gospel, the words that I speak unto you, they are truth and they are life.

It's quite a statement. In fact, he was the only one who was in a position to make a statement like that, but he did. So all throughout Scripture, beginning as far back as Genesis chapter 3, we are reminded that we have a spiritual component.

Unfortunately, most of mankind tends to ignore that, and we place the vast majority of our emphasis upon the physical, how we feel, how we look, etc.

[6 : 25] And again, I want to emphasize, I'm not depreciating that. I'm not saying the body doesn't matter and how you look doesn't matter and forget it. But there are passages that would indicate that there is a balance to be maintained.

And let me tell you, if man is given to anything, it is approaching virtually any subject in an unbalanced way. And when it comes to health care and government health care and insurance and all the rest of it, that is simply proof positive that that holds up.

We put our emphasis in all the wrong places. Man just does not reason the way God does. Our reasoning is finite and his is infinite.

Our reasoning is flawed. Our reasoning powers and our capability to think through a subject logically and reach a good conclusion is impaired, because that impairment is part of the fall.

We reason with a warped intellect. That's why the world reaches so many wrong conclusions. They don't have what they need to think with, because their thinking is fallen, just as everything else about us is fallen.

[7 : 45] And the only place we can get unfallen information that isn't flawed, that will give us the straight scoop on any subject, is the scriptures. It's the word of God that is alive and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword and so on.

Thy word is truth, and the entrance of thy word gives light. That's why we make a big deal about the Bible. It's the only reliable source we have.

Everything else is just human opinion. And we all know where that gets us, don't we? So, we're looking at the subject of prayer. And actually, I'm taking a slight departure from the Sermon on the Mount, because in the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord talks about prayer, and he gives a sample, not to be repeated verbatim, like so many are wont to do, but it contains the elements that ought to be set forth in our prayers.

And we won't go through that now, because we've touched on it before. So, in a brief aside, I just want to devote a couple of sessions to this subject of prayer. And we still consider ourselves as being in the Sermon on the Mount, but we're just taking a slight detour, and we'll be back there before very long.

Prayer is, first of all, a necessity. Someone asked a very good question. As we departed last week, I was approached in the hall, and the question was something to this effect.

[9 : 12] If what I said in our last message is true, about God not being moved by the numbers of people praying so that he changes his mind, why do we have a prayer network?

Why do we put on the prayer network online who is suffering from what, and who is gravely ill, and who is undergoing surgery, and all the rest of it?

Why do we even care about those things? Why do we mention those things? So, that's a very good question, and I do intend to address it. So, prayer is a necessity. First of all, from the passage that Gary read this morning, the apostle under inspiration said, I urge that in treaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men.

One of the first reasons that we are to pray is because God commands it. We are to be people of prayer, and prayer is little more than communing with God.

I do not buy the idea that some would put forth that prayer is simply asking and receiving. It's much, much more than that. That is just one element of it.

[10 : 33] Prayer is making contact with God. And many times we feel like it is one way. I have never had God speak to me in the way I speak to him.

But he does speak to me in his word. And his word provides the answers to our prayer. The answers are given no place else.

God doesn't speak to me directly. I have never heard the voice of God. Some claim to have, but I'm certainly not among them. And prayer, prayer focuses the mind as does writing.

Let me just illustrate a little bit what I mean. I sometimes am awakened early hours of the morning with certain thoughts in my mind.

And usually it's about a passage of scripture or some theological theme or something like that. And as I think about it, just lying there in bed and reminiscing over it, and a few passages come to mind.

[11 : 42] But let me tell you, that's nothing compared to my getting up, taking pen and paper in hand, and start writing what I'm thinking about.

It is amazing the difference. How writing something down that you're thinking about not only prompts or, shall I say, primes the pump for producing more, but it helps you to organize and think more clearly about what you're thinking by putting it in writing.

I'm not suggesting that it will do that for everybody, but it certainly does that for me. And when we go to prayer, when we pray, we are verbalizing either aloud in the presence of others, or we are mentally verbalizing, just in our own mind and privacy, that thing that we are praying about.

And sometimes when you hear yourself, even in your mind, no one else can hear, and you are praying, it enables you to concentrate and focus on that subject in a way that you wouldn't be able to otherwise.

So it's a profitable exercise for me, at least in that way. And one of the greatest items, of course, which is always, always in order, in connection with prayer, and that is the expressing of thanks, because gratitude is always in order.

[13 : 20] And we're going to see from a number of instances here in the New Testament, where thanksgiving is considered a very important part of prayer.

It doesn't always have to be asking for something. Christians are notorious for praying what I call gimme prayers. God, gimme this, gimme that.

I need this, I need that. And of course we are to come to him and make our needs known. But prayer is so much more than asking God for something. So let's keep that in mind.

Prayer is the believer's exercise that ought to concentrate on the spiritual and not on the physical. Thank you. Thank you so much. And the reason I emphasize this thing about the spiritual, rather than emphasizing the physical, is because we are all going to die physically.

But prayer is often offered to thwart that in any way possible. Now for some people, it is just a given that you are not supposed to die.

[14 : 38] You are supposed to live. And whatever disease you may have that the medical community thinks is going to kill you, they think that that can never be God's will.

You are supposed to be able to pray with faith believing and overcome that and amaze the doctors. Baloney. Double baloney.

Not only does it not work that way, it isn't supposed to work that way. You're supposed to die. Do you know that? You are supposed to die.

The only question is, when? For some of us, maybe me, it might not be long. Because if I can't talk and preach about these things, I'd just as soon be dead.

So, you know, you are going to die and you are going to go to heaven with your spirit, but you're not going to go to heaven with your body.

[15 : 42] Now think about that. While we are not to ignore our body, we are to thank God for it, we are to care for it, we are to preserve it, we are to nourish it, we are not to neglect it.

And if we can say all of those things about the body, what ought we to be saying about the human spirit? And the reason I'm not talking about the soul is because I've already come to the subtle conclusion, at least in my own mind, and I admit that it might be wrong because I've been wrong before, that I think the soul is the combination of the body and the spirit.

Those two elements make up the totality of your being, which is your soul. If that is true, you do not have a soul, you are a soul, and you have a spirit and a body, neither of which is to be ignored.

So, while we are all going to die physically, prayer is often expected to thwart that in any way possible. Let me go on record right here.

I don't know if I've said this here or someplace else. But if I come down with a serious disease that is life-threatening, don't hold any prayer vigils for me.

[17 : 05] Don't pass the word and say, oh, let's all pray that God will raise up Marv. Let's not do that. If the prognosis is bad and if there isn't responsible medication that can be administered, to prolong life in a reasonable way, let him go.

I don't want to be here if God wants me there. Now, this may sound kind of morose or morbid, but is to be with Christ which is far better?

Is it? Really? Or are those just words? Now, I'm not, I must confess and say, I'm not volunteering for the next batch.

You know, like the little boy was sitting right down there in front and the preacher said, everybody that wants to go to heaven, raise your hand. And the whole congregation raised their hand except that one little boy sitting down there and he peered over at him and says, Johnny, don't you want to go to heaven when you die?

And he said, well, yes, when I die, but I thought you were getting up a load to go now. I'm kind of with Johnny, but, you know, is it really what we say it is?

[18 : 27] Is this life something that absolutely has to be prolonged at all costs under any and every circumstance and every heroic measure and all the rest of it?

I've got on record one of those do not resuscitate things. If I'm going and on my way and somebody wakes me up, they're going to have me to answer to, you know, under those circumstances.

But, you know, we're talking about a really super, super complex thing. Let me get on here a little bit. Already what I brought is not anything I intended. with our emphasis where it ought to be on the human spirit.

And why do I say that? I want you to think with me logically. I trust this is logic, and I trust it's not warped or skewed logic, but I think this is the only conclusion that you can reach.

Your physical body is not responsible for the way you treat other people. Think about that.

[19 : 37] Your physical body and its condition is not the cause of the way you treat other people. Will you buy that?

I hope so. Well, then what is? what is it about us that is responsible or that is behind the way we treat other people?

Whether we treat them courteously and kindly and lovingly or whether we treat them shabbily and use them and demean them and depreciate them.

What is it that determines which way we treat people? And isn't it the way that we treat people that is the problem for all of the ills in the world?

We don't have any problems at all other than the way we treat one another. The way we offend one another. That's where problems come from. They don't come from your body.

[20 : 43] They don't come from your body. They come from your spirit. That's why so much emphasis is placed in the New Testament upon the human spirit because that's the part of us out of which attitudes are formed that are translated into actions and it's the actions that create all the problems.

If attitudes are formed in our body, not in our body, yes, in our body in the sense that the body is the vehicle of the spirit, but the flesh and bone body is not responsible for anything like that.

it is that immaterial part of our being where attitudes are formed, where prejudices reside, where truth and error lives, where imagination and memory and all of those things dwell.

That's in the human spirit and your body is just a vehicle for that human spirit, that immaterial part that dwells in you. so it is out of our inmost being that we develop a game plan called how we are going to live our life and treat other people.

Now, if this is true, and maybe that's a big if, maybe I would suspect that most of you, if not all of you, would agree with this, then do you not see the folly behind so much emphasis on the body and affordable care, but you know, that's the only thing the public will buy.

[22 : 34] Can you imagine Congress announcing, we are going to pass a new piece of legislation and it has to do for the care and improvement of the human spirit. Can you imagine the protests?

People would be circling around Washington. That isn't the craziest thing I ever heard. And actually, it would be the first thing they said that made any sense in a long, long while. But you're not going to find any politician to talk like that.

But is that not true? Or am I just totally out of it and way off base? Well, how man treats one another is the source of conflict, tension, animosity, and even war.

So, it is the human spirit that ought to get most of the attention. And it gets very short shrift.

And as a result, we get what we got. Why should you expect anything else? We got all the spas, and the beauty parlors, and the gyms, and the marathons, and all of these things.

[23 : 51] things. And I'm not panning them. I'm just saying they are all oversold compared to what really matters. That's the spiritual content. And I want you to consider some of Paul's prayers.

He's talked about the necessity for praying here in 1 Timothy. And I'd like you to turn to a couple of his epistles, and let's look at what his emphasis is. And it is amazing. It is amazing.

You know, as you go through the Old Testament, I want you to note this now because it's a very important comparison. And I think there is a reason for it. As you go through the Old Testament, the spiritual part of man's being is there.

It's very present. There's no doubt about it. It shows up as early as Genesis 3. But that doesn't seem to be the emphasis. Do you know what the emphasis seems to be? Seems to be on the physical.

In the Old Testament, I'm talking about. When God raised up Abraham and gave him this promise, about the land.

[24 : 53] Do you any idea how prevalent the land is, particularly in the Old Testament? And it's the only land in all of the Bible that God calls my land.

Well, actually, the whole planet is God's land. Yes, but Israel, in a special way, is God's land in a way that no other land, in a way that Ireland isn't, in a way that the USA isn't.

Israel is God's land. And so much emphasis is placed upon the physical land of Israel, from this border to this border, and he divides it all up among the twelve tribes, from this river to that river, etc.

and all of the emphasis seems to be on the material. And we find God doing miraculous things in the Old Testament.

And what's the nature of miraculous things? What's the essence of miracles? They're physical. The opening of the Red Sea is very much physical.

[26 : 00] people, making an axe head that sunk to the bottom of a pond, float again. An axe head float? That's a miracle.

And for manna to rain out of heaven when nobody can see how or where it originated and it just comes down and feeds all of these people? that's a physical miracle. Joshua and his little army marching around Jericho seven times and the walls come tumbling down.

That's a physical miracle. And it's for these reasons that Paul said Israel requires a sign. Israel looks for a sign. Israel had a history of God doing miraculous things in their presence.

Things that could not be denied or disputed. there it is. They saw it with their own eyes. And when Christ comes, what does he do in the Gospels?

And I've told you before, the Gospels, theologically, doctrinally, the Gospels belong to the Old Testament rather than to the New. And you find a continuation of what God began in the Old Testament in the Gospels with Christ performing miracles.

[27 : 18] miracles. What kind of miracles? They were all physical. They were all the kind of thing you could look at and see and go, wow, that is really something. They went completely contrary against natural law.

law. It is just as if the creator of the natural law just set it aside and invoked his own for the moment. We've got water into wine and feeding the 5,000 and walking on water and raising the dead and casting out demons.

And they're all physically, literally, visually demonstrable. people. And it even carries through a little bit into the book of Acts. We see it there in connection with Pentecost.

The miraculous speaking in languages that they had not learned. What were these languages? They were audible. They could hear them with their ears. They saw what happened.

The Spirit of God descended. There was this noise. A noise is physical. It has some substance to it. And they could attest to this.

[28 : 25] You see, they could get into all of these things through the natural processes of learning, through the ears and through the eyes. But how do you partake of things and receive things spiritually?

Does God have to do something like he did back then in order to authenticate himself to you? How does he communicate things of spiritual value?

Well, let's look at Ephesians, for instance. Ephesians 1. And I would just suggest that he does this. He does this through his word, and he does it exclusively through his word.

Verse 15. For this reason, Paul said, I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus, which exists among you, and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you.

So we mentioned earlier that the giving of thanks is a super important part of prayer, is thanksgiving. while making mention of you in my prayers.

[29 : 45] And what is he going to pray for or about when he writes to these Ephesians and he says, I'm making mention of you in my prayers. And it doesn't have to do with, is there somebody among you that has cancer?

I pray that he'll be healed. Is there somebody who has epilepsy? I pray that he'll be healed. None of that. Are these things important? Absolutely they're important. They're especially important to the one who's suffering from them.

I don't discount them. But we need to look at where the importance is. While making mention of you in my prayers, and here's what I prayed about, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

Well, who's going to be healed by that? Whose mortgage payment is going to be met by that? Whose broken relationship with a husband or wife is going to be broken, mended by this?

You know, I get the impression that Paul is saying, you know what, there are all kinds of legitimate things that we could pray about. But what I'm giving you tops the list.

[31 : 14] If you're going to make up an agenda, this is job one. This is the top of the list. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope or the confidence of his calling and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.

Why is that so important? That's so important because if you know that, that will change your attitude. That will change your thinking. That will change your motives.

That will change your agenda. It will affect you. And it will affect you spiritually and for the better. And it will also affect how you treat others.

And what is the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe? These are in accordance with the working of the strength of his might, which he brought about in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.

these are the things that we need to know the most. While we're in the territory, come over please to chapter 3 and verse 14. Chapter 3 and verse 14.

[32 : 43] For this reason, oh, by the way, just look at verse 13. therefore, I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf.

Now, what's that all about? What are these tribulations? They're problems. They're hurts. They're difficulties.

They're painful things. That's what tribulations are. they hurt. Sometimes they hurt a lot. Difficulties. Obstacles. And know what Paul says about them.

I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf. And now what he's saying is, and you know why I'm undergoing these tribulations, these problems and pains and heartaches and difficulty and opposition?

Do you know why I'm experiencing those things? It's because of you. because I am experiencing these things because I'm trying to get to you.

[33 : 48] I'm trying to reach you. And now this is far, far from anything anyone could call a pity party or woe is me.

What Paul is saying is, don't lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf. For they're your glory. How could that be? Only if you've got an all-wise and omnipotent God who is able to bring blessing and joy out of tribulations and out of heartache and out of disappointments and all the rest of those things.

And for this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

And here's what I'm asking for, for you. That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power.

He's not talking about muscle power. He's talking about spiritual power, staying power. Strengthened with power through his spirit in the inner man.

[35 : 11] The inner man is nothing but another name for the human spirit. It is that immaterial component that lives within every human being, regardless of their relationship or connection with God.

so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And this word dwell in the Greek conveys the idea, so that Christ may be at home in your heart.

That's a wonderful feeling. You know, there is no place in the world where you can relax and be yourself like when you are at home.

home. And nobody else's home, no matter how kind or hospitable they are, no matter how friendly or engaging or welcoming they are, they can never, ever make you feel at home in their home like you feel at home in your home.

That's just the way it is. There's nothing wrong with that. We're all that way. You feel at home. And for Christ to feel at home in your heart, your heart is the core of your being.

[36 : 30] That too is involved with the human spirit. It's not talking about the body. It's talking about our spiritual innards. And when Christ is at home, there is a in other words, you ought not to have a value system and live your life in such a way that Christ dwelling in you as a believer would ever have to say to himself, you know, I'm really not comfortable here.

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. What does that mean? How do we know that Christ is dwelling in our hearts at all?

Through faith. What does that mean? It means we believe that Christ is dwelling in our hearts because he said so, and we believe him.

That's what it means. It doesn't mean trying to muster up some kind of special oomph where you really, really, really believe. No, no, no. It just means when you take something by faith as regards what God has given, it just means you believe it on the basis of the fact that God said it, and that's all you need.

Christ is dwelling in your hearts, you believe it, and the reason you believe it is because God says so, not because he makes you feel in some way, warm, fuzzies, emotions, he gave you a sign, or whatever.

[38 : 06] You believe that Christ is in you, the absolute confidence of glory, just because he says he is. That's all you need. That's what it means to take it by faith. You take it on the basis of what God said.

And you don't have to have a miracle, but Israel, sought after signs. And the reason they sought after signs was because they were so accustomed to God giving them signs. And now, there aren't any signs here.

And when we go through the New Testament, particularly dealing with Paul's letters, the book of Acts, we find some things that just don't seem to compute. We can't make sense of it.

it's a, well, let me boil this down to the complex part. I can see I'm not going to get through this with one message.

And this really throws us to, you know, we have difficulty putting these things together. Paul says, we know not how to pray as we ought.

[39 : 11] Romans 8, 26, I believe it is. And here is this man whom God used to write a third of the New Testament. And if anyone was close to the Lord spiritually, I think that it was Paul the Apostle.

And he said, I don't always know how to pray as I ought. And you remember the illustration we gave about the thorn in the flesh, and he prayed that God would take it away, and he didn't.

And you know, maybe Paul was remiss, and maybe what he should have said was, I prayed three times that God would take away this thorn in the flesh, and he didn't.

You know what I should have done? I should have started a prayer chain. And if I could have gotten a hundred or maybe a thousand people praying that God would take away Paul's thorn in the flesh, I bet he'd have to listen then.

I bet he'd have to do it then. Because God can say no to me, but he couldn't say no to a thousand people. So what do you do with that? Is the name of the game, you just get enough people praying, put it out there on the internet, and you get, you'd have people in Europe praying.

[40 : 30] For people in America, you'd have people all over the world praying. surely God would have to be moved to do something. He'd say, wow, in Venezuela they're praying, in Bolivia and in Africa they're praying, well I guess I'll just have to, I'll just have to, they've just won me over and I'm going to have to give them what they asked for.

I don't think prayer works that way. In fact, I'm confident it doesn't work that way. But when we share our needs and our heart and our concern with others and we pass the word around, it does cause people to think about those.

And sometimes somebody might be in a position to do something about it. An illustration I remember reading years ago in a devotional, was about this, this was in the depression years in the 30s when things were tough.

A dollar was a dollar and ten dollars was really something. And this pastor of a little church received anonymously in the mail a ten dollar bill.

He had no idea who it was from or why they sent it, but he was really thankful to get it. And he just thought to himself, well my, this is wonderful, the Lord does provide. And he put the ten dollars in his wallet and thanked God for it.

[41 : 52] A few minutes later there was a knock at the door. And he went to the door of his study and lo and behold there was one of his parishioners. And he was wringing his hands.

Pastor, can I talk to you for a minute? Sure, come on in. He said, explain some emergency situation that came up in his family and how desperate, how dire the situation was.

And he explained to him all the circumstances. And the pastor said, well I can see you. Wow, you really are in a bind. And the worst part of it all is, I've got to find some way to come up with ten dollars.

Otherwise, thus and so is going to be lost and this is going to happen and that's going to happen. And the pastor said, well, you really do have a problem there. And yes, I'd be glad to pray for you. And they got down their knees to pray together and the pastor couldn't utter a word.

And he put his arm around the fellow and said, stand up. The man stood up and looked at him. The pastor reached in his wallet, pulled out the ten dollars and gave it to him.

[43 : 04] Now, sometimes somebody can come to us with a need that they have and we have the means to meet that need.

Should we do that? Or should we just pray about it? Now, I'm not suggesting if I come to you next week and say I really need five thousand dollars, would you pray about it?

I don't mean that I expect you to write out a check for five thousand, but listen, sometimes when we hear of needs or concerns or cares, sometimes we are in a position to do something to alleviate it.

And we ought to really pray about whether we ought to do it, or sometimes just do it. When Paul was in prison in Acts 16, and they were in the, they were not only in prison, they were in the inner prison, and not only in the inner prison, but they were in stocks in the inner prison.

And they were praying and singing psalms till midnight. And all the prisoners and the jailer heard them, and they probably thought these guys are crazy.

[44 : 24] they were and as they prayed, there was this tremendous earthquake that just shook that prison to its very foundation, and all the clanging and banging and the cell doors just flipped open, and the commotion and the darkness and the confusion was tremendous.

And I think as you read the text, you become aware that God had sent that, and God had opened those prison doors. And Paul is not only going to walk out a free man, but he's going to have some souls for his hire, if you will.

The Philippian jailer and his family are going to come to faith, and who knows what other prisoners were affected by that and involved, and it was a wonderful deliverance. God really came to the rescue.

We don't know what Paul and Silas were praying about. It doesn't tell us. It just says they were praying. We don't know. Maybe they were praying. God, get us out of here. How can we preach the gospel here?

We're praying that you will release us. We're not told what the content of the prayer is, but whatever it was, God moved, and God opened the doors, and they went out free.

[45 : 42] But I want you to go fast forward about four years, maybe five. And now Paul will be in a different prison. It will be the Mamertine prison in Rome, and he is scheduled for execution.

And there is no earthquake. There's no miraculous opening of any prison doors. There's no executioner who is struck dead before he could strike Paul dead.

tradition says he was led just outside the city of Rome, where there was a small clump of trees, and one had a stump about a foot high out of the ground.

And the apostle Paul laid his head on that stump, and a Roman executioner took off his head with his sword.

There was no deliverance, no earthquake, no miracle. Why not? Did God fail him?

[47 : 03] Maybe he didn't pray with faith believing. Maybe if he had gotten more people to pray that his life would be spared the next morning, maybe there wouldn't have been an execution.

I don't attribute it to any of those things. I just attribute it to the fact that God has a perspective that we don't know anything about. God has a game plan that we don't know anything about.

And what he has led us in on is just a very, very small amount of it, because we are finite, and God is infinite. God has an agenda, and a plan, and a program.

I'll tell you, the one I do understand absolutely blows my mind. I can't imagine what it would be like to know the bigger picture behind it.

I probably wouldn't be able to contain it. But having said that, can you believe that? Can you believe that regardless of what happens, what comes into your life, when, whatever your health, whatever your wealth, God has a plan and program, and he is committed to being only kindly disposed toward you, and he really does work all things together for your good, but maybe not for your good tomorrow, but for your ultimate good, because timing also figures into God's plan, not just what, but when.

[48 : 26] Can you believe that? Is that too much to believe? I think it's only responsible. I think that kind of belief is the only thing that enables me to live in this day-to-day world with all of its pain and problems and heartaches and all the rest of it, because I know ultimately, I don't care what comes into my life, I know the ultimate outcome is going to be for my good, my blessing, and God's benefit.

Can you believe the same thing, or do you not have the ability to do that? Well, if you don't have the ability to do that, there's only one thing that will give you that ability, and that is your spiritual growth and maturity.

And that's why we spend so much time on this. That's why we talk about this. That's why we present this. Don't have any other reason.

This is reason enough, and it really, really makes the difference. So you go ahead, like I do from time to time, and you gripe, and you moan, and complain about your bones and about your body.

But you know what, folks? Your body is wearing out. It's giving up on you. It's telling you, hey, I got a lot of wear and tear on me.

[49 : 53] You put a lot of miles on me. Why wouldn't you expect me to fall apart? And that's part of this fallen world. And I'm not saying you shouldn't seek out responsible medical help for ails and pain.

You ought to do what you can within reason to preserve the body, to be as free from pain as you can, to enjoy living as much as you can. But don't you ever forget the bigger picture and the big perspective.

When Paul said, bodily exercise profits little. didn't say it didn't profit. He said it profits little. And I kind of get the impression that he's comparing it with what profits a lot.

It's spiritual exercise profits a lot. Bodily exercise profits little. for the Christian, it's a matter of perspective, isn't it?

Well, let's pray. Father, we've just scratched the surface of so much that we really don't begin to understand as fully as we would like.

[51 : 07] But what else can we expect from a God who is infinite, who orders all things after the counsel of his own will? Who are we to question you? We just need to reassure ourselves that you are only kindly disposed toward us no matter what comes into our life and no matter how much it hurts.

You are a loving, heavenly Father. And you are thoroughly committed to to our ultimate well-being.

You are given to honing and perfecting and chipping away the dross so that we might be conformed to the image of Christ.

And you can choose to do that through a multitude of avenues that are available to you. Help us to believe you more and more and to trust you more and more and to love you more and more.

we pray in Christ's name. Amen.