

## Stronger - Week 1

There's an old saying, if you don't like the Georgia weather just wait a minute, it will change. Well, I hate to admit but my attitude is kind of like the Georgia weather. Hang around long enough and it's going to change. And not always for the good.

Believe it or not, it's already October and this week our teaching team will be starting a new message series from Philippians called "Stronger." They will be looking at Philippians 1 which is full of good stuff. But being on the intellectually challenged side of things, I need to boil all that good stuff down to something simple. And when I read and ponder this chapter, one of the things that impresses me most about Paul is his attitude. Here is a man, a "prisoner in chains," which at that time most likely meant he was literally chained to a Roman guard, that had an amazing attitude. Who, even though in jail, was more worried about his fellow brothers and sister in Christ, than his own circumstance. After all, he did write his Letter to the Philippians while under arrest. He was a man that didn't see being chained to a Roman guard as a hindrance, he saw it as a captive audience, as an opportunity for ministry. In Philippians 1:12-13 ESV he writes, *"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ."*

So, where did Paul's attitude come from? Well, for Paul it wasn't always that way. You may remember in Paul's early days, as a young, stud, Pharisee, he was known as a persecutor of Christians. Or more simply, he killed Christians. And he was good at it. So, what changed him? What changed his attitude? He encountered the living God. He had a personal experience with Jesus on a road to Damascus. You probably know the story, but after his encounter with Jesus on that road, Paul was sightless for three days. But even after his eyesight returned, Paul spent three years reflecting on the experience before he started his ministry of proclaiming the Gospel to the gentile world. Not exactly Georgia weather, but it was effective. I've heard it said, and maybe you have as well, that

*"you can't come into the presence of God and not be changed."* This was especially true for Paul. He was changed so much that he went from persecuting, to making Christians. He changed so much that he went on to change his world...in a good way. In verse 14 Paul writes, *"And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."* Because of Paul's circumstances his followers had become bolder. They had become stronger.

But who wouldn't? Who wouldn't be emboldened? Who wouldn't be strengthened to see your leader as a "*prisoner in chains*" yet demonstrating such an amazing attitude? But what about the small things? What is our attitude towards the small things? The small things can have large effects on someone. Maybe that someone needs more than to hear of the love of Jesus. Maybe they need to see it. Maybe they need to see the changes in your attitude. Maybe they need to see the changer in you.

Paul goes on to write in Phillipians 4:11-12; "*for I have learned, in whatever situation I am, to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.*" To me, these are some of Paul's most profound words. And I think there are a couple of key words. The first is "learned". This isn't something that came naturally to Paul, it was something he had to learn. It was a change he had to make. Yes, he had an encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. But there were also those three days of reflection. The other word is "*whatever.*" It almost has a negative connotation today, but for Paul it was the key. Because for Paul, regardless of the circumstance, he had "*learned to be content.*" Whether it was good or bad, big or small, Paul learned to have a good attitude. And people noticed. And people were changed. And people came to Jesus.

You know, it's kind of funny. We try to over-complicate things. But it really comes down to simple things, doesn't it? So, during this week, during this upcoming Holiday season, may we keep it simple. Remember the KISS principle? Keep It Simple Saint. Yes, I mean you.