

Made For His Purpose
January 1, 2017

I have here a small cup, made of clay. In fact, I have two. I made both of them. I made this one for holding something special, a gift from someone. I made this one for digging in the dirt when I garden. They started out as one lump of clay. I divided the lump of clay into two smaller lumps and then formed each cup out of each smaller lump.

The clay is mine. I bought it. It belongs to me. I can make anything I want out of the clay. I can make two cups and I can decide the purpose for each cup. It is my clay. I am the one doing the shaping. And I can decide a purpose for each of them.

If I could give them the power to think, and speak, this one might complain that it is always going to be dirty, coming into contact with the soil and germs and such. Even when not being used to dig, it will sit on a shelf in the basement and be dirty.

So what will I answer the cup? I'll say, "You are mine. I made you. Apart from me you would have no life at all. I get to choose what you are used for. So quit complaining. And give yourself up to the purpose for which I made you."

That same scenario is what we are living with God. God made us. He brought his own materials and made us. He gave us life, but not so we could go and do whatever we choose with our life. He made for the accomplishment of His purpose.

We have no right to complain about why He made us. We have no right to complain about what we look like. We know God likes variety. He created lots of different kinds of trees, flowers, rocks, sand, snow, bugs, clouds, and people. God made us all different from each other. There are things we have in common, but we are not identical. There are differences in each of us that sets us apart from all the others in this room.

We are different in gender, in age, in size, in how we think, in what we desire, in our personalities, in the sensitivity of our taste buds, in how much pain we can endure, in the types of music that appeals to us, and many more ways we are different from each other.

God created us with those differences because it fit His purposes to do so. He was free to make us however He wanted to. God is free to make whatever He makes for whatever purposes He wants to make them. God created us to accomplish HIS purposes.

What are those purposes? What is the purpose you are here? We might all answer that question a different way. I want to share with you how Paul answered it in one of his letters to a church. He said, his purpose was...

Philippians 1:20 (NIV) "... that ... Christ will be exalted in my body."

The word "exalted" means honored, magnified, made bigger and higher and more special. This week a famous singer died. And people were exalting his name. I did not know his name, though I had heard some of his songs. People were exalting his name,

his music, his talent, his story. And I became one who learned his name because others were exalting him.

In that same way, as we live for and speak of Jesus, we exalt Him. As we exalt Him others will learn of Him and maybe pursue a relationship with Him. Paul wanted to live in such a way that everything he did and said would serve Jesus and point people to Him. That was the purpose for which God made Paul and saved Paul. That was the purpose of God for Paul's life, "That Christ will be exalted in my body."

We can well imagine Paul, getting ready to start out on his life of missionary work praying such a prayer. "Jesus, I want to exalt you in my life. Use me however You need to." And he probably did pray such prayers as he started his first missionary journey.

When he started out on his journey he was secure in the love of Christ for him. He had a good faith in the love of Jesus for him. He had a good faith in the promises of God to Him. We see that faith expressed in another of his letters, this one to the Christians at Rome.

Romans 8:35, 37a (NIV) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... NO!

We need not fear that any such trouble will turn Jesus against us. We are secure in Christ's love for us. And the promises of our eternal future are secure. None of the things mentioned in verse 35 can prevent you receiving what God has promised to you in Jesus Christ. There is no danger that such things will separate us from the love of Jesus.

But there is a real danger that such things will separate Jesus from our love. Let's read the verse a different way. **"What shall separate Christ from My love? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?"**

Paul said, "No, I will serve Jesus no matter what." Let's go back to Philippians 1:20. **Philippians 1:20 (NIV)** "... that ... Christ will be exalted in my body."

Paul did not write these words when he was starting out as a missionary. Paul wrote those words from jail. Paul was in a Roman jail with the strong possibility of being executed when he wrote those words. He believed there to be a good possibility that he would be put to death. And yet, he is praying, "that... Christ will be exalted in my body." He has no thought of deserting Jesus, even if it means jail and execution.

In order to accomplish God's purposes, Paul had to live through many of the things in Romans 8:35. He need better than a good faith in Jesus. He needed a mighty faith. Such a faith only came about through Paul experiencing the presence of Jesus in the bad things he lived through. Such a strong faith only came about as Paul saw Jesus provide for his needs in the difficulties he faced over and over again.

In order for Paul to be used by God to accomplish God's purposes, God had to allow Paul to live through a lot of bad things. The same may be true of you this year.

God created you for His own purpose. To accomplish that purpose, He may need to develop a strong faith in you. A strong faith will only come about through troubles and hardship.

Knowing that, could you pray the following prayer knowing that you might suffer for Jesus this year? **A New Year's Prayer: "I will serve Jesus no matter what."**

Things are pretty good for most of us here today. But this year could bring lots of trouble to your life. Will you pray this prayer, knowing that might be a possibility?

None of us knows what this next year will bring to our lives. Any one or more of us may experience troubles, hardships, persecution, or more in 2017. Jesus has not made us any promise that we will not. His purposes may only be accomplished by us experiencing some of these bad things.

It may be part of God's plans that you experience one or more of the things in verse 35 so that your faith in God will deepen, broaden, and strengthen.

God's plans may prevent your plans. You may have made all kinds of plans for this year. My wife and I are planning a trip to the west coast to see relatives. I plan to finish digging the rocks out of my garden this year. I plan to ride my bicycle again this year. I plan to make cookies for the Vacation Bible School workers. I plan to paint the back of my house. I plan to eliminate the violets from my lawn. Will those plans succeed? I have no way of knowing.

We just don't know what is going to happen to us this year. But God does. God has His purposes for our lives mapped out.

Proverbs 19:21 (NIV) Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

God has purposes for my life. And to accomplish His purposes, He may have planned that I experience some troubles and hardships this year. It is not that God wants bad for me. It is that God sometimes needs to use bad to accomplish His purposes. That is what God did with the nation of Israel. God allowed them to become slaves in Egypt because that fit with the purposes He had created them for as a nation.

God's plan for any of us may include some of the things Paul mentioned in his letter. God's plan may include trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword. All of these are within the realm of possibility for any of us.

There are ample troubles we might name. We have homes and vehicles that could get damaged or destroyed in fires or storms. Some of us have experienced such. Every time the big winds blow, I pray that the big trees in my back yard do not fall on the house first, the electrical lines second, and the sheds last. My shed and that of two neighbors are all grouped together. One tree falling there could wipe all three out, and the power lines, and hit a house.

Some of you had troubles in relationships this past year. That might carry over into the new year.

You might experience hardships this year. You might experience financial hardships. You might have physical hardships. Your health may suffer. You may develop a chronic health problem or become handicapped in some way.

Paul mentions persecution. There are plenty of Christians around the world experiencing persecution. Even in America it is happening. It could happen to you this year.

While famine is not a likely event for us, it could occur. The Midwest and west coast draughts have devastated the lives of many. The southeast has been really dry this year. We were on the edge of that draught. It could continue this next year and spread north.

In 2008 the economy nosedived. Many saw their retirement savings cut in half, or worse. There are many predicting a worse recession than the last one. We could lose everything. Even pensions are not entirely safe.

And terrorists are working in many places, including the United States. Any day, any of us could be in the wrong place, at the wrong time, and experience danger or sword. Everything on his list, and more, could be facing you this year.

In light of the fact that it is through the bad things that your faith grows, and you may experience some this year, can you pray, **"I will serve Jesus no matter what."** ?

What is the alternative?

If you refuse to pray such a prayer, you should ask yourself, "Am I really living an unwritten contract with God?" Do I really hold the following idea in my heart: "Jesus, I will serve You as long as _____."

I will serve you as long as I stay healthy. I will serve you as long as my retirement funds don't dry up. I will serve you as long as my relationships last. I will serve you as long as my children outlive me. I will serve you as long as my parents live. I will serve you as long as I get to buy a house.

You may never have said that out loud. You may never have prayed such a prayer. You may never have thought it. But do you hold such deep in your heart?

Do you believe that Christians should have some kind of charmed life where really bad things are not supposed to happen to you? After all, you are one of the good people. You are one of the faithful. You go to church regularly. God owes you protection from bad things. God is supposed to help you accomplish your goals.

Do you really believe that deep in your heart? Many people do, even though they have never thought it. It comes out when something bad does happen in their lives. They become angry at God. And they don't give up that anger. They feel God deserted the unwritten contract. They quit attending church. They quit praying. They lose their love for Jesus. They walk away from God. I've seen it happen, many times.

Do you hold such an unwritten contract in your heart? Listen, God has made no such promises to any person. God has never said yes to such a contract. Such a contract denies the His purposes. It denies His sovereignty. It denies His will for us in Jesus.

If there is any hint of such a belief in your heart, give it up. And pray, "Jesus, No matter what life brings me this year, I will serve You." Commit yourself to Him using you for His purposes, even if you don't know what they are, even if you don't know what trouble will come because of it.

Back to Paul's letter, let's read again, more fully, what he saw as his purpose, and what his hope was.

Philippians 1:20 (NIV) I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

Pray that you will not be ashamed of how you serve God's purposes this year but will have sufficient courage to serve Jesus no matter what happens.

Invitation

We see God's purpose accomplished using bad things in people's lives in the death of Jesus. As Peter was speaking to the crowd on the day of Pentecost he said,...

Acts 2:23 (NIV) This man (Jesus) was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement. This was God's purpose for the Messiah. He accomplished a great, great good for everyone who calls on the name of Jesus for salvation.

Won't you call on Him today?