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It Worked Out For The Best

By Mark Gorman
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How many times have we heard someone say these words, "It worked out for the best"?

Usually that means that things didn't go the way they had planned, but even though they didn't get what they wanted, it eventually proved to benefit them.

In Philippians 1:22, the Apostle Paul says, "But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel,"

Now, when some people say that things didn't work out the way they planned, that may mean that when they arrived at their vacation hotel, their reservation had been lost in the system, and they had to stay somewhere else. Or, it may mean that, although they ordered a hamburger, instead, they received a cheeseburger, but they were able to peel off the cheese, and it was still a tasty hamburger.

But when Paul said this, he was talking about 'Big Boy Problems'.

We just think we had a "Bad Day", but listen to Paul: 2 Corinthians 11:24-29
24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and

naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. NIV

Now, do you REALLY want to have that contest with the Apostle Paul, to see who had the worst day?

First, we need to acknowledge that God does NOT CAUSE these bad things in our lives. But, we do know that if He wanted, He could prevent them – He could stop them.

As a father, I can speak from experience when I say that I love my children so much, I wouldn't hesitate to give my life for either one of them, if it would save their life. I can't even describe the kind of love a parent has for their child.

But, as much as I want to protect them and keep them from harm, there have been times in their lives when I willingly stepped back and watched as they encountered uncomfortable situations – which I could have prevented. Why would I do that, if I love them?

The answer is simple: I love them enough, that I want them to grow and flourish. And if I see that a particular experience, which may seem negative at first, will actually bring new strength into their lives, or new understanding, which could protect them in the future, then I will stand by and watch as they go through that uncomfortable experience. And although they may think that I don't care, it is actually out of an abundance of love and concern that I allow this, because I know that I won't always be there, when they encounter similar situations in the future. So therefore, I would prefer to have them experience this discomfort when I am there – so that I can keep a watchful eye on the whole process, than for their first encounter of this type to occur when I am nowhere nearby.

Does that make sense to you?

I truly believe that, although God doesn't CAUSE these difficult, painful situations, He DOES see them. He is aware of them, and if He chose to do so, He definitely could stop them. But it is out of an abundance of love that He allows us to encounter some of these trying experiences, under His watchful eye, monitoring everything as it happens, to ensure that it is NEVER more than we can bear.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

So, with that in mind, let's take a closer look at Paul:

As I read about Paul, in the book of Acts, and as I read his writings (more than half of the New Testament), I get a "feel" for the kind of man he was.

He strikes me as a no-nonsense guy. You didn't have to be a mind-reader with Paul, because it appears that he was the kind of person who spoke his mind freely. In other words, he never had an unexpressed thought!

He was confrontational. And, although he had much love and compassion for others, he had no tolerance for those who willingly choose to transgress God's laws, or those who take advantage of others through manipulation or deception.

Now, tell me, do you think that this kind of no-nonsense guy was really a "writer"?

Does Paul strike you as the kind of guy who kept a journal? Can you picture him picking out matching stationery and envelopes?

Come on! He wasn't that type at all. He would rather express himself verbally (with his mouth) than to put his thoughts into written form in a letter.

In fact, my guess is that, if he had a choice, he probably wouldn't have written any letters. (This is my own guess here, so don't get bent out of shape if you disagree. No sense in two of us being bent out of shape. HA!)

But I really don't picture the Apostle Paul sitting quietly in a room, pondering the questions of life, and then journaling his thoughts.

So, how did he end up writing more than half of the New Testament? Because he was faced with a situation which restricted his options – he was in prison. And although he would have preferred by far, to physically travel to each of the churches which had been birthed through his ministry, so he could mentor their leaders, and bring proper order to those who were "out of line", he DIDN'T HAVE A CHOICE!

He was in prison – no phones – no fax – no e-mail. And the ONLY way he could maintain communication with his spiritual sons & daughters, with the churches he had birthed, with those leaders who were looking to him as a mentor, was to write to them.

You see, the thing I'm getting at here is that, if Paul had never been thrown in prison, I don't believe he would have written any part of the Bible!

(And, I'll be the first to admit that I don't know everything. But I feel confident that someone on my e-mail list DOES, and that they'll be kind enough to enlighten me if I'm making wrong assumptions here. What a blessing, that those who know everything, are thoughtful enough to share their knowledge with us – especially in the form of a rebuke or correction! Precious!)

But think about it. Doesn't this make sense?

I honestly believe that the only way to get Paul to write, was to lock him in a room. That way, since he couldn't travel, his only other option was to write letters to those whom he was mentoring, and to the churches who were under his spiritual, Apostolic covering.

And, I don't believe that he had a clue, to know that these letters would someday be reprinted in different languages around the world, grouped together with other writings, in a single book which would be known as the Bible. I don't think he was looking that far into the distant future.

No, he was just trying his best to communicate critically important information to these people and church congregations who looked to him for spiritual oversight and counsel.

I can imagine that the devil was getting upset when Paul got saved, and then started traveling all over, witnessing, winning people to Christ, and then birthing churches in those cities. Satan probably told his demons, "We MUST stop this Apostle Paul! Everywhere he goes, he starts new churches! Wait, I have an idea. Why don't we get him thrown into jail? Then, all he can do is write letters!"

Duh! The devil DEFINITELY didn't see it coming!

When Paul was thrown into prison, the devil considered it a personal victory for his team.

And who knows? For all we know, Paul may have honestly thought that the only people who would ever read what he had written, were those to whom his letters were addressed. I haven't found anything to indicate otherwise.

So, that would mean that Paul died, not knowing how great an impact his letters would have on the entire world in centuries to come.

You may ask, "Mark, how does all of this apply to me?"

Well, I believe that, like me, many of you have encountered situations in your life which seem to be taking you completely "off track" from the path you thought you should be walking.

In fact, you probably thought that everything was just now starting to come together for you. It was all starting to "gel". It seemed as if all the pieces of the puzzle were beginning to fit.

And then, WHAMO! Out of nowhere, something knocked you off your feet. And what you encountered may be completely different from me. But regardless of what it is, something seems to have knocked you down, and restricted you from fulfilling what you thought was God's perfect plan for your life.

But you see, before he ever accepted Christ, while he was still living in sin, God already knew that, in order for him to fulfill his greatest potential, Paul would eventually have to

be restricted from traveling, so that his deep love for those churches would cause him to do something he never intended to do – to sit quietly and write letters – not knowing that those letters would eventually fill more than half of the New Testament.

Yep, the devil thought that he was really hindering Paul's ministry when he was thrown in prison. But God allowed it because He knew that Paul's writing career was about to start.

And if Paul had never been thrown in prison, I question whether he would have ever taken the time and patience to sit and put his thoughts into written form.

And even after he had written those letters, do you really think he knew that they would be a part of the Bible? I don't. I truly believe he assumed that they would be read only by the recipients to whom they were addressed.

Now, have you been feeling that the devil has knocked the wind out of your sails? Have you even wondered if you have been thrown so far off course, that you can never get back on the right path, to fulfill God's plan for your life?

Well, maybe, you are such a threat to the enemy, that he is trying to restrict you, either by imprisonment, or by severe pain, or by whatever else. Let him throw his best shot, because no matter what he tries, God can turn it around, so that it works out for the best!

And then you can say, "It worked out for the best!"

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