

Bridgeway Christian Church - Main Service - December 9/10, 2023

The Empowered Church Series, Part 39

Title: The Power of a Changed Life

Subtitle: Paul and the Kangaroo Courts

Fill-in: Our TRIALS are opportunities for TESTIMONY

Acts 21:27-26:32

We are in part 39 of our 40-part series through the book of Acts called The Empowered Church, and if you look at your bulletin or at the Bridgeway app, you will see that today we are Acts 21:27 all the way through 26:32, which for those scoring at home is five chapters of Scripture. That means church is going to be four hours today. I hope you're hydrated and that you brought a snack. We'll be bringing in hot chocolate at the two-hour mark.

I'm kidding, of course, and as a matter of fact, I promise church will end on time because I have a reputation with our Kidsway department to protect; that is, they know I never go over time when I preach. Now, I don't want to name any names, but some of our other pastors don't have that reputation.

Because we're tackling such a huge section of Scripture today, I won't be able to read through all of it line-by-line like we normally do here at Bridgeway, but I'll summarize some of it so we can zero in on other parts.

And broadly speaking what we're going to see in this story is the Apostle Paul under all different kinds of duress. And we will see the way that his heart, and his character, and his love for the Lord shine through despite the enormity of the obstacles he is facing.

And the truth is that while hopefully none of us will be wrongfully imprisoned and dragged in front of mostly bogus courts, as long as we're on this earth, we are going to spend the majority of our lives under stress. And too often, stress triggers harmful behavior, and we excuse this harmful behavior by reminding everyone that we are stressed. But what if there was a better way?

What if, our faith gave us the resources we need to respond to trials we face in a different sort of way, a way where we still feel our emotions and where we don't fake happiness or anything like that, but a way where the security and the peacefulness that comes from having Christ as our foundation could shine through us. I think that would transform marriages, I think that would transform workplaces, I think that would transform family and friend dynamics. And I believe that is what God wants for you, and more importantly, I think that is what you want for you. It's certainly what I want for me. So we're going to talk about that as we work our way through this story.

When we left off last week, the Apostle Paul had just returned to Jerusalem after his missionary journeys, where he was sharing Christ with Gentiles all over Europe and parts of Asia. The believers in Jerusalem were happy to see him, but there was some concern because Jews in Jerusalem were getting riled up because they believed Paul had been teaching people to abandon all of their laws and customs. And we learned last week that James, the brother of Jesus, and the other elders in Jerusalem, asked Paul to participate in a Nazirite vow to show honor to ancient Jewish customs, and help settle down the people who were nervous about Paul. Paul, for the sake of unity and for the sake of trying to ease the nervousness and anger of Jews in the city, went along with it.

So Paul went along with it.

The problem is, it didn't work. Acts 21:27

“When the seven days (of purification) were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together.”

As you can see, no one has been settled down, and once again, Paul finds himself surrounded by a bunch of hysterical people. This is a bit of a reoccurring theme in the second half of the book of Acts.

The Jews from Asia are likely from the city of Ephesus, where a Gentile mob almost killed Paul in Acts 19. So, it's safe to say he's not very popular there. And they accuse him of defiling the temple by bringing a non-Jew into it. This is a serious charge, as bringing a Gentile into the inner court of the temple was punishable by death. Paul did not do this; as you can see in the text, they had no evidence that he did this. But that didn't stop the crowd from believing it.

Too often, we as humans are more interested in what we want to be true than what is actually true, especially when it comes to people we don't like. And that's largely what has happened here. The Jews didn't like Paul, so when rumors got started they believed them.

It's easy to look down on them, but don't we do the same thing? I'm pretty sure about half of the data use on social media is people sharing false information about people they don't like. When we receive information, it's easy to fall into the trap of caring more about whether or not it supports our opinions than whether or not it is true. In this case, Jews have already decided that they don't like Paul, then someone makes a false charge against him, and everyone just believes it without any efforts at verification.

When we believe and repeat false things about people or institutions we don't like, it feels pretty good in the moment. That's why we do it. But we absolutely destroy our credibility. It's also not good for us. Reading and sharing things that get us and others riled up keeps us in a state of elevated stress that really jacks us up.

Furthermore, we dishonor the Lord, who tells us over and over again in Scripture to not lie and to put away falsehood. And yet, at least in my

experience, too often, we as Christians are fine with lies as long as they support our point of view. You will not find the phrase, “the ends justify the means” in the Bible, and there is a reason for that. When we choose to follow Christ, we commit ourselves to a different standard of honesty, integrity, and consistency.

A question I like to ask myself when I’m engaging in emotional or controversial topics is, what do I need to be true? Because - and track with me on this - if I need something to be true, I’m in a dangerous position. In fact, I believe when I need something to be true, I am most at risk of believing lies. Because what I will tend to do is I will twist reality so that it conforms with my beliefs and opinions. In other words, I will become dishonest. If I need it to be true that someone else is entirely at fault that everyone is out to get me or that my side is only good, that will make a liar out of me.

I’ll give you a silly example. I go to a lot of sporting events, and the words of fans around me have given me a lot of opportunities to talk with my sons about what is and is not appropriate human behavior. And I’ve heard fans shout a lot of things, but I’ve never heard someone say, “The referees are totally favoring our team! This is ridiculous!”

And yet, how often have I heard the opposite? Sports fans, and I am one, seemingly have this desperate need to believe that referees are against them, so they interpret ambiguous situations in a game to support that conclusion. And then they will say and do ridiculous things. I’ll take my kids to Kings games, and the whole arena will be booing and grown adults will be shouting the craziest things, and I’ll just sit there and say to my son, “These people can boo all they want, that was a foul on us.”

And some would say, “Uh! Where is your loyalty?” Not in front of my integrity! My bad. If I have to choose between being called disloyal and being a liar, you can change my middle name to disloyal for all I care. If you encounter a person or institution who asks you to sacrifice your integrity to prove your

loyalty, run. If you find yourself sacrificing your integrity for loyalty, ask for the help of God and trusted people to figure out what's going on.

What do you need to be true? Because when we need something to be true it can blind us to reality. And the truth is, when Jesus Christ is our center, when we know we are safe and secure in our relationship with him, we can be clear-eyed about what is real and what isn't. We can tell the truth. We can have the courage and moral clarity to speak against lies, even if they are lies that support our point of view. And, there is an added bonus that we are less likely to get caught up into a deranged mob like the one that happens here in Acts 21.

So everyone is freaking out, Paul gets dragged out of the temple, and then word gets to the Roman authorities that there is some sort of disturbance, so they come down with a bunch of soldiers and it says in verse 32, **“When the Jews saw the Roman tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.”**

Well that's good. The problem is that then the Romans arrested Paul and started questioning what he had done to cause all of this commotion.

This is significant moment in the book of Acts, because it marks the end of Paul's freedom. He will not be a free man for the rest of the book.

And yet, he's going to continue to do powerful ministry. And yet, God will still be active and at work in his life. And yet, he will remain focused on the mission God has given him to talk about Jesus to anyone who will listen. Through beatings and imprisonments and sham trials, Paul will remain who he is and share his story of what Jesus has done in his life.

See, what Paul understood is the fill-in the blank on your bulletin or on the app: **Our trials are opportunities for testimony.**

Suffering brings with it a certain degree of credibility, isn't that true? It's one thing to talk about the goodness of God when everything is amazing, but

when we can remember he is good even in our hardships, that says something. That doesn't mean denying our hardships or the pain that comes with them, but it does mean remembering a God who is greater. When we can lean on the presence of God in our moments of pain, challenge, and even grief, that says something about the reality of our faith to a watching world.

When we face trials, we have opportunities to testify to the goodness of God. We have opportunities to testify that he has changed our lives and that we trust him. One of the most famous passages in all of Scripture says, **“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil,”** why? “because you're going to make everything ok!” No, because you are with me. When we tell our stories of how God saved us and rescued us, even when we're facing trials, it's powerful.

And we'll see, that's exactly what Paul will do. He's going to keep telling his story. We've been talking about this all year, but your story is powerful, ya'll. I know to you it's normal because it's the only story you've got, but it's not normal to others. We need to tell the stories of God's work in our lives, because our trials are opportunities for testimony.

Getting back to the text, Paul gets arrested, the Roman officials are trying to question him but there is so much chaos that they can't get the information they are seeking. And this Jerusalem crowd is shouting “away with him!” at Paul, in a scene reminiscent of a few decades before when they shouted similarly at Jesus.

We've been studying the book of Acts all year and we've talked about how the book was written by...who? And does anyone know which gospel he wrote? Very good.

It was a common practice for ancient historians to link historical figures by highlighting parallels between them. So, just as an angry mob shouted at Jesus, they shouted at Paul. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus stood trial twice

before the Roman official Pilate and once before the Jewish high priest Herod Antipas. In Acts, Paul will stand trial before two Roman governors and the Jewish king Agrippa II. The fact that Luke is highlighting this is not random. Let's keep going

So now Paul is under arrest after getting beaten by a mob. And in verse 40 he asks to address the crowd, and in chapter 22 he does so. And we're going to skip over this speech because he's going to give a similar one in a few chapters, but he basically outlines for the crowd that he had been raised and educated as a Jew, but then Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus and at that point, his life was radically changed as he went from a persecutor of Christians to a spreader of Christianity.

And Paul finishes his speech in verse 21 by saying that God had told him that he needed to leave Jerusalem and go preach to the Gentiles, and it was almost as if hearing the word Gentiles reminded the crowd why they were mad at Paul to begin with, and they started losing their minds again. It says in Acts 22:22, **“Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live!”** As you can see, everyone is doing a great job keeping their cool, verse 23, **“And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this.”**

Ok, first of all. You know they were seriously out of control because there was some dust-flinging going on. That's a really funny way to express anger. What's more likely happening is that people are shaking the dust from their clothes to show they wholly reject what they believe to be Paul's blasphemous teaching.

Second, things continue to get worse for Paul, as the crowd's behavior makes the Roman tribune think that Paul must be a really bad guy, so he says

we're going to take Paul into the barracks and torture him to try to get him to talk.

And, my goodness, what happens next is crazy. They get him all stretched out and are about to start whipping him, when Paul finally says to one of the soldiers, **“Hey, uh, is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?”** And the soldier immediately goes to his boss and says, “Hey, this guy is a Roman citizen.” The boss questions Paul, Paul confirms it. It is extremely illegal to flog a Roman citizen who has not been tried and found guilty, so the mood in the barracks changes considerably.

It goes from, “Let’s whip him till we can see his organs,” to, “Paul, buddy, or should I say, Mr. Roman citizen who we definitely weren’t going to flog, can I get you anything?” Because now they’re worried that they are going to get in trouble for mistreating a Roman citizen.

I just can’t believe Paul waited that long to tell them. If it were me, the moment I see the whip hanging on the wall, I’d shout out, “Roman citizen! Roman citizen right here!”

So Paul avoids another dangerous situation, and chapter 22 ends with this in verse 30, **“But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, the Roman tribune unbound him and commanded the chief priest and all the council to meet and he brought Paul down and set him before them.**

As we turn the page to chapter 23, Paul is now in front of Roman officials who have brought in Jewish officials to help them figure out why the heck everyone is so mad at Paul, and it is to this crowd that Paul delivers his second defense speech. This one gets off to a bit of a rocky start, verse 1

“And looking intently at the council, Paul said, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.”

That just seems rude. And Paul just has a moment where he loses his cool. Verse 3:

“Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck? Those who stood by said, ‘Would you revile God’s high priest?’ And Paul said, “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, of it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’” And that last phrase is a quotation of Exodus 22:28

So Paul, who, remember, is already in pretty bad shape from that whole mob-beating thing the previous day, gets popped on the mouth and is like, “Ok, that’s it!” He insults the high priest, and then is reminded that that’s a no-no, and basically says, “My bad, I didn’t realize he was the high priest.” He makes a mistake, and he owns it. He apologizes. That’s character.

Back to Paul: He gives another speech, and he manages to get the Pharisees and the Sadducees, two different sects of Jews, arguing with each other, but he doesn’t do much to improve his position.

However, notice this: All the way back in Acts 9 when Jesus first appeared to Paul in a vision and knocked him down in the road to Damascus, Jesus declared that Paul was, **“a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.”**

As Paul is now arrested, that’s starting to happen. Look at Acts 23:11: **“The following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.’”**

The actions of these chapters are not random. This is God moving things into place for Paul to preach the gospel in places he otherwise would not be able to go. But, that doesn’t mean it would always be easy for him.

Look down at 23:12:

“When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.”

I have to admit I am very inexperienced when it comes to trying to hunt people down and kill them. I don't know about you, but it's just not something I've done much of. But it seems like a hunger strike could really interfere with the operation if it stretches on for more than a day or two. But, what do I know? In this case the point they were trying to make was that they were going to end Paul's life or their own.

Spoiler alert: They're not going to kill Paul. What happened to them? They were very hungry.

Verse 13: **“There were more than forty who made this conspiracy. They went to the chief priests and elders and said, ‘We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul. Now, therefore, you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near.’”**

So that's their big plan. They wanted the Jewish leaders to ask the Roman leaders to send Paul to them, and then they were going to whack him on the way.

The plan gets spoiled because even though there has been no mention of any of Paul's family members up to this point or after this point, his random nephew saves the day. We literally hear nothing about Paul's family outside of this random nephew in Acts 23. He hears about the plot, he tells Paul, who tells a soldier, who brings Paul's nephew to the tribune, where he tells the tribune the whole plan. The tribune says he's not going to let that happen, and he summons 250 soldiers to ensure Paul's safe passage out of town to

Caesarea and ensuring that there were going to be some very hungry Jews in Jerusalem.

So Paul gets sent to Caesarea along with a letter from the tribune to the governor in Caesarea named Felix basically saying, “Hey, I have this prisoner, I don’t know what to do with him, he’s a Roman citizen and Jews are trying to kill him, so I sent him to you. Good luck.” Felix gets the letter and says that he’ll give Paul a hearing once his accusers arrive. In the meantime, Felix says that Paul will be kept in Herod’s palace, which, if you’re going to be a prisoner, may as well be in a palace by the sea.

Chapter 24, verse 1, **“And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul.”**

So, let’s set the scene. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem; now he is in Caesarea. He’s had a trial, sort of, in Jerusalem, and now he is before the Roman governor Felix and his accusers have come from Jerusalem to argue that Paul is a bad guy and Rome should get rid of him.

And the gist of the argument they make to Felix can be found starting in verse 5: **“For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.”**

Paul responds in verse 10, **“Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.”** It’s always good to be cheerful when defending yourself. And Paul proceeds to make his defense, pointing out that his accusers have no actual evidence against him. I’m neither a lawyer nor a judge, but that seems like a pretty solid defense.

And in verse 21 he finishes with a flourish, saying, **“It is respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.”** He’s saying they have no legal case against me and they know it. They just don’t like that I preach about the resurrection of the dead. In other words, he’s trying to help Felix understand that this is a religious dispute and Rome doesn’t need to be involved.

Despite all of this, Felix makes sort of a non-decision decision, and says he’s going to keep Paul in custody until the Roman tribune arrives. But we learn in the next few verses that while he was in custody, Paul would be called upon by Felix to talk with him.

Verse 24: **“After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, ‘Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.’ At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him.”**

Paul’s situation allows him to share Christ with a corrupt Roman governor. He talks to a Roman governor who was interested in receiving bribes and favoritism about the need for righteousness and self-control, and more importantly about their need for repentance and the salvation that Christ offers. How is Paul getting this opportunity if he’s not in jail?

What Paul does here is instructive for us. He’s not merely accepting his unjust situation lying down. When he’s given the opportunity, he comes to his own defense and is very clearly trying to regain his freedom. And yet, he’s taking opportunities to talk about Jesus. He’s keeping his character and integrity intact. He’s living and speaking in a manner that earns the credibility of the people around him. He knows that his trials are creating opportunities for testimony, and he doesn’t want to let them slip away.

Verse 27 tells us that after two years, Felix left office and was succeeded by Porcius Festus as governor, but that he left Paul in prison as a favor to the Jews because he needed their help in keeping order.

Now, with Felix out of the picture, Paul has a new trial with a new Roman governor in Acts 25. And it's the same story as we've seen before. Acts 25:7 says the Jewish leaders were bringing serious charges they could not prove, Paul would refute them, but the governor would leave Paul in prison because he didn't want to upset the Jews.

Festus then asks Paul if he wants to move his trial to Jerusalem, but Paul knows Festus is corrupt and won't give him a fair shake, so he's having none of that. He says to Festus in verse 11: **“If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.”** Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, **‘To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.’**

Paul didn't like that Festus was using him as a gift to the Jews, and his right as a Roman citizen was to appeal his case all the way to the emperor, which at this point would have been Nero Caesar, and he does exactly that. He is one step closer to Rome, where he knew God was ultimately leading him.

This was also somewhat beneficial for Festus, who got to wash his hands of Paul and all of the drama surrounding him. The problem for him was he didn't have anything to charge Paul with. So the text tells us that a few days later, the Jewish King Agrippa II arrived in Caesarea, and Festus started consulting with him about the case. After getting updated by Festus, Agrippa says he wants to hear from Paul himself. So Festus arranged for Paul to testify before Agrippa, and as they are getting started, look what Festus says starting in the middle of verse 25:

And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him.”

Once again, not a lawyer or a judge, but that seems rather unreasonable to me, too. Festus is seeking Agrippa’s help in trying to find something to charge Paul with, because it’s a bad look to send a prisoner to your boss saying, “Here’s a prisoner, I have no charges against him.” The last thing he wanted to do was appear to be wasting the emperor’s time.

And it’s here that Paul makes arguably his greatest speech in the entire book of Acts.

He says he will defend himself and asks for Agrippa’s patience. He speaks of his own life in Judaism and his life as a Pharisee. He says in verse 6, **“And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain as they earnestly worship night and day.”** He is basically saying, I’m only on trial here today because I’m saying that that God’s promises that we’ve been waiting for for generations have been fulfilled.

In verses 8-11, Paul talks about his original skepticism about Jesus and how he was a persecutor of the earliest Christians, but then in verse 12 he starts telling his conversion story. He talks about how he was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians when Jesus appeared to him in a vision. Let’s read starting in verse 15:

“And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you,

delivering you from your people and from Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

Verse 19:

“Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. For this reason, the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

God’s message, through Paul, to an ancient audience is the same as his message to us today. We have the opportunity to repent, to turn from our own way of living and instead follow Jesus, and we are invited not just to make a one-time decision, but to participate in a lifestyle where we are transformed to be more and more like Christ. In other words, we perform deeds in keeping with our repentance.

Look what happens next, verse 24:

“And as he was saying these things in his defense, Fetus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.’”

Remember, when you don’t understand someone or you can’t refute what they’re saying,

Verse 25: **“But Paul said, ‘I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this had not been done in a corner.’”**

Paul is saying, Agrippa knows what I’m talking about. He’s seen the growth of the Church. He’s seen have people are turning to faith in Christ. We haven’t been hiding any of this he says.

Verse 27:

“King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.’ And Agrippa said to Paul, ‘In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?’ Agrippa’s like, are we about to have an altar call right now? And Paul says,

“Whether short or long, I would say to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.”

These chains are kind of a drag, Paul says, but I want you King, and you Festus, and everyone else to come to know and believe the good news that God has sent his Son into the world, and his name is Jesus, and he died on a cross and rose from the grave and salvation is available to all who would turn to him in faith and make him their Lord. Paul’s got some people who are treating him really badly. And he’s trying to get that bad treatment to stop, but what I love about Paul is he’s refusing to hate. We’re so quick to hate in our world today. As followers of Jesus we’re called to a different way, where we love our enemies. Here’s Paul sharing Christ with them.

Verse 30:

“Then the king arose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another,

this man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment. And Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

Jesus was three times declared innocent by Roman authorities in Luke 23, so here Paul is a third time declared innocent by Roman authorities. And both Festus and Agrippa leave saying Paul should be free, something that is much easier for them to say now that they know he will be sent to Caesar. But God has his plans in all of this. By appealing to Caesar Paul guaranteed his passage to Rome, and guaranteed safety from the Jewish mobs in Jerusalem that wanted him dead. And, as we'll see with Pastor Lance next week, there are yet more opportunities that await Paul to testify to the reality of Jesus Christ and his kingship.

Closing:

Paul's trials gave him an opportunity for testimony. We have those same opportunities. We are going to face darkness, but these Advent candles remind us that God's light shines into the darkness and the darkness will not over come it. So as we face the darkness in our lives and in this world, may we trust Christ and let his light shine through us. It might just change lives.