

Dear Fellow servants of Christ,

Have you heard of “Yarovaya”? It is a new Russian law that restricts the sharing of the Gospel in Russia. You can only teach and share the Good News in a registered church, but not in peoples homes and not out on the streets. If a person does, they could be arrested, jailed or deported. We could say that this is an attempt to “chain the gospel.”

This was true in St. Paul’s day. Rome was burning by Nero’s hand, but Christians were blamed. Later hundreds and thousands were led to the arena to die gruesome deaths.

Paul himself is in chains around this time. He writes a very positive letter to his “son” in the ministry, Timothy. If he was telling Timothy to be thankful because things were going to get better, Paul would have been misleading Timothy. Because of the persecutions that were just starting and would last over 200 hundred years, things were getting worse, not better, at least outwardly.

Yet as Paul is in prison waiting to die he has a very thankful spirit. He is giving thanks not because Christ will take the persecution away, but because the Gospel of salvation is unchained. Part of Jesus’ church was in chains, but the good news of salvation and all its blessings were spreading rapidly. The Gospel of Jesus, which Paul preached, cannot be chained.

As we live in a world that brings trouble and suffering for the Christian, we want to **Give Thanks for the Unchained Gospel**. When you hear what St. Paul says you will feel positive and thankful.

1. Good News that cannot be chained.

The letter of 2 Timothy is what we believe is St. Paul’s last letter before his death. Pastor Timothy has been like a son to Paul. He wants Timothy to come to him, but he doesn’t know if that will happen before he dies. So the apostle writes his most personal thoughts. Chief among his thoughts is that Timothy should take heart because the Good News of Jesus cannot be chained.

A. Even though Timothy is a pastor, St. Paul says, “**Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead...**”

1. Christians, including pastors, must always remember Jesus. What we are

to remember is that he is the Son of God who has come into the world as the Savior. As Paul had written before, **“Jesus was born under law to redeem those under the law.”** (Galatians 4) Every pastor, every person is under the Creator’s rules and laws as we find them summarized in the 10 Commandments. Whereas we do not keep these rules, Jesus did keep them perfectly.

2. Timothy had been with Paul on his missionary journey’s when Paul preached **Christ crucified**. (1 Corinthians 1:23) Jesus who was a flesh and blood human being descended of David had been nailed to a cross for the sins of the world. The key to all Jesus did was his resurrection from the dead. He rose from the dead after three days. It proved he was God. It promised forgiveness of sins to all who believe in Jesus. This was Paul’s Gospel.

3. When you come to church what do you want to hear? *“Ten steps to a better life”* sounds appealing. St. Paul says it is best if we are reminded of Jesus and his death and resurrection. The salvation that he won for us not only makes for a better life, but it makes for a fantastic eternity.

B. Someone mocking the apostle Paul might say, *“That is easy for you to say, but you are in chains. Your Good News doesn’t seem powerful.”* St. Paul would respond, **“The Gospel is powerful. It cannot be chained.”**

1. It is true that things were bad for Paul. After his first arrest he lived in a rented house and had all that he needed. In 2 Timothy, he was chained behind bars, he was lonely and likely cold. He was sure he was going to be executed. Outwardly things were not going well.

Inwardly, Paul’s heart was on fire. In chapter 1:12, **“I know whom I have believed and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted until that day.”** Paul was convinced the Lord was ready to give him eternal life in heaven and nothing would change that.

2. Also knew that the Good News could not be chained. The Jewish leaders had tried spread rumors that Jesus’ body had been stolen, instead the Good News of his resurrection spread throughout Judea. The leaders threatened and persecuted Jesus’ disciples, but the Good News spread throughout the Roman world. The Roman Empire was now trying to stop the Gospel. It would not succeed. Paul was confident.

3. A few decades ago Communism tried to stamp out the proclamation of Jesus as Savior. There are more Christians today in China, Russia, Cuba than ever before. There are attempts again by the Russian government, Islam and even groups in our own country to chain the gospel. St. Paul says to us, **“But**

God's word is not chained." They can chain Christians, but they cannot stop the spread of the gospel. With Paul we can be thankful.

2. Good News by which we endure.

The Good News was not only for the people that the apostle was preaching to. The Gospel made Paul strong so he could endure suffering. And it helps you and me as well.

A. He writes in verse 10, **"I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."**

1. When people come across this passage some will ask, *"Who are the elect"*? They are the people God has chosen before time in eternity to come to faith through the Gospel and be saved. These people were precious to the Lord and so they were precious Paul. He therefore did everything, including suffer, to help these people to know Jesus and to continue believing in him.

On one occasion Jesus said, **"I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also."** (John 10:16) St. Paul took this seriously and worked very hard to bring in those sheep. He wanted them to be saved.

2. It may be difficult to share the Good News in some countries. It may be dangerous to meet and worship. That is not yet the case in our country. We have the legal freedom to speak. We have the legal freedom to gather. We can even have a church group in our homes. Give thanks to the Lord for such freedoms. We can thank the Lord in our prayers, but also thank the Lord by taking advantage to gather not only for worship, but to gather for Bible study and fellowship. The Lord wants us to and he will strengthen our faith and bless us as we do.

B. This important because the apostle Paul makes another point. Suffering and salvation go together in this life. He introduces a trustworthy saying, in verses 11-13, that may have been a hymn stanza.

1. Can you imagine the Christians singing these words? They did not know whether the Romans would show up while they were gathered and haul them off to prison. They sing, **"If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him."** (11b-12a) Dying with Jesus happened at their Baptism. They had been united to Jesus and his death in the waters of Baptism. So as Jesus lived, they also had life, eternal life with God. The hymn reminded them that they had to endure. Jesus told his disciples that they would be persecuted just as he had. Paul told the

Christians in Antioch in Syria that they would go through many hardships. This is true for us today. Not all will suffer to the same degree, but it is not easy being a Christian. If we endure, the hymn verse tells us **“we will reign with him.”** Jesus has promised that as a part of our salvation we get to live with him in heaven forever. Paul would tell us, “Continue in the Gospel. Don’t give up!”

2. All out persecution is hard. We may feel we are strong in the Lord until we are tortured or we see other Christians falling away. We may wonder if it is worth it. So the hymn carries a warning.

a) **“If we disown him, he will also disown us.”** (12b) The hymn writer may have remembered Jesus words in Matthew 10:33 when he wrote these words. Jesus said, **“But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.”** To deny Jesus or desert him, is deserting the only Savior and salvation we have. Someone might say, *“But pastor what if the persecution is vicious and brutal.”* I agree it would be hard, however, the Scriptures also say if we have the message of salvation deeply ingrained in us, we will not easily give it up. Perhaps the issue is not what am I going to do then in the heat of the moment, but rather what am I doing now while I have the chance to be deeply rooted in God’s Word and in faith.

b) The hymn ends with a promise. Even if we turn away from him in a moment of trouble, he will not remove his grace. The Christians sang, **“if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.”** As long as we are alive we can always turn to him in repentance and receive forgiveness. God’s grace is always good in this life.

Conclusion: An argument could be made that never more has the gospel been resisted, rejected and persecuted. Yet the Gospel is unchained today as is demonstrated in the special edition of *Forward in Christ* magazine. The gospel is being shared and taught everywhere. People are coming to know and believe in Jesus as their forgiving Savior!

Rejoice! Give thanks! Remember that through Jesus we not only have salvation, but strength to endure and the power to help spread the gospel. Amen.

General Thought: The Christians lives a life of thanksgiving. Our thankfulness and faithfulness is a response to the Lord's grace and faithfulness toward us.

Context: St. Paul is in prison and in chains. He will soon die for the Lord. Rather than be

disappointed, he is thankful because the Gospel cannot be chained and it is bringing salvation to him and others.

Malady: Should we give up faith and ministry because the church is chained?

Propositional Statement: Give thanks for the gospel of salvation which cannot be chained.

Ruth 1:1-19a

(NIV 2011)

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. 2 The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

3 Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

Naomi and Ruth Return to Bethlehem

6 When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. 7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. 9 May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud 10 and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

11 But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? 12 Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— 13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has turned against me!"

14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

15 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."

16 But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” 18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem.

(NIV 1984)

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then she kissed them and they wept aloud and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people." But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me--even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons--would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me!" At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her. "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." **But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."** When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem.

1 Samuel 12:20-24

(NIV 2011)

20 “Do not be afraid,” Samuel replied. “You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. 21 Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. 22 For the sake of his great name the Lord will not reject his people, because the Lord was pleased to make you his own. 23 As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you.

And I will teach you the way that is good and right. ²⁴ But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you.

(NIV 1984)

“Do not be afraid,” Samuel replied. “You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. ²¹ Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. ²² For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own. ²³ As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. ²⁴ But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you.

NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE LESSON - 2 Corinthians 1:8-11

(NIV 2011)

(NIV 1984)

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

2 Timothy 2:8-13

(NIV 2011)

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

¹¹ Here is a trustworthy saying:

If we died with him,
we will also live with him;

¹² if we endure,
we will also reign with him.

If we disown him,
he will also disown us;

¹³ if we are faithless,
he remains faithful,
for he cannot disown himself.

(NIV 1984)

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

THE VERSE OF THE DAY

Alleluia. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation. Alleluia. (Isaiah 25:9b cf. NIV)

THE GOSPEL READING - Luke 17:11-19

(NIV 2011)

11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13 and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

(NIV 1984)

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²
As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³
and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."