Ephesians 3:1—For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles —

Paul was *"the prisoner of Christ Jesus"* (Ephesians 3:1). For this phrase to fully impact our lives, we must understand the backdrop associated with his imprisonment.

While Paul was imprisoned in Rome, the Roman Empire ruled the world with Caesar as its emperor. The Romans had initially imprisoned Paul in Jerusalem (for his personal safety) after hostile Jews threatened his life for associating with Gentiles and teaching "politically incorrect" views regarding the Law (Acts 21:17-36). The Romans later sent Paul to Caesarea (Acts 23:12–26:32) and then to Rome (Acts 27:1–28:31), where he lived *"in his own rented quarters"* (Acts 28:30-31). Interestingly, Paul, under the jurisdiction of the Roman Empire during this lengthy imprisonment, did <u>not</u> say, "the prisoner of Caesar." He realized that all *"authority"* is established by God (Romans 13:1), which made him ultimately *"the prisoner of Christ Jesus"* (Ephesians 3:1). Thus Caesar, possessing a free will, was God's instrument for that season of history just as Pilate, possessing a free will, was God's instrument during Jesus' First Coming (John 19:10-11). Paul viewed himself as Christ's *"prisoner…for the sake of"* the *"Gentiles"* (Ephesians 3:1). This mindset allowed him to understand how his "circumstances" were working for his *"good"* (Romans 8:28) as well as the good of his Gentile readers (Ephesians 3:1).

Paul was an apostle *"to the Gentiles"* just as Peter was an apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2:8; Romans 15:15-16). In fact, Paul's involvement with the Gentiles put him at odds with the unbelieving Jews (read Acts 21:27-31). His teaching that Jewish and Gentile believers are one in Christ irritated his Jewish critics immensely.

Paul confirms in Ephesians 3:1 that our "circumstances" are a matter of perspective. When viewed from God's vantage point, difficulties become opportunities. Freedom naturally follows, releasing the believer to truly "live."