

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Pathway.
- B. We are together listening to God's message to us from a book in the Bible. The Book is Philippians. We are going through it one paragraph at a time.
- C. The title of my series is: **Quit Telling Yourself I Can't**
- D. Today I want to think with you about one of the most powerful lies that can echo in our hearts: So my title today is:
 - 1. **Quit Telling Yourself I Can't Handle This**
 - a) The doctor tells you bad news: *I can't handle this.*
 - b) Your car air conditioner goes out and you get a flat tire on the same day and the voice in your head says: *I can't handle this anymore.*
 - c) This voice speaks every time your family is in chaos.
 - d) It speaks when the ghosts of the past show up uninvited.
 - e) It speaks when you feel overwhelmed, discouraged, depressed, sick, broke, confused, angry, hurt, embarrassed, ashamed, tempted, threatened, or lost.
 - (1) I can't handle this. I can't take this anymore. I've had enough. I'm just done.
- E. A while back, I preached about spiritual warfare.
- F. Part of that was a teaching on strongholds. The topic of strongholds comes into play today.
 - 1. **A stronghold is a fortress in your mind... made of interlocking half-truths and lies that take you captive, usually without you noticing it. (2 Corinthians 10:4,5)**
 - 2. You could say that a stronghold is a deeply engrained pattern of false thinking.
 - 3. It's built brick by brick out of beliefs you're convinced are true.
 - 4. And it's deadly because those beliefs are mostly lies with enough truth in them to make them convincing.
 - 5. A stronghold holds a person captive to those lies.
 - a) This captivity is emotional and it's psychological. Sometimes, it's physiological.
 - b) And here's the big takeaway:
 - (1) **The essence of emotional and mental captivity is a breakdown in your personal agency and dominion. You're not yourself.**
 - 6. In theology, it's called "the bondage of the will." It means that instead of living by intentionality and choice you're being dragged around by an external power, an external locus of control.
 - a) God made you for dominion, and that's broken... your life is dominated by dysfunction or some other brokenness.
 - 7. Strongholds are painful. They are damaging. They are confusing.
 - 8. They come from your childhood, your parents, your friends, your peer groups, and your culture.
 - a) You might have been told this all your life:
 - (1) You're too weak to handle this. You're not smart enough...
 - (2) From parents, from abusers, from bosses, from institutions.
 - b) They're all liars. God says otherwise.
- G. The truth is that God gave you the right to rule your life.
 - 1. Sin broke all that and took it away. Salvation gave it all back to you.
 - a) And every time you say I can't, and I can't handle this, you become a warrior in full retreat.
- H. But what if I told you that Scripture gives us a master class in demolishing that specific stronghold?
 - 1. It comes from a person in the last place you would expect to find victory over broken dominion.
- I. The Apostle Paul. As he writes the letter to the Philippians, he is in a nightmare scenario.
 - 1. Paul has been arrested by the Roman Empire.
 - a) Physically, he is in chains. Emotionally and spiritually, he's being attacked... *by his own side.*
 - (1) So, Paul is both a prisoner of Rome, and a target of his 'friends.'
- J. If ever there was a moment to say, 'I can't handle this,' this was it. The walls of that stronghold were closing in on him.
- K. And yet, from that dark place, Paul says something that defies all logic. He says, 'In this, I rejoice.'
 - 1. How does that happen?
 - a) If ever there were a moment to say, 'I can't handle this,' this was it. So how can he say, In this I rejoice?
 - b) That's the question for us today. How did he find joy?
 - c) The answer is that he took a wrecking ball to that stronghold.
 - 2. Let's identify these same divine weapons God still offers to us today.

II. 6 Wrecking Balls For the I Can't Handle This Stronghold

- A. *"But I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel."* (Philippians 1:12)
 - 1. He looks at his chains, his confinement, his nightmare—and he doesn't call it a tragedy.
 - 2. He calls it the furtherance of the Gospel.
 - a) **Wrecking Ball 1: God transforms your problems into a catalyst for grace.**
 - 3. God didn't cause Paul's suffering, evil did. This fallen world is a morally broken Pain Machine, and so the bad stuff is not God's fault.
 - 4. But when the bad stuff happens, God steps in. No, he doesn't turn the bad stuff off—we all wish he would. But that has to wait for heaven... that's the ground rules.
 - 5. Instead, when the bad stuff happens, God, in his redemptive genius hijacks the evil for good.

- a) He invades the enemy's territory. He turns the bad stuff to produce His own loving purposes.
 - (1) "The things that happened to me have turned out for good."
 - (2) "The things that happened to me have turned out for the furtherance of the Gospel..." which was the one thing Paul cared about most.
6. This makes the devil spitting mad.
 - a) After his brothers were violent to him—Joseph said, "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good..." (Genesis 50:20).
 - (1) Same event. Double purposes. God wins. Devil gets mad.
7. And do you see how this one move immediately attacks the 'I Can't Handle This' stronghold?
 - a) That stronghold thrives on the lie that your suffering is pointless.
 - (1) It tells you that you are just a victim.
 - b) But the moment you see your problem as a catalyst for the love of God, your agency is restored.
 - c) You're not the victim you thought you were.
 - (1) Ask him, and God will bring good out of it. Believe him. Rest in him.
 - d) When you choose that, you no longer identify as a prisoner of your circumstances; Now you identify as a participant in God's beautiful purposes.
8. So how do you start? You don't start by seeking some kind of emotion or spiritual high. That's not God's plan for us.
9. You start by declaring your faith
10. And then you pray a dangerous prayer:
 - a) God, I don't see how, but I am asking you to flood into this situation. Invade this pain. Show me how you can turn this problem into a catalyst for your grace in my life and my world.
11. And we have to understand, this isn't just a clever trick God pulls out once in a while.
12. This is the central logic of the universe because it is the logic of the cross.
 - a) The enemy gathered all the evil, all the betrayal, all the injustice of the world and threw it at Jesus on a Friday afternoon.
 - b) That was the enemy's ultimate move, designed to be the ultimate prison.
13. But God, in His redemptive genius, hijacked the greatest act of evil in history and turned it into the greatest act of love and the only salvation the world has ever known.
14. If God can turn something as dark and evil as the cross into a catalyst for grace, He can certainly take the broken pieces of your life and turn them into a catalyst for grace too.
15. This is the first swing of the wrecking ball. It comes down to this:
 - a) The enemy designs a prison for you, but God makes your problems a catalyst for grace...
 - (1) Even if you caused the problems yourself.
 - b) For some of you, your 'prison' is the memory of a painful past.
 - c) For others, it's a high-pressure career, a difficult relationship, a chronic illness.
16. The lie says, *This will break you*.
 - a) Grace says, I have something awesome planned. Sit tight.
 - (1) That's not easy, but it's awesome.
 - b) This leads us to the second wrecking ball that demolishes the 'I Can't Handle This' stronghold.
- B. Wrecking Ball 2: God joins your Identity to his Mystery.
 1. "...so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ." (Philippians 1:13)
 - a) **Wrecking Ball 2: God joins your Identity to his Mystery.**
 2. Paul says it became evident to everyone that his chains were 'in Christ.' How? How does an invisible spiritual reality become so undeniable that even hardened Roman guards can see it?
 3. The answer is this: Because God joins your identity to His mystery.
 4. Let's break that down. There are two parts to this divine reality, and you need both.
 - a) First, there is Your Identity.
 - (1) For the Christian, your identity is 'You in Christ.'
 - (2) This is your legal, spiritual, unshakeable position.
 - (3) On the day you were saved, God joined you to Christ. He made you one with Jesus.
 - (4) Since that day, you are completely identified with Jesus.
 - (a) His identity becomes your identity.
 - (b) His righteousness is your righteousness.
 - (c) His status as God's beloved Son is your status.
 - (d) His power, His privileges, His riches, His glory—they are all yours. Perfectly and forever.
 - (e) This is the foundational truth Paul stood on, the objective reality of who he was.
 - b) All of that is wrapped up in that little package, "in Christ." It's a verbal shortcut for a very big truth.
 - c) That's IDENTITY. That's what the Roman Guard could see.
 - (1) This guy doesn't see himself as a prisoner, a victim, a loser, or a weakling.
 - (2) He sees himself as royalty.
 - (3) He sees himself as someone powerful, purposeful, and meaningful.
 - d) But "in Christ" isn't just IDENTITY. It's also...
 5. MYSTERY

- a) "To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:27)
- b) What did the whole palace guard see?
 - (1) IDENTITY: That's You in Christ. But then they also saw:
 - (2) MYSTERY: That's Christ in You.
- c) The mystery is the living, breathing, transcendent presence of Jesus dwelling inside a believer.
 - (1) It's that something magical, something that can be sensed but not fully explained.
 - (2) It's a peace that defies logic, a joy that survives sorrow, a love that forgives the unforgivable.
 - (3) It's a power that is clearly from beyond the dimensions of this realm.
6. Now, think about those palace guards, and "all the rest". Their whole job was to be around power. They guarded Caesar. They served the Roman Senate. They knew what human ambition, fear, pride, and brute force looked like. It was predictable. It was of this world.
 - a) The identity of a Roman guard was built on things you could see and measure: the strength of his arm, the sharpness of his sword, the authority of the eagle standard, his unwavering loyalty to an earthly emperor.
 - b) Their world was all about power and force. About violence and jockeying for position. Honor was won through dominance. Security was found in strength.
 - c) And here comes Paul, a man with none of that. He's weak. He's in chains.
 - d) He's got no armor at all... none that they could see at least.
7. And then they get chained to Paul.
 - a) And from day one, they see something entirely different.
 - b) They see a man whose identity is not in his circumstances, but in Christ. But it doesn't stop there.
8. They see something in Paul that they can't explain. It's a mystery. It's Christ in Paul. **Paul is more secure in his chains than Caesar is on his throne.**
9. What kind of secret armor does this man wear?
10. We may not be able to point to it, but it is *EVIDENT*. It is undeniable. They can't explain it.
 - a) They couldn't see Paul's spiritual bank account, but they saw him living with the resources of heaven.
 - b) They couldn't explain his peace, but they couldn't deny it.
 - c) They were witnessing the mystery of Christ in a human heart, filling a human psychology, and bringing magic and blessing and a supernatural something they never saw before.
11. That's you. That's who you are, when you let who you are out of the cage.
 - a) It's that formula. IDENTITY plus MYSTERY. You in Christ plus Christ in you.
 - (1) This wrecking ball smashes the lie that you are nothing more than what people can see.
 - (2) It demolishes the stronghold that says your circumstances are your reality.
 - b) And for anyone here carrying the weight of a difficult past, this is so crucial. Trauma tries to give you a permanent name tag. It whispers lies about your identity: 'You are damaged.' 'You are unworthy.' 'You are defined by what was done to you.'
 - c) But your core identity is your identity 'in Christ. This reality supersedes any earthly perception.
 - (1) It's a fact truer than your feelings, truer than your memories.
 - (2) God doesn't just paper over your wounds; He gives you a new name that your wounds cannot erase.
 - (3) The mystery of you in Christ means the truth about you is glorious and powerful and beautiful and whole.
 - (4) The mystery of 'Christ in you' means His healing presence is actively at work, rewriting the lies of the past with the truth of His love.
12. And here is the powerful truth for us: The enemy puts you in visible chains to give you an identity of shame. But God reveals your invisible identity in Christ through the undeniable mystery of Christ in you.
 - (1) Who are you to say, I can't handle it. You're seated on a throne with Christ and you share a dominion that stretches beyond the stars.
 - (2) Who are you to say, I can't handle it. Christ is in you, and he can handle it. The Holy Spirit is in you and he can handle it. You've got powers to tap into you haven't begun to try out.
 - (3) Who are you to say I can't handle it. The demons are trembling, keeping their fingers crossed, hoping that you never realize that come what may, you are richly blessed, highly favored, and deeply loved.
 - (4) Who are you to say, I can't handle it. You're saved. You're a Christian. You're a citizen of heaven, an ambassador of Christ. God's got angel armies on standby, ready to swoop down to your aid.
 - (a) Your identity is a container for a mystery, and the mystery is supernaturally out of this world.
 - b) Even if your faith is shaky, sing it, say it, declare it, pray it... I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.
 - c) Quit telling yourself I can't.

C. Wrecking Ball 3: God Turns Your Trial into a Trumpet Call that Mobilizes an Army.

1. Look at the explosive ripple effect Paul describes in verse 14:
 - a) "And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly." (Philippians 1:14)
2. This is the Gospel Jiu-Jitsu on a grand scale. The enemy's plan was simple: take out the number one voice for the gospel. Silence the chief apostle.
 - a) But the plan backfired. Because the believers in Rome saw the mystery of Christ sustaining Paul in his chains, it didn't scare them; it made them bolder than ever before. Faith is contagious.

3. They saw God's power in Paul's weakness, and it ignited their faith. They thought, "If God can be that real for Paul in a prison, then He can be real for us out here." So they started speaking about Jesus more boldly and fearlessly than ever before.
4. The devil tried to silence one man, and in doing so, he accidentally mobilized an army of evangelists.
5. A celebrity and athlete from the late 1800s, C.T. Studd, said:
 - a) **Let us not glide through this world and then slip quietly into heaven, without having blown the trumpet loud and long for our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Let us see to it that the devil will hold a thanksgiving service in hell, when he gets the news of our departure from the field of battle.**
6. Paul's chains became a trumpet call. His suffering wasn't a quiet, pitiful affair; it was a loud, defiant declaration of God's faithfulness that rallied the troops.
7. When Paul was brought to Rome for trial, it took a while. The Bible says he lived in his own rented house and for two years "welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:30-31).
 - a) Paul turned his imprisonment into a ministry hub. And the whole church was made more bold than ever before to be ambassadors of grace and truth in a culture of confusion and pain.
 - b) Satan took out the key leader, and he regretted it, because a sense of great responsibility fell on the whole church. They could no longer rely on Paul to be the main voice.
 - c) So they all stepped up and took ownership of the mission.
 - d) I pray that when it's my time to move on (years from now) that an army of love stand up here to carry on...
8. God Turns Your Trial into a Trumpet Call that Mobilizes an Army.

III. Conclusion

- A. And what does that trumpet call sound like for us, today, in our own lives?
 1. It sounds like a heart that has been so captured by the mystery of Christ that it can stand in the middle of its own chains and speak with supernatural confidence.
- B. The world may only see your struggle, your sickness, your pain.
 1. But in that struggle, they still feel that flicker of faith.
 2. And in that sickness, they still sense the magic of hope.
 3. And in your pain, they still feel the tenderness of your love.
 - a) And all they can do is look on in wonder and ask, how on earth does that even happen?
 - b) Where's the bitterness? Where's the anger? Where's the lashing out? Where's the vengeance? Where's the cursing? Where's the voice of giving up and giving in and quitting and checking out?
 4. Christian, your truest self shines forth the day you quit saying I can't handle this anymore, and start saying...
 - a) Yeah this hurts, but if God is for me, who can be against me.
 - b) I'm still here. I still love you. I'll be okay.
 - c) My Dad's got this. Don't worry about me. I'm not going anywhere.
 - d) I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. I still believe.
 - e) God causes all things to work together for good to those who love him.
 - f) My chains are in Christ, Paul said.
 5. What are your chains? Set them in Christ.
 - a) My chains... that's my physical sickness... but I've got ultimate healing on the way, and I'm going to race down streets of gold. My chains are in Christ.
 - b) My chains... that's my depression, that's my discouragement, that's my thoughts of ending it all... but I've got hope that my God will make a way, and I will rise above it all. My chains are in Christ.
 - c) My chains... that's my mountain of debt... but my Father owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the wealth in every mine, and I'm an heir of the unsearchable riches of Christ... and one way or another this gets fixed. My chains are in Christ.
 6. My chains... that's my marriage that's falling apart, my kids that have turned against me, that charge with the court date set, that addiction that I can't beat...
 7. My chains... that's my anxiety. That's my fears. That's my grief. That's my memories of past cruelty casting a shadow over every day of my life.
 8. My chains are my chains, but my chains are in Christ, and in Christ, I find hope, I find mercy, I find forgiveness, I find grace, I find strength, I find purpose, I find possibility, I find solutions, I find help, I find power, I find provision, I find presence, and I find love. Deep, real, love. Friendship, caring, and love I never thought I could have.
 9. **My chains are in Christ... so...**
 - a) I *can* handle this. I *can* beat this. I *can* rise above. I *can* see beyond. I *can* make it another day.
 - b) I've got a Savior who sticks closer than a brother, and a shepherd and guardian of my soul.
 - (1) My chains are in Christ.
 10. That's a supernatural, transcendent, humble life that silences the critic and makes the demons tremble.
 11. And that's a wrecking ball to the I Can't Handle This stronghold.

IV. Teaser:

- A. But Paul is a realist. He knows that life is messy. What happens when that newly mobilized army includes people who aren't on your side? What happens when some of those voices start preaching Christ not out of love, but out of envy and rivalry, trying to make your life even harder? How do you handle that?
- B. That is where we will pick up next week, with the fourth wrecking ball.