

Chain of Fools

By Rev. Todd Farnsworth

Philippians 1: 12-19



Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard[[b](#)] and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. 15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard[[b](#)] and to everyone else that I am in chains (Chain, chain, chain)

*Chain of fools
For five long years*

*I thought you were my man
But I found out
I'm just a link in your chain
Oh, you got me where you want me
I ain't nothin' but your fool
You treated me mean
Oh, you treated me cruel
Chain chain chains...for Christ!*

Aretha Franklin made that song about being in bondage to a man a Grammy Award-winning hit in 1969. She sang about being one of a long line of women in this man's life. One after the other, woman after woman, the man in the song goes through women without thought or care, and she knows she's going to be replaced. It's a burden, and a cycle, and she just can't seem to get out despite his sending her away.

Chain chain chain...chain of fools!

As I was researching this song, I came across an interesting bit of information that links it not only to today's text but to this week's big news story. The song, Chain of Fools, was originally written with different words, in 1953, by an artist named Don Corvay. Corvay was signed with Atlantic Records and wrote songs that the Rolling Stones, Wilson Pickett and, Otis Redding recorded. According to Don's son, Chain of Fools was originally written about the cycle of slavery and poverty. His son Tony wrote in Songfacts, "*My father wrote Chain of Fools about mental slavery and the cycle of poverty with a message. Look, read the words, slavery words. The bicycle chain gave him the hook. He said he had to change the words to fit the public.*"

I have written to Tony and hope to learn more about the original version of the song. Nonetheless, with that insight, we can revisit the lyrics that are attributed to Aretha and hear them in a different light.

For five long years

I thought you were my man

But I found out

I'm just a link in your chain

Oh, you got me where you want me

I ain't nothin' but your fool

You treated me mean

Oh, you treated me cruel.

Chain Chain Chain...chain of fools!

With the new information I can hear the sound of the bicycle chain going round and round, pushing the writer forward without any thought to his or her well being. It is the kind of cycle of betrayal that Paul found himself as a Roman citizen, wherein he would preach the gospel and the state would set him in chains. He'd be released, preach again, and find himself back in chains. It was the Roman Empire asserting its power over him for expressing his faith. For being who God/Jesus called him to be. It was a cycle of oppression.

We read about/heard about another cycle of oppression this week with regards to the awful murders in Buffalo, NY. We read about a young white man who drove 3-4 hours to a black neighborhood to kill black people as they went about their lives shopping for groceries. Imagine. Being murdered for buying a can of soup or a box of CapnCrunch cereal! Of course that's not why they were shot down. The young man killed the 10 people and, injured many more, and caused one of the only grocery stores

in the area to close, thereby depriving the rest of the community a source for food, he did all that, and planned to kill Jewish people afterwards, because of something called “replacement theory.”

Replacement theory is a conspiracy construct that states that there is a nefarious plot to replace white people with people who are not considered white by whoever is stating the theory. It is an “elastic” theory in that anyone can be named “other” and, anyone can be perceived as an enemy who is trying to steal jobs, homes, partners, food, space in a park, seat in a church or synagogue or mosque. The theory is stupidly brilliant because it allows a lot of wiggle room for including anyone who you fear...or don't like...or anyone who you've been told over and over again, is out to get YOU! And there are media outlets that promote this replacement theory. And there are sites on the internet that produce content that drowns people's senses in replacement theory. And there are politicians who manipulate the masses with the idea that "they, the other" is coming to get you and take your rightful place in the world! And there are enough (mostly) white fools who become links in these chains of fear and oppression, that it becomes terrifying to live as a person of color in our country. We bind their lives with concerns that need not be. They have to watch what they say. They have to be careful of how they behave. They have to consider where they hang out, and where they shop for milk and eggs. They have to decide what to wear that will not incite somebody who is addicted to replacement theory. They appear to be free, but they are every bit enslaved as their ancestors, by this replacement theory that is perpetuated.

Link after link after link. When you hear about these shootings, think about the links and their strength. Think about the centuries of systems that keep our sisters and brothers in places like prisons.

Chain chain chain...chain of fools!

Because in attaching to these stupid sentiments of being replaced, white people are also prisoners. We cannot fully express ourselves without fear, and if you think that's not true I can tell you that the most threatening messages I have ever received in my career were when I preached about having compassion for people of color. I was threatened with gun violence. I was threatened to be censored. I was told that members of that community didn't want my care and compassion for them to be replaced with black people, or gay people, or poor people, or children, or...the longer they went on the less clear it was. They were afraid that my capacity to love, to care, to have concern for people other than themselves somehow diminished my ability to minister.

CHAIN CHAIN CHAIN...CHAIN OF FOOOOLS!

The song goes on to describe the chain weakening:

Every chain

Has got a weak link

I might be weak, yeah

But I'll give you strength

Oh, hey

And Paul goes on to say that the chains that are binding him are actually strengthening his witness of Jesus. He says *I am in chains for Christ.* 14

And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

Despite being dragged down by the state, or theories of replacement that keep us imprisoned, Paul proclaims a risen Christ. He continues to preach and teach and share the Good News of the liberating spirit that Jesus has

to offer. He uses the chains that bind him to declare that he is NOT a fool, but a fool for Christ. He knows that there is another way for him to be in the community. He knows that he need not live in fear. He knows that in Jesus there is enough for all to go around and the shallowness of his oppressor's arguments is no match for the deliverance that awaits him.

The shallowness of replacement theory, the nonsense of white superiority, and the insulting absurdity of Jesus being too small to hold us all, need to be broken. And we can do that by living the faith that we have inherited and boldly rejecting these wannabe wardens when they seek to imprison us or our neighbors. We can do that by being unified in declaring freedom in Jesus' love that allows for all people to seek work, all people to find pleasure, and all people to shop for Bran Buds without fear! We can do that by not supporting those who would hold us hostage to their unfound fears. We can do that by using our faith-filled voices to break the *chain chain chain, chains of fools*, in Jesus' name and to His glory! If we're not breaking it, we're allowing others to keep making it. *I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened will turn out for the deliverance of all...in Jesus' name, let's break those chains.*

Amen