

For the Furtherance of the Gospel

Written by David Wise

Thursday, 06 April 2017 15:52 - Last Updated Thursday, 06 April 2017 15:56

“But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places;” – Philippians 1:12-13

The Apostle Paul pens this epistle to the church at Philippi during his first Roman imprisonment which occurred probably near 61-63 AD. The Philippian church had sent a messenger, Epaphroditus, to Paul to provide aid to him in prison, who Paul commended for his service towards him (Phil. 2:25-30). It appears that the messenger had relayed to Paul the church's concern and attitude of despair for Paul's current condition in prison. Paul, in these verses, rather redirects the Philippian church to have his own positive perspective of how God in His providence used Paul's imprisonment in Rome for “the furtherance of the gospel” to allow certain of God's children in that city to come to the knowledge of the gospel.

Paul's journey to Rome was quite adventurous to say the least. Paul was brought up with falsified charges by the Jews before the Romans in Jerusalem (Acts 21-22). A plan to kill Paul was discovered by Paul's nephew and he was snuck out of Jerusalem to Caesarea in the middle of the night to protect him (Acts 23:12-33). Then, Paul is tried before Felix and spends two years in Caesarea being able to minister to both Felix and his wife during his captivity (Acts 24:1-27). Then, when Festus takes over for Felix as governor, he tries Paul, the incumbent prisoner, and Paul appeals his case directly to Caesar (Acts 25:10-12). After being tried by King Agrippa as well (Acts 25:23-26:32), Paul is sent on a ship with other capital prisoners to Rome which eventually capsizes and all the passengers of the prisoners are saved to the island of Melita (Acts 27:1-44). After spending three months with the kind barbarians on Melita, Paul finally arrives in Rome (Acts 28:1-11). Then, Paul lodges in his own hired house in Rome, having freedom to receive any persons he desired into his house (Acts 28:30-31), and eventually stayed and ministered in Rome for over two years.

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Paul had appealed directly to Caesar in his case, so at some point after he arrived in Rome he had an audience to meet in person with the Roman Caesar. The Roman Caesar at this time was Nero (who was the ruler from 54-68 AD). Nero is known infamously in history for his wickedness and brutality; suffice to say he showed no evidence of a heart touched by grace. It wasn't but just a few years after Paul's meeting with him here, that in 64 AD Nero blamed the Great Fire of Rome on the Christians and began a severe persecution that eventually led to the martyrdoms of both the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter. Paul is given an audience to meet directly with Nero, and as his manner was when he was given a public audience, no doubt Paul preached the gospel and called for repentance of those who heard him, even repentance from the Caesar. There's certainly no evidence in history, that Nero was pricked in the heart by Paul's preaching and repented. However, later in Paul's epistle, he indicates that members of Nero's own family were converted to Christianity and belief of the truth by his preaching. *"All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household."*

(Phil. 4:22). Certainly it was those converted saints who were publishing the imprisonment of Paul, and the gospel for which he was imprisoned, "in all the palace (the palace of Caesar most likely), and in all other places." The gospel of Christ, and the conversion of Nero's family, was not just the buzz of Caesar's palace but it was truly the talk of the town in all of Rome.

What is amazing about this encounter is how God used the imprisonment of Paul (God did not cause this to occur, but it's evident that God sovereignly overruled this bad plight of Paul for His good by divine providence) as a medium to give him an audience with children of God in Nero's family who under normal circumstances would have most likely never been exposed to the gospel of their salvation! God used the unideal situation of Paul's imprisonment as a means for children of God to hear the gospel and be converted to the truth! Therefore, Paul tells the Philippian church to not be bitter or concerned about his imprisonment, but rather to glorify God that through His divine providence he was used by God to further the gospel to the elect in Caesar's own household. Likewise, we may find ourselves in difficult circumstances but we may have an opportunity in that unenviable situation to share the good news of salvation by grace and the finished work of salvation by Christ alone with children of God that we ordinarily would not come in contact with. May we be ready to preach the gospel if God opens such a door for us!