

Tuesday

January 6

Spiritual Discernment Applied

The Philippians were understandably distressed when they heard of Paul's imprisonment. Now his work was severely limited. He could not travel. He could not preach. He could not visit the synagogues and teach people about Jesus as the Messiah. He could no longer raise up churches. The Philippians sent Epaphroditus to ascertain the apostle's condition, to encourage him, and to ensure that his physical needs were being met.

Read Philippians 1:12-18. How did Paul view his imprisonment? What lessons can we learn from his attitude, despite the circumstances he found himself in?

The Advance of the Gospel

"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 in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel." **Philippians 1:12-17 KJV**

The message Paul sent back with him must have surprised the Philippians. Paul saw his circumstances through different eyes. His spiritual discernment led him to see his imprisonment as a good thing. It didn't hinder

his work at all, but "actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel" (*Phil. 1:12, NKJV*). 1. Where others saw only chains and bars, Paul saw his Roman guards as potential souls in God's kingdom. 2. He saw also that his imprisonment greatly encouraged others to be more active and more determined to spread the gospel, to speak boldly for Christ without fear of the consequences.

~~It may be hard to imagine, but some actually thought to benefit from Paul's imprisonment. Apparently, they thought his obscurity would lead to more attention for themselves and their own preaching of the gospel. What a powerful but sad example of human selfishness, even in the church. As Jeremiah said long before Paul: "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?" (*Jer. 17:9, NKJV*).~~

PAUL IS SPEAKING OF PERSECUTION BY
UNBELIEVING JEWS, NOT THE ENVY OF BELIEVERS HERE

"In every age God's chosen messengers have been reviled and persecuted, yet through their affliction the knowledge of God has been spread abroad. Every disciple of Christ is to step into the ranks and carry forward the same work, knowing that its foes can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. God means that truth shall be brought to the front and become the subject of examination and discussion, even through the contempt placed upon it. The minds of the people must be agitated; every controversy, every reproach, every effort to restrict liberty of conscience, is God's means of awakening minds that otherwise might slumber.

How often this result has been seen in the history of God's messengers! When the noble and eloquent Stephen was stoned to death at the instigation of the Sanhedrin council, there was

no loss to the cause of the gospel. The light of heaven that glorified his face, the divine compassion breathed in his dying prayer, were as a sharp arrow of conviction to the bigoted Sanhedrist who stood by, and Saul, the persecuting Pharisee, became a chosen vessel to bear the name of Christ before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. And long afterward Paul the aged wrote from his prison house at Rome: "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife: ... not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds....

Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached." Philippians 1:15-18. Through Paul's imprisonment the gospel was spread abroad, and souls were won for Christ in the very palace of the Caesars. By the efforts of Satan to destroy it, the "incorruptible" seed of the word of God, "which liveth and abideth forever" (1 Peter 1:23), is

sown in the hearts of men; through the reproach and persecution of His children the name of Christ is magnified and souls are saved. . MB 33.2-MB 33.

Fortunately, in contrast, some faithful workers also became more zealous to spread the gospel. They loved Paul so much that the suffering they saw him endure for his faith led them to trust Christ more and emboldened them to be even more active for the Lord. It energized them to go where before they were afraid to go; it led them to speak in situations during which before they kept silent; it led to even more people accepting Christ and spreading the gospel of salvation.

What lesson have you learned from experiences that, though unquestionably bad, also brought about some benefits? Even in cases

**in which a benefit might not be apparent, how
can we learn to trust God regardless?**

- 1. JOHN'S IMPRISONMENT ON PATMOS**
- 2. THE PERSECUTION OF THE EARLY CHURCH**
- 3. JOSEPH'S SLAVERY & IMPRISONMENT IN EGYPT**
- 4. DANIEL & FRIENDS CAPTIVITY TO BABYLON**
- 5. JESUS DEATH ON THE CROSS**
- 6. JOB- PRECIOUS INSIGHTS TO THE GREAT
CONTROVERSY**
- 7. THIS WE KNOW FROM OUR OWN LIVES THAT WHEN
CIRCUMSTANCES SEEM THE WORST AND WE ARE
DISAPPOINTED BY WHAT WE THOUGHT WERE CLOSE
EARTHLY TIES, WHEN THE DEVIL WORKS TO DESTROY
AND CRUSH OUT YOUR LIFE – GOD WILL MAKE ALL
THINGS NEW. GOD WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU NOR
FORSAKE YOU, HE WILL WORK WITH YOU THROUGH THE
VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH AND HE WILL
RESTORE YOUR BROKEN HEART, HE WILL ANOINT YOU
BRUISED HEAD WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT OIL, HE WILL
LEAD YOU BESIDE GREEN PASTURES AND MAKE YOU TO**

SIT WHO BY STILL WATERS. ROMANS 8:28; 2

CORINTHIANS 4.

A PSALM OF DAVID.PSALMS 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.