

Philippians

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May 27, 2020



Philippians 1:12-20

Introduction

- Re-read 1:1-11
- We know from the end of the letter that a man named Epaphroditus (4:18) had brought Paul a care package from Philippi. Surely he came inquiring as to Paul's well being as a prisoner in Rome and hoping for news of a good resolution to Paul's "circumstances".

Vss. 12-14

- Perhaps most believed, and his enemies hoped, that Paul's imprisonment would put an end to his evangelistic and missionary activities. This may be why we find in Acts 28:21 that the Jewish leaders in Rome had no instruction from Jerusalem about Paul. Maybe Paul doesn't survive the journey to Rome, they may have been thinking, and even if he does, he'll be locked away in a Roman prison never to be seen or heard from again.
- But Paul writes to inform the church in Philippi the exact opposite has happened! That his "circumstances have turned out for the greater progress/advancement of the gospel." Paul has been a prisoner 3 or 4 years by this time, maybe longer. During that time his life had been repeatedly threatened by both Jews and Romans, he had been shipwrecked, and snake bitten, all while being in chains. But all of that was simply just his "circumstances". And rather than quieting him forever, his circumstances have only served to propel the gospel forward! The Greek word here for "the greater progress/advancement" of the gospel is *prokope*. It is a word specifically used to describe the clearing away of impediments before an advancing army. In February 1865, near the end of the Civil War, Gen. Sherman began to march from Savannah to Columbia, SC. Then and now its

unusual for armies to move in the winter due to the weather and conditions. Tens of thousands of men and horses marching in the rain will turn a dirt road into impassable muck and mire. Sherman's solution was *prokope*. He ordered his men to cut down trees as they went and laying the trunks over the road, he created a corduroy road, which made a way for his army to progress even in the winter. So what Paul is saying is that **God has made a way**. God has cleared away all the impediments that would inhibit the gospel going forward, progressing, advancing in Rome.

- The inroad of note the gospel had made is that the Word is now known to the praetorian guard and to "everyone else." The praetorian guard was the Imperial Guard of Rome, Caesar's own hand-picked bodyguards and private army. They began under Augustus and numbered between 10,000-16,000. They served between 12-16 years and at the end of their service they became full citizens of Rome and received a pension. They owed everything to the emperor. In practical terms, an elite military force that large would be the most powerful force in Rome...and this is whom Paul was reaching with the gospel.
- Throughout Acts and his epistles, Paul is "in bonds/chains". The Greek work here is *halusis*. This is a short chain by which a prisoner is bound at the wrist and the other end is bound to the wrist of a guard. So for at least two years, day and night, Paul was chained to a praetorian guard. They would serve in 8-hour shifts. Given that Paul had 3 guards every day for at least two years, that's almost 2200 guard shifts! For 2200 8-hour shifts these guards heard Paul speak to groups and individuals, dictate letters, and offer his defense. They learned he was not a murderous rebel, a pirate, or an anti-Imperial troublemaker. Rather they learned of a man in Palestine who was the Son of God, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate who they knew well, and that this man was raised from the dead, and years after his crucifixion, he appeared to Paul at mid-day on the Damascus Road. And they learned that Paul has been in His service ever since. And that this Man, Jesus, is the Christ, the Anointed One of God and that forgiveness of sins and salvation is through Him and Him alone. It wasn't long before all of the

praetorian guards many thousands more had heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- And to bring Paul even more joy, the church in Rome, watching the reaction of the Imperial City to Paul, now is greatly emboldened! Seeing Paul speak out so strongly *while an Imperial prisoner* has given the Roman church the courage to speak out strongly themselves. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

Vss. 15-17

- Paul is so elated about how things have turned out that he won't let any negative news get him down. While he has heard that the church is speaking out like never before, and doing so out of love for him and out of love for the pure gospel of Christ, he has also heard that some are doing so out of “selfish ambition”, in a partisan (*eritheia*) way. Not everyone agreed with Paul on every point, so there were some who were taking advantage of Paul's confinement to put themselves and their arguments forward. It had to sting a little to know that these people, brothers and sisters in Christ mind you, were doing this to cause Paul “distress” in his imprisonment. The word literally means “friction”, to cause him to slowly burn while locked up.

Vss. 18-20

- Paul never sought an office. He never sought prestige. He did want to be recognized as a true Apostle, one who had seen Jesus, but nothing more. He knew nothing of personal jealousy. If Apollos was a better preacher in Corinth, great! All the better for the advancement of the gospel.
- He takes the same tack here. What does Paul's ego matter? Nothing! All that matters is that Christ is preached! So let us rejoice!
- It is hard to know exactly what Paul means in vs. 19 when he speaks of his “deliverance/salvation”. Does he mean his eternal salvation or release from prison? There is a third possibility. The Greek word here, *soteria*, may also mean health/general well being/inner peace. Paul has consistently preached that eternal salvation, deliverance, is by faith through grace, not

works. And he goes on to say that he is not sure whether this will end with life or death, so he's not counting on deliverance, being released, with any certainty. I may be that he is saying that through their prayers and the Spirit of Jesus Christ, he is at peace.

- Finally, Paul says that “my earnest expectation and hope” is that he will never be shamed into silence, or water down the gospel to save himself, but that Christ will be glorified as he boldly speaks and acts...even in prison, especially in prison!!
- Maxie Dunnam, the former director of the Upper Room Prayer Fellowship, says that what the first chapter of Philippians tells us is that 1) we can proclaim the gospel anywhere 2) we are to proclaim the gospel everywhere 3) the Spirit provides the harvest for the Kingdom and provides everything we need for the task.