

Reuben Saywell pm: 23 January

The Gospel is not chained: Philippians 1:12-14

(Sermon Summary)

“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

Paul was a prisoner in Rome when he wrote the letter to the Philippians. He wanted to reassure them that his chains would not hinder the Gospel. On the contrary, God was using Paul's circumstances to further the Gospel. There have been many other Christians through history whose suffering has been used to advance the Gospel, such as John Bunyan, who wrote 'Pilgrim's Progress' while in solitary confinement.

The Gospel is gaining control (v12)

Was Paul's imprisonment 'a blessing very well disguised' in that it prevented him from carrying out his missionary work? Paul didn't see it that way. Sometimes God sidelines His 'star players' to show that He can do the work without them. Paul's imprisonment was part of God's deliberate purpose.

It's hard for us to accept the truth that God works through suffering when we are in the midst of trials. We need to be able to step back and see the big picture. Paul's heart was set on the Gospel (is this true of us?) and he could see actual evidence that the Gospel was gaining control.

The guards are getting converted (v13)

Paul was chained to two guards throughout the day and night; they were probably members of Caesar's elite Praetorian Guard. These guards were a captive audience for Paul, and as they changed over regularly, Paul would have spoken to quite a number of them. Converted guards would then spread the message to other members of Caesar's household. It was not just Paul's words that spoke to the guards - they saw that his behaviour matched his message. He had an inexplicable joy, demonstrating that his chains were not 'in Caesar' but 'in Christ'.

Are you 'chained' by a boring job, a difficult relationship, poor health, etc? Do you take the opportunity to speak about the Gospel to the 'captive audience' brought to you by these circumstances?

The congregation are growing in confidence (v14)

Courage is contagious; Paul's example, and the news of his influence among the guards, made other Christians bolder. In 1555 Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer were burned at the stake for their Gospel preaching. As the fire was lit, Latimer said "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as shall never be put out". Their brave example did indeed help to 'light the candle' of the Reformation and has encouraged Christians down the years. When we witness, we may be encouraging other Christians. Are we equipping others to witness? Could there be a chain reaction here in Crich Baptist Church?

Let's be willing to follow Paul's example and pray that God would advance His work even if it means chains. He is working in everything for the furtherance of the Gospel.