

**Articles and Sermons :: Blessings from Imprisonment by Zac Poonen**

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Paul, writing from a prison in Rome says, "Don't be discouraged about my imprisonment because my imprisonment has turned out for the progress of the gospel" (Phil.1:12). Paul believed that "all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

How did Paul's imprisonment work out for good? Here is one way in which Paul's imprisonment worked for our good: Paul was a man who was always on the go. Even when he was old, he was always travelling. He wanted to reach as many places as possible with the gospel, before he left this earth. He had such a close walk with God and had been through so many trials that he had become a very wealthy man spiritually. But he had not written down all that he had learnt from the Lord. God determined that this man's spiritual wealth should not go down with him into the grave, but be preserved and transmitted for the blessing of future generations. But how could God make Paul slow down enough to make him sit down and write all that? He allowed him to be imprisoned!!

When Paul was in prison, he could not travel. So he decided to spend his time profitably and write letters to some of the churches. That was how he wrote Philippians, Ephesians and Colossians. What was the result? Those writings have become a blessing to millions of people for 2000 years. So, Paul's imprisonment turned out for good.

In the mid-1980s, I was admitted in a hospital for a short while. I asked the Lord why He allowed me to be in a hospital when I could have been busy serving Him somewhere. The Lord told me that He wanted me to lie down for a few days and listen to what He had to say to me. I had been so busy in the ministry that I had hardly got time to talk to the Lord. When I saw that that was the reason for my hospitalization, I was happy to lie there for as long as the Lord wanted, because I wanted to hear Him. One advantage of lying in a hospital bed is that you can only look up! As I lay there, the Lord began to speak to me day after day. As the Lord spoke to me, I wrote down what He said. That was the only article I ever wrote that was written almost thought for thought, as the Lord spoke to me. It was published as an article titled "God Needs Men" (Chapter 2 in my book "New Wine in New Wineskins"), and later as a booklet titled, "Fifty Marks of Godly Men". God has used that article and that booklet around the world in many countries. I consider it to be the most important of all my writings. But I might never have written it, if the Lord had not put me in a hospital-bed!

God stops us at times "by sickness or by imprisonment" in order to make us do something for Him that we would never have done otherwise. So we can be thankful whenever God stops us in our tracks. He has a purpose in it, for "the STOPS of good men are directed by the Lord, just as much as their STEPS" (Psalm 37:23).

There was also a second way in which Paul's imprisonment worked for good. He says, "My imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else" (Phil.1:13); and later, "All the Christians here want to be remembered to you, especially those who work in Caesar's palace" (Phil.4:22 - Living). How did people in Caesar's palace get converted? Because Paul preached the gospel to those prison guards when they were chained to him. In those days, prisoners were chained to a prison guard to prevent them from escaping. During the 8 hours that a Roman soldier was chained to him, Paul would preach the gospel to him. The guard could not go away!! He had to listen. When one guard's 8-hour shift was over, another guard would replace him for the next 8 hours "and Paul would preach the gospel to him too! Thus a number of the guards were converted. Very soon there was a little church meeting in Caesar's palace!!

Paul's imprisonment resulted therefore in the Scriptures being written and in people (who would never have come to a meeting) being converted.

But that was not all. There was a third blessing too, that came from Paul's imprisonment. Many believers who had been timid became courageous to preach the gospel, when they heard of Paul's imprisonment (Phil. 1:14). They got rid of their fear of preaching the gospel and began to boldly proclaim Christ. Thus Paul's imprisonment "turned out for the spread of the gospel".

Our God is a God Who brings good out of evil. Praise the Lord.