

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Shut In

2Corinthians 11: 23 in prisons more frequent,

The preaching of the gospel brought its accompanying persecutions. Paul was no stranger to the dungeon. The deprivations of Roman incarceration were unimaginably severe though Paul had frequented varied accommodations depending on the city of his detention. He was chained in a common holding cell in Philippi (Acts 16:23– 30), imprisoned in probably better conditions in the praetorium at Caesarea (Acts 23:35), and held in relative comfort while in house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16). In Rome, Paul was responsible for maintaining himself during his imprisonment, including his meals and clothes (Acts 28:30). Conditions of imprisonment were closely linked to the status of the prisoner. Non-Roman citizens, even those of high status, were often harshly treated. In contrast, house arrest was typically more comfortable for the prisoner, who was usually physically chained to a guard but could still host visitors.

Paul was probably placed in an underground cell somewhere in Rome before his execution. It is possible that he was then imprisoned in the Roman Mamertine Prison in the Roman Forum. The ancient historian Sallust said it was twelve feet underground and described its appearance as: "disgusting and vile by reason of the filth, the darkness, and the stench." This was where major convicted enemies of the state were strangled or kept before being thrown off the Tarpeian Rock on the Capitoline Hill.

To Timothy, Paul writes his last will and testament from this cell where he not only exhorts him to "preach the word" but also includes his request for items of necessity. A cloke, his treasured books, but "especially the parchments". *II Timothy 4:13* In this desperate season of want the apostle would find his comfort in a tattered coat, his primitive commentaries, and especially the scrolls of Old Testament scripture.

In some ways, our recent COVID quarantine has afforded us some perspective in this mandated house arrest in which we found ourselves. It is a far cry from the severity of Paul's sufferings but it can give us all some awareness of what had been so suddenly taken away from us. Within the breast of the courageous apostle was an unquenchable passion that a Roman chain could never extinguish. Rather than languishing in self-pity, he chose to redeem the time by the study of the Word, incessant prayer, and witnessing, as he eludes to in *Philippians 1:13: So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace and in all other places*; Paul was intent on finishing the course and receiving the crown of righteousness. That course is often fraught with disappointments and hardships that are seemingly inexplicable to us. Paul would have much preferred pursuing his peripatetic ministry all the way to Spain if given liberty, but the steps (and the stops) of "a good man are ordered by the Lord".

In the immutable, inscrutable counsels of the Almighty God, Paul would be shut in but not shut up. He received inquirers, instructed the guards and penned the fourteen epistles that would edify believers for the proceeding centuries of Christian thought.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17