

Paul a Prisoner: in Rome Acts 28:11-31

by J.R. Miller

J.R. Miller's sermon explores how Paul's imprisonment in Rome became a powerful platform for his ministry and the growth of Christianity.

Scripture: Acts 28:30

Topics: "God's Providence", "Joy in Adversity"

Description

J.R. Miller reflects on Paul's arrival in Rome as a prisoner, emphasizing how his circumstances allowed him to preach the gospel freely and effectively. Despite being chained, Paul remained joyful and purposeful, using his time to spread the message of Christ and influence many, demonstrating that true freedom comes from serving God. Miller highlights God's providence in Paul's life, showing that even in limitations, one can find opportunities for ministry and impact. The sermon encourages believers to view their own challenges as potential avenues for God's work, just as Paul did. Ultimately, it contrasts the fleeting power of worldly leaders with the enduring influence of a life dedicated to Christ.

Transcript

It must have been a happy hour for Paul when he saw Rome and entered the gates. For a long time he had earnestly wished to preach the gospel there. He came, however, not as a free man--but as a prisoner. Yet this was really favorable, for he was under the protection of the Roman Government and free from Jewish persecution--much more free to preach than if he had gone there merely as a missionary. His prison was not a dungeon--he "was allowed to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him." He was treated kindly, with as little restraint as possible. He was secured by a slight chain round the right wrist to the left wrist of a soldier--but was allowed to be at large within the palace, or even, if he could afford it, to hire lodging for himself outside. His prison became a center of influence for good, a place to which people were constantly coming.

"After three days Paul called together the leaders of the Jews." Paul lost no time. As soon as he was settled in his new lodgings he began his work. Some good people waste a great deal of time in waiting, before taking up their duties. They loiter over their tasks. They put things off. They let golden days and hours pass unimproved. It is very important to learn how to use time--so as not to waste it. For one thing we need an earnest purpose in the heart, and Paul carried a burning fire in his bosom, the love of Christ, which impelled him to instant and strenuous service. He had a message to men--and he could not rest until he had delivered it.

"I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar," he explained to the Jews his presence in the Eternal City. It seems remarkable that it was necessary for him, thus to put himself under heathen protection in order that he might do Christ's work freely. It is also very pleasant to think how the providence of God overruled this appeal. Paul was carried to Rome under the protection of Roman soldiers. This is another illustration of the providence of God in the lives of all his people. We need not suppose, either, that Paul was exceptionally a man of providence. The same God who cared for him--is thinking of us and of our lives, planning our circumstances and conditions, and is always ready to overrule what may seem to be evil--if only we put all into his hands.

With simple fervor he said, "Because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." He held up his arm with the chain on his wrist while he spoke these words. He was a prisoner, and yet we see in him, nothing of the spirit of the captive. Indeed, he was the freest man in all Rome that day! A canary, when put into a cage, flies up on a bar and begins to sing. That is the kind of prisoner Paul was. He was a rejoicing captive. He was wearing a chain, not because he was a criminal--but because he was a Christian for Christ's sake. This fact made him bear the chain, without being ashamed of it. It was not in his eyes, a mark of dishonor. When a criminal looks down upon his chain he sees in it a token of shame and degradation. But Paul's chain never brought a blush to his cheek. No chain of gold ever worn by prince or noble, was such a mark of honor--as the iron chain which the apostle held up that day. He gloried now that he could wear a chain for Christ. Then the chained hand was not idle.

While in his prison Paul wrote many letters, among others one to the Philippians, the most cheerful and joyous of all his epistles. Every line of it is full of gladness and bird songs. No part of his ministry yielded sweeter influences, than that wrought in his prison. We shall not likely have the privilege of literally wearing chains for Christ--but there are many hindrances and limitations in every Christian life, which are really chains upon us. Sickness sometimes shuts us in. Poverty ties the hands of many. Christians who are not free to do what their hearts prompt them to do for Christ, should study Paul with his chain--and gather the lesson of victoriousness and rejoicing. His prison life was not lost time for him--there went continually from his place of activity, rich blessings for his fellow men.

At that time the Christian Church was only a poor, despised handful. The little church in Rome seemed to have no influence in the great center of worldly power. But what did it grow into? Old Rome has long since gone. Its glories have perished. Only a few of the ruins of the ancient city, tell now the story of its greatness. But that despised sect, then everywhere spoken against, touches now all the world with its influence. We need not fear when our cause is weak and despised. Almost every great movement for good, began in the same way. A divine life, however, was in Christianity, and it could not be crushed. The little stone cut from the mountain without hands--now fills all the earth. We must not let the world's judgment of Christianity, affect our confidence in it.

We are told that "Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house." Prisons have often become centers of blessing in this world. The history of these years in Paul's prison in the heart of Rome, never can be written. Thousands came to hear the gospel from his lips and went away rejoicing to tell the story to others. Letters were written there which went out to distant churches with their words of life starting immortal influences. Nero was emperor then. Contrast Nero's palace with Paul's prison--and then the influence of Nero's life with Paul's. Which was the happier man--the emperor or the prisoner? Which made his life the nobler, the more beautiful, the greater blessing in the world?

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