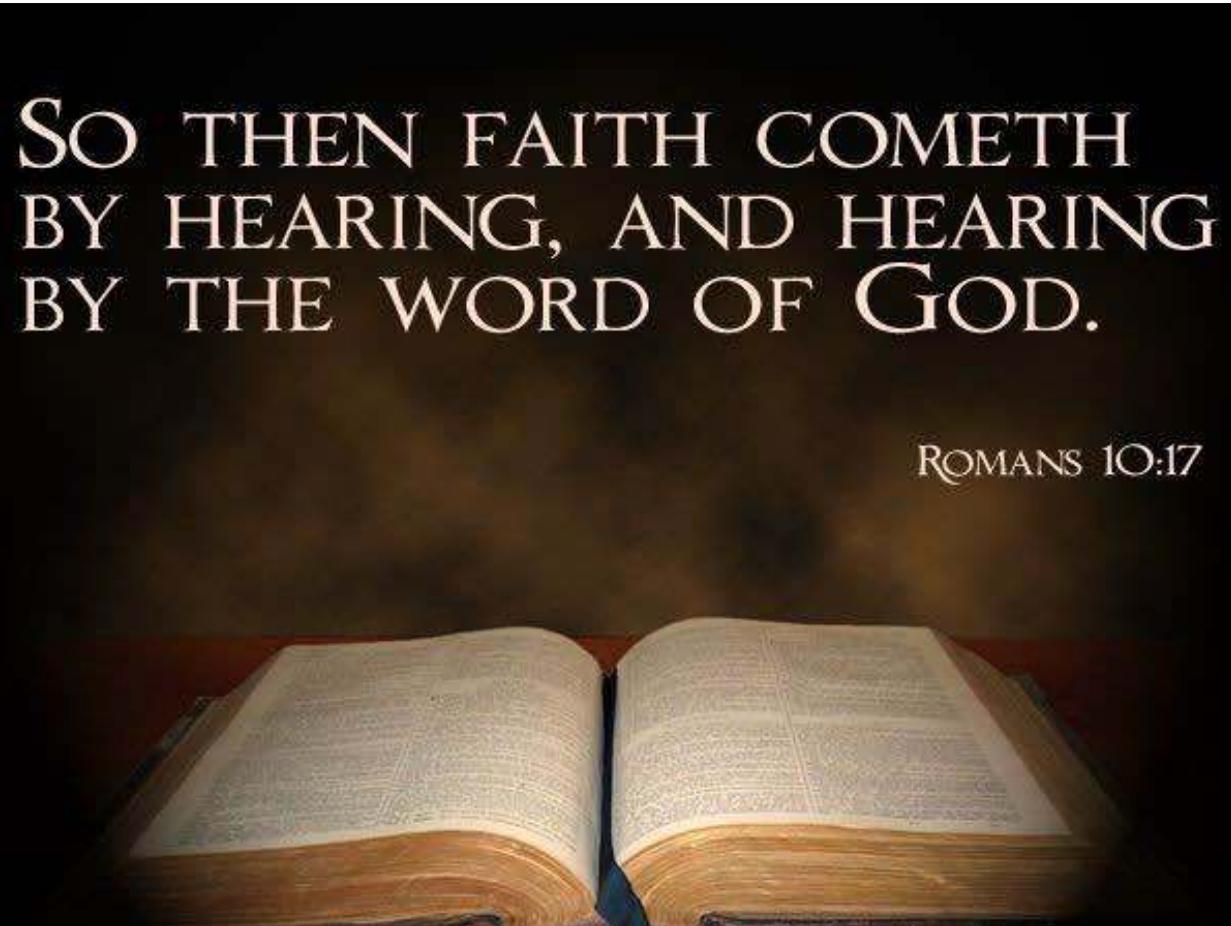


Today's Sermons
 Morning: God's Desire For Us
 Evening: The Tale of Two Cities

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FOR THE RECORD

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Sunday AM Worship	47
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Times of Services:
Sunday
 Bible Study:... 10:00am
 AM Worship...11:00am
 PM Worship:...6:00pm
 2nd Sunday:.....1:30pm

Wednesday
 Bible Study:.....7:00pm

Radio Program
 Sunday:.....7:30am
 "Back to the Bible"
 AM 580 WSKS
 93.5 FM

**We Extend A
 Warm & Cordial
 Welcome
 To All Our
 Visitors!**

A LOOK AT A CHRISTIAN PRISONER
 Roger D. Campbell

Few people in history have suffered for the Lord as much as the apostle Paul did. Among Paul's sufferings were his numerous imprisonments. He often wrote of himself being without freedom, as in 2 Corinthians 11:23, where it is written, "Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft" (emphasis mine, rdc). Those words were written before he ever spent two years in prison in Caesarea (Acts 24:27), was taken in bonds by ship to Rome (Acts 27), and then spent two more years in bonds in Rome (Acts 28:20,31).

During Paul's first recorded imprisonment in Rome, the Holy Spirit inspired him to write four of the New Testament epistles. In each of those four letters he made reference to himself as a prisoner for the Lord or spoke of the literal bonds which were attached to his body (cf. Ephesians 3:1; 6:20; Philippians 1:13; Colossians 4:3,10; Philemon 1:1). He truly was "the prisoner of the Lord" (Ephesians 4:1). There is much, much indeed, that we can learn from the attitude and actions that we see in Paul, a Christian prisoner. These lessons are ones that we need to acknowledge, appreciate, and then apply in our lives.

Though he often found himself in bonds as an innocent victim, as a prisoner Paul Still Possessed a Strong Faith. Once when he was traveling as a prisoner to Rome by ship, an angel of God spoke to him. When Paul later spoke of that message,

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he said, “Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me” (Acts 27:25). We learn what kind of faith we really have when our faith is tested by the fires & trials of life (James 1:2,3; 1 Peter 1:6,7). Paul’s faith did not waver in the midst of adverse conditions. Even in bonds, his faith remained strong. How is OUR faith holding up under the storms of life?

Even when he was a prisoner, Paul Was Still Active in Teaching the Gospel. During his two years in bonds in Rome he continued, “Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31). One passage that stands out is Philemon 10, where we read, “I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds.” To say that Paul was in bonds when he begat Onesimus simply means that Onesimus learned the gospel from Paul when the apostle was a prisoner. Despite his horrific circumstances, Paul continued to teach the great news of salvation through the Son of God. What a great example! Shame on us when we live as free citizens with material abundance, but never take advantage of our opportunities to teach the lost. If a prisoner can teach, then surely free folks can, too.

Even while bound with chains, Paul Still Encouraged His Fellow Saints to Remain Faithful. As a prisoner Paul praised Philemon for his faith and love (Philemon 5), he charged the brethren in Colosse to set their affections on things above (Colossians 3:1,2), he pleaded with the saints in Philippi to “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27), and he exhorted the disciples in Ephesus to put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-17). Paul’s love for the Lord and his brethren did not turn cold, despite his hardships as a prisoner. He continued to be concerned for members of the body of the Christ, regardless of where they might be. Amazing, isn’t it? As a prisoner Paul’s thoughts were on the spiritual needs of others, and not on his own physical discomfort and inconvenience.

Even though he wrote as a prisoner, Paul Never Expressed Self-Pity. It would have been easy for him to have stuck out his lips and proclaimed himself as the most pitiful person in the whole world. He could have claimed that no one had ever been through the hard times that he was enduring. But, no, that is not what we see in his “prison epistles.” Never, not once, do we read anything from him that sounds like an appeal for others to feel sorry for him. He did ask the saints to whom he wrote to pray for him. Do you recall what his requests involved? Consider Ephesians 6:18-20: “Praying always with all prayer . . . And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel . . . that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” Rather than ask them to pray that he be released, or at least have his suffering reduced, he wanted them to pray that he might keep on boldly preaching God’s gospel. What an attitude! He expressed similar sentiments to the Christians in Colosse (Colossians 4:2,3), asking them to pray that God would open for him and others “a door of utterance.” The next time that you and I are tempted to feel sorry for ourselves because of some unfortunate or unpleasant situation in our life, we would do well to examine Paul’s prison writings and check out this special prisoner’s attitude

One final thought. Even though he was often without freedom, as a prisoner Paul Still Kept His Sights on Heaven. Going to be with the Lord was always on the mind of this great man of God. “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain . . . having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better” (Philippians 1:21,23). In that same letter he wrote, “For our conversation [citizenship, NKJV] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (3:20). During that same imprisonment he reminded the Colossian brothers and sisters that hope is laid up for them in heaven (Colossians 1:5). Brethren, when problems arise and aggravating experiences come our way, how much do you and I keep our focus on going to heaven? If Paul, while in chains, could keep his sights on his eternal reward, can we not do the same?

I have been in prisons in three different countries (only as a visiting teacher!). I have no desire to be put behind bars. But, who knows, someday it may come to that if we continue to faithfully serve Jesus. I wonder what type of attitude and action I would manifest as a prisoner? I need not concern myself with that thought right now. Why? Because at the present I live outside the iron bars of prison, and I must deal with the trials, temptation, and disappointments of my life right where I find myself. So do you. May God help us to learn and apply the great lessons that we have noted from one fine example, the apostle Paul as a Christian prisoner.

" Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah. But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah. I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about.

Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongeth unto the LORD: thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah" (Psalm 3)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- May 7 – Men’s Business Meeting & Ladies’ Class
- May 14 – **No** Preach-N-Eat or 1:30 Worship (regular 6:00 pm service)
- May 21 - Preach-N-Eat & 1:30 Worship
- May 21-25 – Our Gospel Meeting with John Daniels
- Please give support money for Chinese orphans to Minnie Kennell