



A Spiritual Encouragement Message August 5, 2020

Progress of the Gospel by Randall Jarrell

How did Paul's imprisonment become a means for the progress of the gospel?

Praetorian Guard and More – vs. 13

The second half of verse 13 gives us the first specific. "Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else." The same chain that kept Paul from going anywhere also linked the guard to Paul. Imagine being a pagan guard who is now linked to Paul for however many hours his duty shift would last. And remember that it would not have been the same guard all the time, but it would be a rotation of different guards with each one fulfilling the hours of their shift. Remember as well that this imprisonment was at least two years in length, so over the course of that time, there would have been many different guards who would have been chained to Paul.

Keep in mind here the statements in Acts 28:30,31. Paul could not leave, but he was free to have people visit him, and to the many that did Paul was "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered." These various guards would be there to hear all these conversations. And I don't think there is any wild speculation in assuming that these same guards would be speaking to Paul in private about all these things when the guests were gone. They would have known the false charges against him as well as found out from Paul the circumstances of his imprisonment and that it was because it was a matter of his beliefs about God. They would then be hearing all that he taught about God. They would also see him in every situation to know the result of those beliefs in how Paul lived. They would not only have heard the gospel from Paul but would see it lived out moment by moment in Paul's life. A challenge from Paul's example to us is to consider how people would react to what we proclaimed if they were also with us throughout every moment of daily life. Paul had a positive effect on these men because his daily life in living for Christ matched his stated beliefs.

One other factor to keep in mind here is that the men watching Paul are members of the praetorian guard. This group of 10,000 or more hand-picked soldiers were the elite unit of the Roman army. They were specifically charged with the protection of the Emperor and were stationed throughout Rome for that purpose and to keep the general peace. They served for twelve years and then were granted the highest honors and privileges in their society. Like any military unit, they would have lived together in a camp or base, and these various men who were assigned to guard Paul would certainly have talked about him with

one another. Many of these men did respond to the gospel message and became Christians. In turn, they would tell others in their unit the good news of Jesus Christ and how to know the God who created all things. Because the duty of the praetorian guard included protecting the Emperor and his household, it is assumed that it would have been through them that some in Caesar's household also became Christians, as Phil. 4:22 indicates. These would be some of the "everyone else" Paul refers to here in 1:13 among whom the gospel was making progress. The rest of the "everyone else" would be those Acts 28:30,31 who came to talk with Paul and learn of the teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:9-15 tells us of Paul's desire to go to Rome to minister there and preach the gospel. Though the circumstances were not what Paul would have liked, God was allowing him to do exactly that, and to have an effect on a group, the praetorian guard and through them Caesar's household, that he might not otherwise would have been able to reach. Paul's imprisonment was indeed turning out to be for the greater progress of the gospel.