

Witnessing In Spite of Our Chains

Rev. Li Chen of China had been in prison for 18 years because of his preaching the Gospel. He had been beaten and tortured when they heard him quoting the Scripture and praying out loud. For punishment, he was assigned to clean the cesspool each day of human excrement which was later used for fertilizer. At times the pit was nearly waist deep. Because of the overpowering stench, no guards would get anywhere near him. So here he could quote the Scripture from memory and pray out loud! He also began to sing as he worked in the cesspool. He would sing his favorite hymn in Mandarin Chinese in a beautiful, clear voice, "I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses..." And then he praised God for his years in the cesspool. It was there, he said, God taught him that even a cesspool could be turned into a garden of prayer and praise!

The Apostle Paul's cesspool was in a prison. There he sang and prayed, and wrote letters to Christians which have become Scripture for us. As he wrote he was soon to face trial. No doubt his friends were worried about him because they knew altogether too well that death would be Rome's judgment against him. But Paul rose above any anxiety about death, or his prison confinement and suffering. The primary passion of his life made everything else -- even prison and death -- pale in significance. His mantra that the only thing that mattered was that in every way...Christ is preached; and in this he rejoiced.

A man went to the Dr. He said, "Doc, I got my arm broken in 3 places, what should I do?" Doctor responded, "If I were you I would stay out of those places." Paul was in prison but he did not allow this to hinder his missionary work. He refused to let his mess (circumstances of life) stop his message (To proclaim Christ as Lord and Savior of the world)! In fact, his imprisonment had turned out for the furtherance of the Gospel. Paul was reminding us that we can proclaim the Gospel anywhere and in any circumstance. He witnessed to the soldiers who guarded him. Through them the word spread to the whole Pretorian guard while he was in prison, not because he was a criminal, but because he was a Christian and that became a powerful witness.

A relief organization was gathering supplies -- medicine, clothing, food, and the like -- for refugee camp in Africa. Inside one of the boxes that showed up at the collecting depot one day was a letter. It said, "We have recently become converted Christians and because of our conversion we want to try to help. The Gospel of Jesus has changed our lives and turned our hatred to love! We won't EVER need these again, but do not want to destroy perfectly good fabric. Can you use them for something? -- if not destroy them and we are sorry for wasting your time" Inside the large box with that letter were several Ku Klux Klan sheets. So, those sheets were cut down to strips and used to bandage the wounds of persons in Africa. It could hardly be more dramatic, could it? From symbols of hatred to bandages of love because someone had proclaimed the Gospel and someone had responded, and the Spirit provided the harvest. The circumstances of our life may determine how we share the Gospel, but not whether we share it. We never know what God will do when we are faithful to share the Gospel to everyone.