

PAUL

PRODUCTIVE
IN PRISON



PAUL—PRODUCTIVE IN PRISON

INTRODUCTION

This stand-alone lesson focuses on the Apostle Paul, and the amazing kingdom work he was able to do while imprisoned.

Currently, Christians all over the world find themselves in a sort of “prison”. We are not surrounded by bars or Roman guards, but due to the harsh realities of COVID-19, we find ourselves limited in what we can freely do as we try to stay safe and social distance.

For Paul, his time in prison was not a pause in his faith, and neither should our time in quarantine be for us. Paul was productive in his time, and saw it as an advancement of the gospel.

So should we.

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All verses are quoted from the ESV Version unless stated

PAUL

PRODUCTIVE IN PRISON

Discussion Question: What is something that you would really like to do that you currently cannot do because of quarantine?

Paul In Prison

After spending several chapters talking about Paul's missionary journeys, Acts 21 recounts the story of his arrest in Jerusalem. Following that, we are taken on a whirlwind tour of Paul's legal trials and appearances before several different officials, his imprisonment in Caesarea, and his eventual journey to Rome where he will appear before Caesar.

Acts 28.30-31 concludes with Paul under house arrest in Rome:

He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

That sounds like a productive time in prison, right? Even while under house arrest, Paul continues to proclaim and teach about Jesus. He was able to get a lot done for God's kingdom. But there's more to the story.

We know that some of the letters that Paul wrote that are books in the New Testament were written while he was imprisoned.¹ These books are generally called the "Prison Epistles" and include Philemon, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians.

These letters tell us a little more about what Paul was able to accomplish in prison:

Colossians 4.3-4 At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

Ephesians 6.18-20 To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my

¹ Paul was imprisoned multiple times in his life, so it is hard to know exactly when the prison epistles were written, but most scholars place their composition during the time that Paul was under house arrest in Rome.

mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Philippians 1.12-14 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Philippians 4.21-22 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

These verses give us a fuller picture of what we were told at the end of the Book of Acts. Paul boldly taught about Jesus while he was imprisoned—but this is something that he had prayed about and asked other Christians to pray about as well. Those prayers were clearly answered, and the events that transpired with Paul led other Christians to become more confident and boldly share about Jesus as well.

Discussion Question: Why do you think that the other Christians became more "confident in the Lord" because of Paul's imprisonment and were "more bold to speak the word without fear"? (Philippians 1.14)

Paul spent so much time talking about Jesus that the entire imperial guard knew all about Paul and the Jesus whose name he proclaimed.² Apparently, even some in the household of Caesar (whether servants or relatives) had become Christians due to Paul's sharing of the gospel!

And in addition to all that we have talked about, Paul also wrote four New Testament epistles while in prison, which have instructed and inspired countless numbers of Christians for thousands of years.

Paul's time in prison was remarkably productive for God's kingdom!

Us In "Prison"

So, we are not "in prison" right now, but at times, with only a little bit of melodrama, we may feel like we are. Many of the things that we can normally enjoy with freedom are either altered or totally off limits with the realities of quarantine and social distancing.

² Paul was likely chained to a rotation of guards (Acts 28.20; Ephesians 6.20) who would have overheard the messages he shared with his visitors. And even when he wasn't entertaining guests, can't you imagine Paul taking advantage of a captive audience by preaching to his guards?

Certainly, this can be discouraging. I have talked to or heard from a lot of people who are lacking motivation, feeling bummed out, and growing impatient for this strange season to end.

But I wonder: what if we tried to have a productive time “in prison” like Paul did? I mean, I’m not saying you need to write four books of the Bible or anything, but are there ways that you could take advantage of this time to grow closer to God?

To increase your knowledge and understanding of His word?

To pray for others and seek to serve others?

To share your faith?

Paul’s life was all about following Jesus and sharing Him with others. Because that was his main purpose in life, being detained in prison didn’t change what Paul’s life was about; it just changed *how he went about* sharing Jesus with others.

It should be the same way with us. COVID-19 shouldn’t be a pause in our discipleship. It shouldn’t be a break from following Jesus. It should just be a prompt to encourage us to thoughtfully change *how we follow* Jesus and share him with others.

Discussion Question: Paul tirelessly shared his faith with others while in prison; how can you share your faith with others during this time in quarantine?