

# Our Place at His Place

## House Arrest

March 29, 2020

*Welcome to where we're learning to rejoice in our incarceration!*

**Do you take the truest way out, or the easiest?**



Last week somebody asked for a good Bible story to tell the family during the pandemic. I got it! **Paul writes to the Philippians while under house arrest in Rome.** This is the actual barracks of the Palace Guard that had charge of Paul in Rome.



**Paul is under house arrest, facing death, while tending to a deathly ill co-worker, Epaphroditus ... or that's what he had.** I'm not sure.



Ten years before: Paul and Silas went to Philippi, a Roman colony in Greece, to introduce Jesus to Europe. And, this is what's left of the city. Now, when they arrived, Paul went to pray by this river, and ran into a wealthy businesswoman named Lydia, who dealt in royal purple cloth. And **Lydia became the first Christian in Europe.**



Paul and Silas were promptly flogged and thrown into PRISON (Acts 16:16-24) (quite possibly, *this one* in the photo).



And, that night **while singing praises with their backs bleeding**, an earthquake shakes the prison doors off their hinges. (Acts 16:25-26)

Here's the twist: Paul and Silas convince the prisoners to stay put; because, **this miracle isn't for them; it's for the jailer.** Let's meet the Philippian jailer.

He drew his sword and was about to **[take the easy way out, and]** kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. **[And suicide was preferred to Roman punishment]** But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" – Acts 16:27b-30 NIV

**The Lord often does what He does, in our lives, to give us moments to seize**, as His ambassadors, to impact those around us. **It wasn't the miracle, but the rejoicing in their pain**, and the integrity to stay put (when *they* could've taken the easy out).

After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, **[Lydia's house was the first established church in Europe! (Acts 16:11-15)]** where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left. – Acts 16:40 NIV

Now, ten years later. Paul is under house arrest in Rome.

**And, he's writing to encourage the old gang back at Lydia's.**

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day [when he met Lydia, who opened her home to the jailer, his family, and the rest of the first converts] until now [under house arrest, tending to Epaphroditus] – Philippians 1:3-5 NIV



Meet the beloved Epaphroditus, [ih-PAF-roh-DIGH-tuhs] who risked life and limb to deliver a care package to Paul from the Philippians (Phil 4:18); but then, while in Rome, fell deathly ill.

And when he's well enough to travel, Paul sends him home with this letter.

I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier ... you heard he was ill. [Not even the Lord's chosen are immune to illness] Indeed he was ill, and almost died. ... Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that ... you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. [But, Paul, the anxious caregiver under house arrest, writes to encourage them! Why?] For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, – Philippians 1:25-29 NIV

“Granted” to “suffer”? Like a gift?! Yes.

**Suffering doesn't discredit God's dominion.**

**It provides an opportunity to partner with Jesus and put it on display.**

**Nothing will impact those around you like singin' in the pain.**

Paul urges them to ...

... continue to work out your salvation [not “work for”] with fear [the healthy type an electrician has for electricity] and trembling, [We're told to “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Ps 2:11); the faithful tremble at God's Word (Is 66:5; Ezra 9:4, 10:3)] for it is God who works in you [heart and behavior] to will and to act according to his good purpose [so He can change us as we pursue Him] – Philippians 2:12b-13 NIV

**Salvation is the finished work of Christ.**

But, **like muscle, we got'a strengthen what we're given.** “For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” (Heb 10:14)

**If your faith was a bicep, how big would it be?**

My favorite piece of equipment at the gym is the hot tub. But if that's all I do, that's all I'll be.

**He works in me through His Word; but, I work out when I read.**

**He works in me through people; but I work out when I listen.**

**He works in me through trials; but I work out when I trust.**

*Joy, rejoice, and glad* pop up seventeen times in Paul's short letter, as he challenges his close friends to respond to *their* suffering the way he's responding to a possible death sentence.

But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice ... I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me. – Philippians 2:17-18 NIV

**Paul isn't glad about it; he's glad in spite of it, because he's confident that God is working through it, which is why God can.**

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. – Philippians 1:12-13 NIV



Relief of the Palace Guard, c. 52 AD

Here's a selfie of the Palace Guard that was "taken" about eight years before Paul wrote this letter. Let's meet the Guard: for two years Paul was chained to a guard's wrist. (Acts 28:16) It's ancient Rome's version of an ankle monitor. And one by one, each guard was exposed to the Gospel. So, **who was chained to whom?**

Paul is under house arrest, facing death, tending to others, and encouraging his friends.

**Paul turned his misery into a ministry.**

How about you?

**Are you chained to your misery; or is it chained to you?**

**It all depends on which of you is doing the most influencing.**

Rejoice in the Lord always. [Because, **we hardly ever know what God is doing until it's done and revealed; and then it's too late to go back and respond the way we wish we had**] I will say it again: Rejoice! [Easy to say, tough to do. Rejoicing in the midst of suffering requires some serious working out of what the Lord's working in. And reminding ourselves] ... The Lord is near. [Right here, right now, and **He really, truly cares about you – more than even you do!**] Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. – Philippians 4:4-6 NIV

**The way to be anxious about nothing is to pray with gratefulness in everything.**

*And apparently, to send Epaphroditus back home.*

Paul doesn't pretend to be perfect.

He says, "Do not be anxious about anything", and "I'm sending him home to reduce my anxiety."

**It's okay to *be* anxious, just don't *stay* anxious.**

**Work it *out* in prayer, with a grateful heart, so He can go to work *in* you.**

**The goal is to pray with gratitude *in* everything, not *for* everything.**

I'm not thankful *for* the Coronavirus.

*But*, I'm very thankful for many things right now, *in the midst* of this pandemic. So ...

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. [And mix in plenty of gratitude, because you care for Him] 1 Peter 5:7 NIV

**He appreciates your appreciation.**

It can be a pretty thankless job, being the Shepherd of our souls.

**What are you thankful for in the midst of this moment?**

Remind yourself.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:7 NIV



We have to hang onto this promise with a tight grip when everything around us is trying to rip our attention from the cross to the crisis. If we're going to know the profound joy of His presence and His peace in the midst of our pain, in Skagit Valley, Jesus must be our highest goal, our deepest meaning, and our greatest joy. As Paul wrote to his Philippian friends ...

I eagerly expect and hope that I ... will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. – Philippians 1:20-21 NIV