

CHAPTER 13

God's Missionary In Rome (Acts 28)

Following the violent storm and shipwreck (Acts 27:14-44) and following the snake bite (Acts 28:3-6), Paul finally made it safely to Rome (Acts 28:16), just as God had promised (Acts 23:11).

Long before Paul ever arrived in Rome, God had said: "so must thou bear _____ also at Rome" (Acts 23:11). How could Paul be God's witness in Rome? Paul did not come to Rome as a free man; he came as a prisoner! According to Acts 28:16 there was a S _____ who guarded Paul at all times! How could a prisoner be a missionary? How could Paul preach the gospel while in prison?

The enemies of Paul must have rejoiced. We can almost imagine them saying: "Hurrah! Hurray! The great preacher Paul is now in prison! He will no longer be able to preach! He will no longer be able to spread the gospel! The Christian faith is in real trouble now because its greatest preacher can no longer preach! The cause of Christ is now going to suffer greatly! This is the best news we have heard in a long time. We hope the Romans keep Paul in prison for many years!"

These enemies of the gospel failed to realize one thing. The Romans could lock Paul up in prison, but there is something that cannot be locked up! They could put chains on Paul, but there is something that cannot be chained! Later in his life Paul wrote these words in 2 Timothy 2:9: "Wherein I suffer trouble as an evil doer, even unto **bonds** (Paul was a prisoner and Paul was chained); but the _____ of _____ is not bound." God's Word and God's truth cannot be chained! They could lock up Paul, but they could not lock up the good news that Paul preached! They could even put Paul to death (and later they did!), but they could not kill God's truth! "The truth of the LORD endureth _____" (Psalm 117:2).

We have already studied about another time Paul was thrown into prison, which was described in Acts 16:19-34. Did the truth of God's Word go forth even though Paul was in prison in the city of Philippi? _____ God used Paul in a wonderful way in that Philippian jail! God was glorified (Acts 16:25); the prisoners were amazed (Acts 16:25-26). The jailer and all those in his house heard God's Word and were saved (Acts 16:27-34)! When Paul was put in prison, amazing things seemed to happen!

The Gospel Went to the Roman Soldiers

Even though Paul was a prisoner in Rome and even though he was constantly guarded by a soldier (Acts 28:16), he was given a certain amount of freedom. He was allowed to see many visitors (see Acts 28:17,23,30). He was also allowed to write letters. During this time he wrote four letters which we now call Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. Paul could not preach to the Philippians and Ephesians and Colossians in person, but he could preach to them in

these letters. Paul was able to preach by his pen, and even today believers are being helped and strengthened by the truths found in these four letters! ***God's Word is not bound!***

Why did God allow Paul to be captured and put into prison? In Philippians 1:12, Paul wrote to the Philippians and tried to explain why these things had happened to him. According to this verse, did Paul's stay in prison HINDER and HURT the cause of the gospel or did it FURTHER and ADVANCE the gospel cause?

God's GOOD NEWS

continued going forth, even though Paul was in prison. How did this happen?

In Philippians 1:13 Paul explains the wonderful way in which God used him in prison: "So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace (guard)." As we have already seen, Paul was constantly guarded by a soldier (Acts 28:16). These Roman soldiers would take turns watching Paul. Probably every six hours another soldier would take his turn being with Paul.

Just imagine if you were that soldier who was told to guard Paul. What would you notice about this man? Would Paul be different than most criminals? If you were a soldier watching Paul, what kind of a life would you see Paul living? Would you see a man who was bitter and upset and worried, or would you see a man who was rejoicing? Would you see Paul pray before eating his meals? Would you see Paul praying at others times also (see Philippians 1:3-4)? Would you hear Paul singing praises to God? Would you see Paul reading the Scriptures?

It must have been very interesting to be Paul's guard! We can imagine the soldier saying: "This is a very unusual prisoner! I've never seen one like this before!" He might even ask Paul, "What crime have you done? Have you murdered someone? Have you stolen something? Have you harmed anyone? Why are you a prisoner?" We can also imagine Paul's answer: "My only crime is that I have gone around telling people the good news about a Saviour who can save sinners! Let me tell you how I was saved!" Paul could then explain how he was once an enemy of the church, and how he persecuted Christians until one day he met the risen Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus.

Yes, each guard had an opportunity to watch Paul's life and to probably hear Paul's story. Each one could listen to Paul as he talked to friends who came to visit him. These guards could ask him questions about Christ and salvation. Some of these soldiers (like the Philippian jailer in Acts 16) may have even believed Paul's message and may have been saved. Paul could then spend his hours with them teaching them the great truths about Christ. These saved soldiers could be moved from place to place and sent all over the Roman empire. They could carry the gospel wherever they went! ***Paul's prison had become a pulpit***, and missionary soldiers were being sent forth to proclaim the good news! No wonder Paul said the gospel was being furthered (Philippians 1:12)!

Suppose different people were assigned to watch **you** twenty-four hours every day for a whole year! What would they see and notice about your life? Would they be able to watch you praying and reading the Bible? Would they see you obeying your parents and being kind to others? Would they be able to say, ***"This young person is very interesting. He (or she) is different from other young people of the same age!"*** Would they be able to see that Christ and the Bible make a difference in your life?

Suppose you were to break your arm and end up in the hospital. You might say, "Why did God allow this to happen? Is there a reason for it? Why did this happen to me?" Perhaps God might

want to use you right there in the hospital. The same God that could use Paul in a prison could use you in a hospital room. There would be people around you 24 hours each day--nurses, doctors and other patients. You could be a missionary right there! Perhaps they would notice something different about you. Perhaps you would have an opportunity to talk to them about the Lord. Perhaps there would be another person with a broken arm that you could try to help and encourage.

The Gospel Went to a Runaway Slave

As we read the little book of Philemon, we learn something else about how God used Paul as a missionary in prison. In the brief letter to PHILEMON we learn of a runaway slave named O _____ (Philemon 10). This slave had run away from his master whose name was Philemon. Philemon was a member of the Colossian church. Apparently Onesimus had stolen something from Philemon and had fled to the city of Rome.

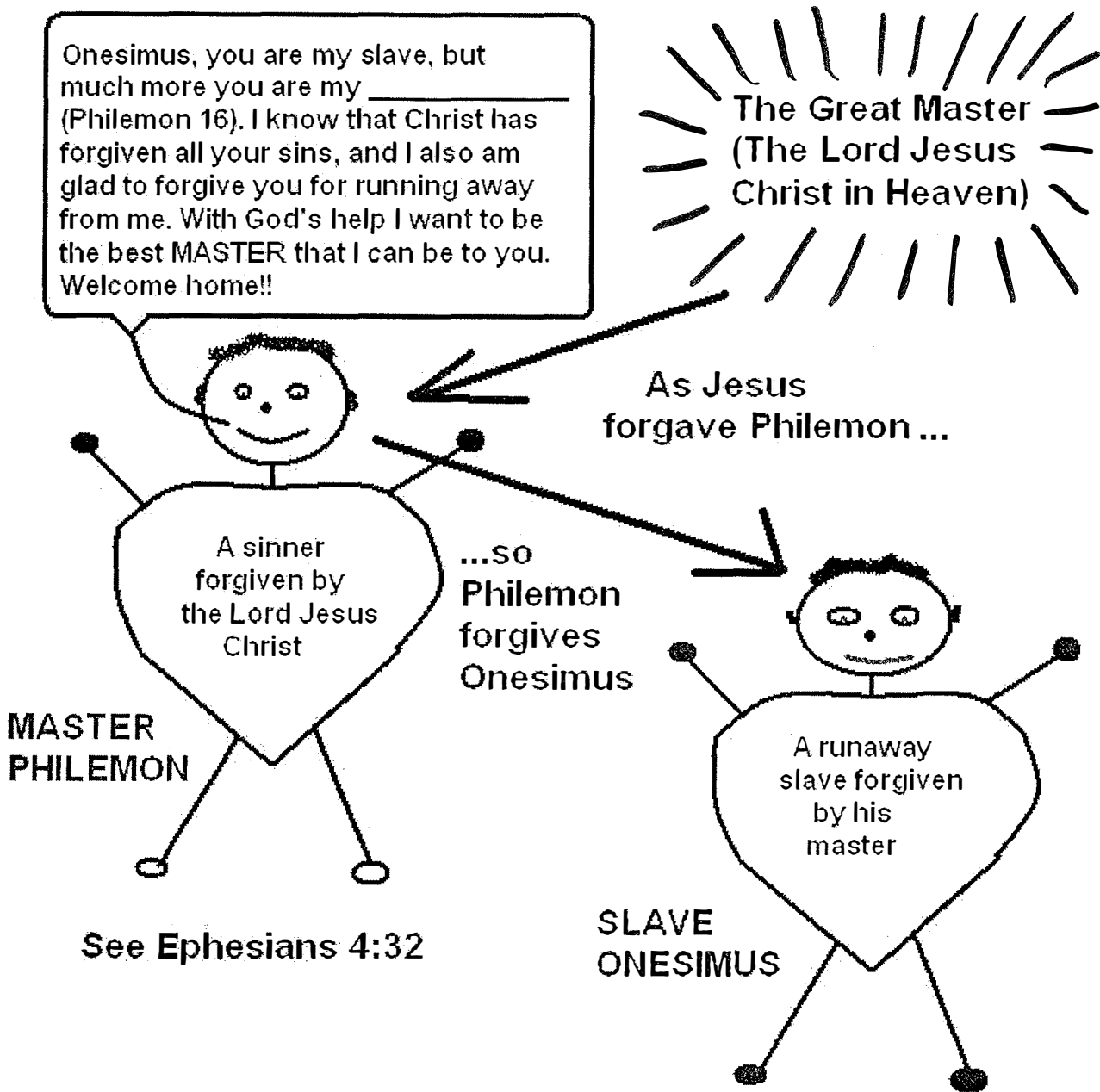
This runaway slave RAN right into the Apostle Paul! Perhaps Onesimus got into trouble in Rome and was put in prison and perhaps this is how Paul met him. We are not sure how they met, but we do know for sure that Paul shared with Onesimus the good news of salvation and that he was born again (Philemon 10). The slave Onesimus was now a **saved slave!**

Perhaps you have done things that are very wrong. Perhaps you have stolen certain things like Onesimus did. Perhaps you have done some very wrong things that no one knows about but you and the Lord. If this is true, God has good news for you. The same God that could forgive and save Onesimus can forgive and save you! The Bible says, "there is F _____ with Thee (with God)" (Psalm 130:4). God's missionary, the Apostle Paul, was able to share with this runaway slave the good news that God is able to forgive sinners.

Paul knew that Onesimus needed to return to his master. Suppose Onesimus had suddenly returned to his master Philemon. What do you suppose Philemon might have said? Perhaps he might have said something like this: "You no good thief! Where is that money that you stole from me? You deserve to be punished for stealing and for running away!"

Philemon did not realize that the slave who was returning to him was very different from the slave who ran away! Even though ONESIMUS was still a SLAVE, he was now much more than a slave. According to Philemon 16 he was a beloved B _____. Paul sent a brief letter to Philemon (which we now call PHILEMON) to explain that Onesimus was now a Christian brother.

Should Philemon have forgiven his slave for all the wrong he had done (see Ephesians 4:32)? _____ When Philemon finally read Paul's letter and saw his runaway slave who was now a believer, we do not know how he reacted. However, he may have said something like this:



Is there anyone who has wronged you or hurt you? If so, are you bitter and angry when you think about this person? Do you wish this person could be punished for what he (or she) has done?

God wants us to learn to forgive (see Colossians 3:13), and to learn what it means to be forgiven by Christ. Suppose the Lord were to be bitter and angry toward us and suppose He were to decide that we ought to be punished instead of forgiven. If God were to do this, we would be destroyed! There would be no hope! But God's mercy is great (see Psalm 103:10-12)! Since God has forgiven us (if we have received Christ as our Saviour), then we need to learn to forgive others! Consider carefully the story Jesus told in Matthew 18:23-35, and let everyone of us learn to forgive, even as we have been forgiven!

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The Apostle Paul was God's missionary, even in prison. He shared the good news with the soldiers who guarded him. He shared the gospel with a runaway slave. He wrote four letters which have helped to strengthen and encourage believers down through the centuries. Even though Paul was a prisoner, did he stop preaching and teaching (Acts 28:31)? _____

We have come to the end of our study of the book of Acts. We have seen the Lord Jesus Christ working and acting through different men (such as Peter, John, Stephen, Timothy and Paul). Today we have the same God who wants to work through us! We have the same good news! We have the same Bible! We have the same Holy Spirit! May God help us to be the witnesses we should be wherever we are--at home, in school, in the neighborhood, or in any other place! Jesus said, "Ye shall be _____ unto Me" (Acts 1:8).

BEGINNING OF A SUCCESSFUL MAN

