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Here's Hope  
by Rev. Jerry Rea

What About Us?

Paul spent much of his time in prison. You might say he was the first to begin a "prison ministry." He didn't really want it and did not exactly plan it, but he never complained about it either. I sincerely doubt it was on his list of goals, and not any sort of "bucket list." He went to prison for the gospel of Jesus. Speaking of Jesus, He spent some time in jail as well. Paul was placed in prison under Roman guard because his message irritated the Jewish authorities. They petitioned the government to help by placing Paul there. Then, he appealed to Rome. So, off he goes from one Roman outpost and prison to another on his way to speak to Caesar. I think he knew it would not end well. He as much as says that he'll be going to heaven soon. This did not deter him from faith. He'd begun churches, and they surely would ask after him from time to time. For most of those far-flung friends, they never would be able to see him again. He kept in touch by writing and in greater touch by praying for his "outside" friends.

The thing that really rivets itself to my mind about Paul's time on the "inside" is his ever joyful and optimistic and powerfully Christlike attitude. You know, of course, that attitude is everything? His prison cells may have been rat holes, but Paul didn't talk about that. He talked about Jesus. Prison food left a lot to be desired (don't you think?). We didn't hear about that from Paul either. There must have been weeks and months when his view of God's big sky was grossly limited. We don't know because he never told us.

He talked about Jesus. On and on he blessed and glorified our savior. His consuming thought was Christ and His Gospel message. Sounds to me as if he were consumed with something so much better than prison. Or, we might say, his circumstances did not keep him from being grateful for his savior.

What about us? Most of us have so, so many things to be happy and joyful about. Most of us have so many clothes our closets are full. We have so much money that when we die our children will fight over it. We are so well entertained that the "chore" of our evening is to work our way through channel after channel on an elusive and empty trip to find "something." What if we were in prison? Are we grateful? Are we singing God's praises? Would "just one more" CD makes us grateful? Would a better "ride" keep us from gloom and doom? I don't think so. I really believe we get "stuck" on these things. I really believe that his time in prison forced him to think beyond prison walls. He must've thought beyond this time of confinement. He must've prayed more (after all there was nothing on TV). Perhaps being quiet and alone made it easier to get in touch with God.

Prison bars did not keep Paul from praising God. Don't let your prisons keep you down either. Please don't misunderstand. I don't think he was happy about being in jail. But, being in jail, a

dark, lonely, stinky jail, did not keep him from seeing Jesus either. Don't let your problems keep you from seeing all the good there is in this world. If Paul found Jesus to be with him in jail, so can you.

I'm praying for you in your jail,  
Jerry Rea