

A STUDY OF THE PRISON EPISTLES

CONFINEMENT

Dallas Cowboy's left tackle, Tyron Smith, is a big dude. This seven-time Pro Bowler, made news in 2018 when he needed a brace for a lingering elbow injury. However, no elbow brace would fit the 6'5", 312-pound behemoth. Cowboy's writer, Clarence Hill Jr., summed it up well when he tweeted, "Tyron Smith is wearing a knee brace on his injured elbow. Why? Because his elbow is as big [as] a d*** knee, per a Cowboys staffer."

Tyron Smith needed a solution. God designed his elbow to bend one way, but his elbow had other opinions. Smith used his knee-turned-elbow brace, such that his arm only bent the God-ordained direction.

Nobody would look at Smith's brace and consider that "confinement" a bad thing. However, when we face confinement in our own lives, we often cry out, "God set me free!" To which God responds, "Don't worry, this is my design. I've got you on track." As we will see, sometimes when we're locked up, held down, or held back, that's when God can use us the most. That was certainly the case for the Apostle Paul.

ACTS 28:23-31

²³ They set a day to meet with him, and they came to him where he was staying in even greater numbers. From morning until evening he explained things to them, testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus from both the law of Moses and the prophets. ²⁴ Some were convinced by what he said, but others refused to believe. ²⁵ So they began to leave, unable to agree among themselves, after Paul made one last statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah ²⁶ when he said, *'Go to this people and say, "You will keep on hearing, but will never understand, and you will keep on looking, but will never perceive."* ²⁷ *For the heart of this people has become dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have closed their eyes, so that they would not see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.*" ²⁸ "Therefore be advised that this salvation from God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen!"

³⁰ Paul lived there two whole years in his own rented quarters and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with complete boldness and without restriction.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The backbone of Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If he awoke from the dead after three days, that changes everything, right? We should probably listen to what he has to say about sin and salvation.

Lee Stroble is well-known for his book and now movie, *The Case for Christ*. Like many before him, he tried to disprove the resurrection. In the end, he gave up and gave his life to Christ.



DISCUSSION

What has been the best and worst parts of your Covid confinement?

1. What do we know about Paul's meeting with the Jewish leaders? (23)

Attendance:

Duration:

Content:

2. Summarize the passage Paul quoted. (26-27)

3. What did Paul make known? (28)

4. What do these verses convey about Paul's attitude and activity re: his confinement? (30-31)

5. Consider your current circumstantial limitations. How can you take advantage of current spiritual opportunities?

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

As we begin a new semester, you may have questions about your relationship with God. If you aren't sure about your relationship with God, talk to your coach today.

STUDY NOTES THE CHAMP IS HERE

Muhammad Ali once said, “Champions aren’t made in gyms. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them—a desire, a dream, a vision. They have to have the skill, and the will. But the will must be stronger than the skill.” Two words to describe the Apostle Paul are “grace” and “grit.” Nothing could stop his relentless determination to turn the world upside down for Christ. His training and background made him one-of-a-kind, but his “desire, dream, and vision—the will stronger than skill,” truly set him apart.

The book of Acts opens with some of Jesus’ final words to his disciples, “*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). God established the Church in Acts 2 with the Day of Pentecost. From that moment on, the Gospel spread throughout the Roman empire.

As we discussed in Zero Week, the greatest church planter and missionary of that time was the Apostle Paul. Through appealing to Cesar as a Roman citizen, Paul fulfilled Acts 1:8. He took the Gospel, bound in chains, to the most powerful man in the most powerful city in the world. He’d been imprisoned for years and the treacherous journey would have made cowards of most men. But not Paul. In our passage today, Paul has finally made it to Rome after many months of hazardous travel. He’s bound under house arrest, but he immediately got to work.

GOD MAY BIND BELIEVERS TO HEAL OTHERS

Paul was a highly respected Jewish scholar having studied under one of the great rabbi’s of that time, Gamaliel. The Roman Jews hadn’t heard the message of Christianity, still thinking of it as a “sect” of Judaism. All they know is that “*people speak against it everywhere*” (Acts 28:22)

Though bound under house arrest, ***they came to Paul where he was staying in even greater numbers.*** I’m sure Paul had amazing stories from his missionary journeys, but ***from morning until evening he explained things to them, testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus from both the law of Moses and the prophets.*** Many who heard believed, ***but others refused to believe.***

For those who left unconvinced, Paul quoted ***the prophet Isaiah, “You will keep on hearing,***

but will never understand, and you will keep on looking, but will never perceive. For the heart of this people has become dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have closed their eyes, so that they would not see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.”

When the Jews rejected the Gospel, Paul let them know that ***salvation from God has been sent to the Gentiles; because they will listen.***

Like many other portions in the book of Acts, time sped up and ***two whole years*** passed in a single verse. Paul wasted no time. He ***welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with complete boldness and without restriction.***

GOD’S BINDING OPENS NEW OPPORTUNITIES

You may have discovered already, if you live sold out for Jesus, you will meet plenty of people who hear, but will not understand. They will look, but will not perceive. And, while some people know how to have a healthy debate, increasingly our world hates the phrase, “I disagree.”

The problem comes when identity wraps around opinion. To reject an idea is to reject the person. Obviously, as Christians we strive to love people while standing for truth. Truth, however, cannot be found *within* a person. The Bible says *the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure* (Jeremiah 17:9, NIV). Jesus came and died on the Cross to set us free from sin rising again after three days. If Jesus really rose from the dead, as history suggests he did, what do we do with that fact?

For those of us who have accepted that message, it means submitting to Christ in all things. It means I am bound to Christ. However, like Tyrone Smith’s knee-elbow brace, being bound with Christ is to be bound according to my design. It means finding hope, joy, and peace that we can find in nothing else.

Like Paul, if we are bound to Christ, we must not waste our time or opportunities. With the same grace and grit as Paul, we must stand for truth, always. This must be done in love, respectfully, and with tactful wisdom—like a baton passed between relay runners, it requires care and precision. Christians earn a bad name when sharing the Gospel like a linebacker blindsiding a QB. Instead, use the time you have now to impact eternity. Pray for your lost friends. Invite them to join you in this study. Most of all, love them where they are, but love in truth with grace and grit.