

In the House Of, Part 11 (Paul)

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Our Father God loves us so much! Despite the failure of the human family, He has made it possible for everyone to be restored to favor through Christ and receive eternal life. This is truly an amazing Gift!

A young boy named Mike was asked by his father to do a favor. His parents were divorced, so he usually saw his dad only on weekends. A few months before Christmas he told him that a father wished to give his boy, who was about the same age as Mike, a horse for Christmas, and asked if the horse could be kept and trained at their ranch. Ten-year-old Mike grudgingly obliged, but he was secretly jealous of the other boy who was getting the horse. He had always dreamed of having one!

A beautiful palomino horse arrived in October and on weekends Mike would be placed in the saddle, and with a rope dad would lead the horse in circles within the ring, training for the special day. As the weeks went by, Mike became especially attached to the horse and, perhaps revealing his own feelings of resentment and jealousy, named him Rebel.

When Christmas Eve came Mike cried his eyes out, but was told to go to the stable and say his final “good-byes” to the horse. As he entered the barn, both the upper and lower doors of Rebel’s compartment were closed. Mike opened the upper half, and Rebel pushed his beautiful, freshly groomed head out, revealing a gorgeous ribbon containing a card which read, “Merry Christmas, Michael. Dad.”

Today there may be disappointment and tears, but the day is coming when all sorrow will be turned to joy, just like it was for Mike that day. Oh; Mike’s dad, the one who surprised his son with that wonderful gift? You might have heard of him. His name was Ronald Reagan.

Today we’re going to the house of the Apostle Paul. Did Paul live in a house? Well, the book of Acts closes with these words; “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.” Acts 28:30, 31. Paul was in Rome at this time, under what we’d call “house arrest.” How that came to be is all a part of his life story, which contains lessons that can help us. These lessons are: #1: *Life doesn’t always come out the way you planned it, but God works through all things to bring good.* Lesson #2: *Satan’s special wrath is reserved for the one who used to work for him, but now works for Jesus.* Lesson

#3: God's purpose is even greater than we imagined, and He will do more than we ask or think.

Lesson #4: It's time to put on the whole armor of God.

Saul was born to a family living in Tarsus, in what today we'd call Turkey. In his day it was the most important commercial port of Cilicia. It was once the residence of Cleopatra and Mark Antony. Living in Tarsus, the family gained the advantage of Roman citizenship, highly prized back in those days. Saul's parents were Jews who hailed from the tribe of Benjamin. Perhaps his parents named him in honor of Israel's first king, King Saul, who was a Benjamite. Early in his reign he exhibited noble and exemplary traits of character.

Saul showed unusual promise in learning and was sent to Jerusalem to learn from the famous teacher Gamaliel. Being of stout spirit, he fought diligently to preserve the heritage of the Pharisees, especially targeting a new group called "The Way," who followed the teachings of a Galilean, Whom they said was resurrected from the dead and now in heaven. They claimed that this Jesus was the true Messiah of prophecy.

Against this "heresy," Saul fought admirably. He was there when one of the new sect's spokesman Stephen was pelted with stones. But the look of peace on dying Stephen's face was never erased from Saul's mind. Shortly thereafter, being commissioned by the Sanhedrin to go to Damascus, where there was a group espousing this heresy, Saul was stopped on the road at midday by a Light brighter than the sun. A voice asked from above, "Saul, Saul, Why are you persecuting Me?"

It was Jesus, the One worshiped by the very heresy he had been sent to uproot! Though blinded by the light, Saul now saw things clearer than he ever had before. Scriptures that he had memorized were knitted together by the Holy Spirit in a way that brought understanding and meaning. How blind he had been to the truth of prophecy! He was turned into another man; he was converted and now lived to preach the One Whose name he had vilified.

As we sit at the feet of Paul, the name by which he was called when he became a Christian, in his rented house in Rome, we recall some of the events of his life and the lessons for us in those events. Lesson #1: Life doesn't always come out the way you planned it, but God works through all things to bring good.

Paul became the Church's chief spokesman to the non-Jewish world. He was indeed, as prophesied by Jesus, the "light to the Gentiles." Along with his companion Barnabas, they ventured out on a major missionary journey, visiting places from Cyprus to Asia Minor and Macedonia. He aspired to travel to Rome, the capital, and preach the gospel there. In his letter he wrote to the people of Rome, "For this reason, I also have been much hindered from coming to you. But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while." Romans 15:22-24.

Paul did go to Rome, as we noted, but not the way he had planned. Why was that? When Paul returned to Jerusalem from his third missionary trip, he was induced to go to the temple with some young men and perform a vow. This was done ostensibly, to demonstrate that his teachings were not at variance with the customs and traditions of the Jews. While there, it happened that he was recognized by certain Jews of Asia, who assumed that he had brought into the temple an Ephesian gentile named Trophimos.

False accusations were hurled and a mob rioted. Paul had to be rescued by the Roman centurion and taken into protective custody. Hearings were held with flowery orations and false accusations offered by the Jews, with no definitive result. Paul, for safety reasons, was transferred to Caesarea and more hearings were held. Although the charges were weak, Felix retained him in prison, hoping to receive a bribe in order to release him. Languishing in prison another two years, Festus succeeded Felix and another trial was held, again with no decisive outcome. Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar, and was therefore sent to the capital in chains. Interestingly, we find no record that a prayer vigil was held by the church in favor of the Apostle Paul as that described in Acts 12 which resulted in Peter's release.

Paul had dreams of going to Rome, but how he got there wasn't the way he planned. Even so, God was with him and brought His gracious purpose to fulfillment, just like God was with Joseph in Egypt. Joseph had dreams; dreams of being honored and respected, but he never dreamed it would be via the road of Egyptian slavery, false accusation and imprisonment. He didn't know that it would come through the door of Potiphar's house and the gate of the dungeon. Yet, the dreams did come true, for "God was with him."

Take note: Life may not turn out the way you had it planned, but God can bring good through any circumstance. Ironically, some time before he was arrested and taken to Rome, this same Paul wrote to the Romans, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His promise." Romans 8:28. He would not have guessed that this truth would be demonstrated by the way in which he made his journey to the very people to whom he wrote this letter! For him, this was not just a proclamation, it was a prophecy!

This is true in your life as well. God is with you every step, patiently working His purpose within you to reveal His character. Every impact of the chisel through the trials of life is for the ultimate goal of salvation. Life may not turn out the way you drew it up; in fact, it's highly likely that it won't. But be assured that the same God Who was with Joseph in the pit and dungeon; the same God Who was with Paul in Rome is also with you and with me. Someday we'll confess the truth of Romans 8:28 just as Paul did. As we sit in the house of Paul, the apostle in chains, he is receiving guests, doing what he's always wanted to do; he's sharing the Gospel story with them.

Lesson #2. Satan's special wrath is reserved for the one who used to work for him, but now works for Jesus. Saul had been one of the devil's most prized tools, "breathing out threats and murder" and going into cities, from house to house, plucking out the believers and bringing them to the

Council to be tried for the crime of being a Christian. Loss of property and life were the verdicts handed down by the Sanhedrin. At the name of Saul believers cringed or fled.

But then this choice implement of destruction and horror became a believer himself; nay, he became the outstanding proponent of Christianity! Nearly ½ of the New Testament would come to life through the pen of Paul. Using his unique skill as a Bible scholar, crossing all barriers with his blend of Jewish heritage and Roman privilege, willing to share at any and all cost to himself, Paul became the champion of the faith. Would the devil sit by idly while his prey escaped from his snare?

No indeed! Outside of Jesus the Messiah, no one endured more for his faith in the New Testament story than did Paul. He modestly presents his credentials as one who suffered for his Master with these words: "In labors, more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." II Corinthians 11:23-27.

Satan directed his sharpest darts toward the Apostle who was once a favored general in his ranks. Satan would do anything to bring down the one who now led the ranks of Jesus' army. But nothing he threw at him worked! Paul was willing to suffer privation and punishment; yes, he reveled in the honor of suffering for the name of Jesus! He wrote, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." II Corinthians 12:10.

Do you feel that the devil has painted a target on your back? Do you sense that he is attacking you through trials and hardships? Take courage! It means that you're on the right track! To suffer for the name of Jesus is a high calling, a noble privilege! Through His mercy, God allows these things to come to us, that we might learn patience and trust through suffering. If you have left the ranks of evil and placed your allegiance on the side of Christ, expect that the devil is going to come after you with all that he has, just as he did Paul. But if we have faith, we can say as did the apostle, "I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me." Philippians 3:13. We are "more than conquerors through Him Who loved us." Romans 8:37.

Lesson #3: God's purpose is even greater than we imagined, and He will do more than we ask or think. As we sit in the rented home of Paul, he is sending out messages of encouragement to believers throughout the growing world of Christianity. Paul was now restrained and couldn't go back physically to the churches he had established. So he wrote to them, giving valuable insight and godly counsel. Question: If Paul had not been arrested and taken to Rome, is it possible that he would have personally visited those cities to whom he later wrote while in prison? Is it possible that, being "in chains," God actually accomplished more through the letters of Paul, preserved by

divine unction down to our day in the New Testament, than if the apostle had gone in the flesh to these places to answer the questions posed or relate the needed wisdom?

Through the wisdom and providence of God Paul wrote out his messages which have been preserved and retained in the New Testament for our benefit. To the Ephesians he spoke of himself as being an “ambassador in chains.” Ephesians 6:20. To the Philippians he wrote that “It has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ.” Philippians 1:13. Some of those in Caesar’s household responded to the gospel call. To the Colossians he referred to the “mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains,” and requested that in their prayers they “remember my chains.” Colossians 4:3, 18. He thanked the Hebrews who “had compassion on me in my chains.” Hebrews 10:34.

The path on which the Lord leads you will lead to opportunities to witness for Him of which you can’t imagine. If it is your purpose to life for Him and share His love, there is no limit to the good that can be wrought through your life. One day Paul will be surprised to find out that we, living 2,000 years after his life closed, are familiar with the details of his biography and testimony. How can it be? He will wonder, that people thousands of miles away are acquainted with my life and witness? How is it that the letter I wrote to the believers of Philippi has brought blessing to people in Africa, China and America? Thus it is with the incredible blessing of God, which sends the ripples of His grace out in a wider circle than human imagination can encompass. Do your best to live for Jesus, and He will send the light of your witness to places you do not know. Some day people will come up to you in heaven and thank you for your encouraging testimony. The “joy of the Lord” will flood over your soul in never-ending waves of happiness and fulfillment.

Lesson #4: *It’s time to put on the whole armor of God.* As Paul received his guests and penned his epistles, standing constantly by his side was a Roman soldier. Even though enjoying many liberties in his “house arrest,” Paul was reminded daily that he was still confined by Roman authority. “Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.” Acts 28:16.

This curse was even turned into a blessing, being the inspiration of Paul’s great analogy in Ephesians 6. Mindful of the protective attire of his Roman guard, Paul applied this as a lesson for Christian living. I have to wonder whether the soldier who stood at his side pondered the significance of these words. “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might; Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded you waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Ephesians 6:10-17.

In the early 1960's Brooklyn-born Powell was assigned to train the soldiers of South Viet Nam. Soon they were sent out in patrols, with those at the "point," or in the lead position, taking the heaviest assault, being massacred by the bullets of the Viet Cong. Powell's heart ached as they dragged back victim after victim, the subject of sniper fire or machine gun nests. Then he had an idea.

Remember, this was some 50 years ago. Although they were heavy to wear, being of the Korean war vintage, he recommended that those on the "point" of the patrol wear bullet-proof vests, and their comrades carry their packs for them. On the next patrol, their squad was met with the usual ambush and barrage of bullets. The man at the front turned to warn his comrades and was struck by bullets in the back. Then Powell heard chattering; it was the South Vietnamese soldiers talking excitedly, as it was discovered that the man was still alive. Examining the vest, they found several bullets which had struck him but didn't make it through the protective gear! The bullets were stopped and his life was spared, as well as many thereafter. A photograph was taken of one of the retrieved bullets. After that, Powell was "dawee" or "Captain" Powell. Captain Collin Powell.

In Paul's house today we've learned four valuable lessons: These lessons are: #1: Life doesn't always come out the way you planned it, but God works through all things to bring good. Lesson #2: Satan's special wrath is reserved for the one who used to work for him, but now works for Jesus. Lesson #3: God's purpose is even greater than we imagined, and He will do more than we ask or think. Lesson #4: It's time to put on the whole armor of God.

It is time that we put on the "whole armor of God." Like never before, the devil is about to unleash his weapons of deception and coercion. Only the one covered by the righteousness of Christ will stand; others will be washed away as surely as the buildings in Japan were swept away by the relentless tide of the tsunami.

Ask daily to be filled with His Spirit. Plead with God to give you a new heart and a new mind. Pray that He will prepare you to stand in the evil day and honor His sacred name as a soldier of the cross.