

How Does God Use Persecution to Advance the Gospel?

Acts 25:13-27

Pastor Jason Van Bommel, Forest Hill Presbyterian

So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. - Acts 25:23, ESV

What role does persecution play in the life of the church? Yesterday, we saw that persecution is neither something so dreadful that we should be willing to compromise the truth to avoid it, nor is it something so wonderful in itself that we should go out of our way to seek it. It is a reality that sometimes persecution is unavoidable, for the world hates Christ and His kingdom. But what good comes from persecution?

We see a powerful example in today's passage of God bringing a great opportunity to advance the Gospel out of unjust persecution. Paul has been lingering in jail for over two years, without being charged with any crime. Due to his imprisonment, he had the opportunity to testify to the truth of the Gospel before two Roman governors, first Felix and then Festus. Now he gets an audience with the royal couple, King Agrippa and Queen Bernice. In addition to the king and queen, military tribunes and prominent men of the city were also summoned to hear Paul.

The Gospel advanced because Paul was faithful to consistently and fearlessly tell the truth about Jesus, no matter who his audience was. Paul preached the same Gospel to a slave girl and a jailer as he did to King Agrippa and Governor Festus. Later, Paul would end up in Rome, where he would continue to testify and see the Gospel advance. He wrote to the church he had founded in Philippi with the unexpected good news of his imprisonment:

"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." - Philippians 1:12-14, ESV

When God grants His servants courage, and His people respond with faithfulness, the persecution of Christians is a powerful tool for the advancement of the Gospel. As Paul stood fearlessly before Felix, Festus, Agrippa and Bernice, watching eyes took note. As he remained steadfast in Rome, the imperial guard took note. People who would never have paid any attention to the Gospel were hearing the good news about Jesus from the imprisoned Apostle Paul.

Heavenly Father, we don't face imprisonment for our testimony, and yet we still pull back and compromise so readily. We need You to empower us with wisdom, eloquence and faithfulness, that our words might reflect Your truth and might bring honor to You. Make us faithful ambassadors, with Your Gospel always on our lips. In Jesus' name, Amen.