

FINALLY PAUL ARRIVES AT ROME

Acts 27:1-28:31

Key Verse: 28:20b

“It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”

Paul, after meeting the Risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, was converted from Judaism to Christianity. Next he spent three years in Arabia preparing himself to be a servant of God. Then he spent six years at Tarsus. He was at Antioch intermittently for two or three years. Then he traveled over Asia Minor and Greece for about 15 years. And he spent three years in prison in Caesarea before going to Rome. Paul had experienced many vicissitudes in his short pilgrimage.

Today's passage deals with Paul's voyage to Rome and his grassroots work in Rome. Why did Paul go to Rome? As we have studied, it was out of his obedience to his Lord Jesus. Initially, Paul had no idea to go to Rome. But after seeing the vision of the Macedonian begging him to come to help him, Paul realized that God was leading him to work in European countries, and finally, to Rome. So he said in 19:21b, "After I have been there, I must visit Rome also." But Paul's way of going to Rome was not easy. When he visited Jerusalem to report about the great work of God among the Gentiles, the Jews stirred up people, seized him, and beat him up simply because Paul preached the gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles whom they did not like. Then the commander of the Roman army arrested him to prevent a possible riot. Thus he was imprisoned for three long years in Caesarea before going to Rome. Paul was fearful from time to time. But the Lord Jesus visited him and renewed his spirit (23:11).

Paul was very obedient to his Lord Jesus because of God's grace to him. So he knew what his Lord Jesus wanted him to do (22:21; 23:11) and he was always willing to do whatever the Lord wanted to be done. Whenever the name "Jesus" came across his mind, he was greatly strengthened and overjoyed. Paul was happy to fulfill his Lord Jesus' will. When he stayed at Corinth for three months, he wrote Romans, the most important book in the New Testament next to the Gospels. Paul really wanted to go to Rome to impart the secrets of the gospel. Romans 1:10,11 says, "...in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to

FINALLY PAUL ARRIVES AT ROME

make you strong...." Finally, Paul was able to go to Rome as a missionary in chains.

I. Paul's voyage to Rome (27:1-44)

It was decided that Paul stand trial before Caesar. So Paul and some other prisoners who were to be sent to Rome were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. At last Paul embarked on his final journey. His voyage to Rome required three ships: one from Caesarea to Myra (27:1-5); another from Myra to Malta (27:6-28:10); another from Malta to Puteoli (28:11-13). Paul boarded a ship with other prisoners. They say that it was a cargo ship carrying corn. The ship put out to sea; it dropped by Sidon and passed to the lee of Cyprus and landed at Myra. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put the people on board. But the voyage was not smooth. Let's see how Paul helped others when the voyage became dangerous.

First, Paul's advice was ignored (27:9-20). Paul had much experience in sea travel. He knew that it was late in the year to travel because it was after the Fast. The Fast was the Day of Atonement, about the middle of September. From that time on, navigation on the Mediterranean Sea was dangerous. So Paul warned them: "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also" (10). What was the response of the centurion in charge of the ship? Instead of listening to what Paul said, he followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship (11). It was natural for him to listen to the advice of the pilot, who was a skilled professional. But the centurion had no insight to see why they wanted to sail on; he did not figure out their motive in wanting to leave Fair Havens; the sailors thought it was too small a town to winter in, because there they could not enjoy wild pleasures as sailors.

When they put out to sea, a gentle south wind began to blow, and they thought they had obtained what they wanted. So they sailed along, expecting that they could winter in a larger city where they could enjoy the wild life of sailors. Before long, a wind of hurricane force began to strike the ship. The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so they gave way to it and were driven along (27:15). They took such a violent battering from the storm that the

FINALLY PAUL ARRIVES AT ROME

next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, they finally gave up all hope of being saved (27:18-20).

Second, Paul said, "Do not be afraid" (27:21-26). After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss." After saying this, Paul urged them to keep up their courage, because not one of them would be lost; only the ship would be destroyed. How could Paul say this? It was because he knew well about winter weather through many journeys; moreover, Paul knew why they were in for a disaster. Paul saw the nature of the sailors who had ventured out so as to spend a pleasure-seeking winter in a bigger city. Most of all, Paul had the word of his Lord Jesus. So he encouraged the crew and prisoners and all others in the ship. Look at verses 23-25. "Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me."

How easy it is for us to be deceived by a gentle wind, ignoring the fact that at any time a wind storm can arise in our voyage of life! We are accustomed to listen to the advice of a skilled man and unconditionally reject the advice of a spiritual man like Paul. But it is foolish for us to depend on science only, for it has a great limitation. Science cannot go beyond science. Therefore, though it may seem stupid, we must listen to the advice of a spiritual man, who can be a true help in the storms of life! Spiritual men are those who have the word of God, and who are courageous during storms; only they can help those troubled by storms.

Third, Paul said, "Eat" (27:27-38). On the fourteenth night the sailors sensed they were approaching land. They were afraid that the ship would be dashed against the rocks. So the sailors attempted to escape by lifeboats, abandoning the passengers. Paul said, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved" (31b). So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away. What did Paul do

FINALLY PAUL ARRIVES AT ROME

next? "Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. 'For the last fourteen days,' he said, 'you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food--you haven't eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.' After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves." Paul had faith that overcomes the situation because he had God's word in his heart.

Fourth, God spared Paul's life (27:39-44). When daylight came, they were getting ready to run the ship aground. So they cut loose the anchors. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move. "The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping" (42). What happened next? The centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. They did so. The rest got on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely (43-44). Here we learn God was with Paul even in the shipwreck.

II. Paul on the island of Malta (28:1-10)

First, Paul, a practical man. Generally great men try hard to look dignified and austere. They want to say to others, "Do this and do that." But Paul was different; he was a great man, but he was really a practical man. Look at 28:1. "Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta." The islanders showed them unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed them. It was lucky for them that the islanders were not savage people. After being in command during the shipwreck, Paul could have taken a rest. But he did not. Though he was such a great man, he was always ready to be useful in the smallest thing; he was diligently gathering a pile of brushwood for the campfire so that others could warm themselves. Only little men turn up their noses at little tasks. Great men are faithful in small tasks. Paul was indeed a great man who could gather a pile of brushwood. We remember the words of our Lord Jesus, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness" (Mt 25:23).

FINALLY PAUL ARRIVES AT ROME

Paul was also a cool man. When Paul put a pile of brushwood on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. Paul could have been shocked and cried out for help. But he did not. He was cool and unexcited. "When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, 'This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live.'" At this embarrassing moment, what did Paul do? Look at verse 5. "But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects." What was the people's response? The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god (6). If Paul had died on account of the viper, his hope to go to Rome would have been stopped. If Paul had not been able to go to Rome, he would not have been able to write his prison Epistles--Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon--which are still living in the hearts of Jesus' people. But God was with him. And Paul also believed that God was with him. So he could be a "cool man." Through this event we remember Mark 16:18, which says, "...they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

Second, Paul, a healer. Paul's people were 276 in number (27:37). How they would supply their needs while waiting for another ship going to Rome was a question. In this situation God helped Paul to heal the father of the chief official of the island. When Paul healed him, they honored Paul's people in many ways. They supplied all their needs for a long three month's time. In addition, when they were ready to sail, they furnished them with all the supplies they needed.

III. Finally Paul arrived at Rome (28:11-31)

After three months Paul and his people put out to sea and boarded a ship of Alexandria with a figurehead of the twin gods, Castor and Pollux. They arrived first at Rhegium, next at Puteoli. There Paul met the brothers who came to Puteoli to greet him. At the sight of these men, Paul thanked God and was encouraged, realizing that God was with him as he had promised. Finally Paul arrived at Rome. When they got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him

FINALLY PAUL ARRIVES AT ROME

(16). What did Paul do when he arrived at Rome?

First, Paul said, "It is because of the hope of Israel" (28:17-22).

Three days later they called together the leaders of the Jews. "When they had assembled, Paul said to them: 'My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar--not that I had any charge to bring against my own people. For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain'" (17-20). Paul did his best to explain to his people why he came to Rome in chains. It was because of the hope of Israel. The hope of Israel is well explained in Exodus 19:5,6: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Peter also knew the hope of Israel well and said in 1 Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." The hope of Israel was the hope of God for his chosen people Israel. God wanted to make his people a priestly nation and a light for the Gentiles. Humanly speaking, Romans had security and peace. But from God's point of view, they were living under the rule of Satan. God sent Paul to bring them from darkness to the marvelous light of Jesus; God wanted to give them true security and true peace. What was the response of the Jewish brothers to Paul? They said they had not heard anything about him and that they wanted to hear his views, for they knew that people everywhere were talking against the sect of the Nazarene Jesus.

Second, Paul taught them the Bible (28:23-31). Many people made appointments to study the Bible at the place where Paul stayed. From morning until evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. Here we learn the key points of Paul's Bible teaching were the kingdom of God and that Jesus is the Son of God.

How did they respond? Some believed, but most of them rejected his teaching. Paul was greatly discouraged. But he was comforted by the

FINALLY PAUL ARRIVES AT ROME

words of prophecy of Isaiah 6:9,10. The people heard the good news of Jesus. But they intentionally rejected it and remained in sin. Because of the rejection of the Jews in Rome, the word of God began to spread to the Gentiles (Ro 11:11).

It was indeed a discouraging situation to Paul. But Paul overcame discouragement in the realization of the characteristics of God's work and history. In God's work it always seems that there are only a few who believe the gospel of Jesus, and among these few, some give up the life of faith and defect, and many reject the gospel of Jesus intentionally and publicly. But as history attests, though it is indeed unbelievable, the church of Jesus has conquered the whole world. Paul, who had a sense of God's work and history, said in 28:28, "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" So many people rejected his teaching. But Paul believed that, in the end, they would listen and the whole world would be saved. Because of his faith in God's work and history, Paul kept on teaching the Bible to people in his own rented house. Most likely, Paul worked part time as a tentmaker and supported himself. Even though his teaching seemed to be in vain, Paul was full of spirit. Verse 31 says, "Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ."

In this passage we learn that one person Paul's faith was very important. Because of his faith 276 members were saved in the shipwreck. Because of one person Paul's faith, the work of God at Rome was going on. Most importantly, God could conquer the Roman world because there was Paul who had faith in his word. Sometimes we are discouraged because the work of God does not grow as we expect it to. But visible work is not so important. The visible work of God is always discouraging, but God is fulfilling the work of world salvation according to his own time schedule. It was possible for Paul to keep on doing God's work when he remembered God's grace and God's great purpose for him. Most importantly, Paul was willing to fulfill God's will, that through Roman roads the whole world might be evangelized by the gospel of Jesus. Paul was happy to see God's salvation work fulfilled through him if God was willing. Because of the hope of Israel Paul came to Rome as a missionary in chains.

St. Luke did not record how Paul died, for though he died, the work

FINALLY PAUL ARRIVES AT ROME

he did is still going on through those who know God's grace through our Lord Jesus. May God help us realize that God has a great hope in each of us.