Text: Acts 28:17-31
Title: Ministry in Rome
Truth: Keep on proclaiming the truth, no matter where you are!
Date/Location: Wednesday July 9, 2014 and June 25/July 2, 2025

Introduction

[2014: Since our last study on June 11, we had a missionary visitor, and then Pastor John O'Dell taught on two Wednesdays. Now we have the opportunity to visit Acts 28 again.]

2025: We have been away from Acts for two weeks because we participated in a missionary candidate welcome service with Gospel Mission of South America on June 18. We return now to finish our study of Acts 28. Note carefully the main topics that Paul discusses with the Jewish leaders: the hope of Israel as the underlying cause of his imprisonment, the kingdom of God, Jesus from the Old Testament, the hardness of heart of people, and salvation being shared with the Gentiles.

I. Paul's Initial Meeting with Jewish Leaders, 17-22

Paul did not waste time. After just three days and he was talking to leaders of the Jewish community in Rome.

A. Paul's Explanation, v. 17-20. Paul affirmed he had done nothing wrong to the Jewish people or customs. The Roman governors and Herod Agrippa agreed on this point. But Paul was compelled to appeal to Caesar—not because he was going to accuse the Jews, but because he had been found innocent and *still* the Jews wanted to kill him, so he needed to establish his innocence before the highest court in the empire. It is conceivable that Paul could have counter-sued them, charging them with malicious prosecution, but the effect of that on Jews throughout the empire may have been too much for Paul to contemplate it.

The reason he had been found innocent was that he had done nothing worthy of death—in other words, a good decision was rendered, but only partially so, because the Romans would have permitted him to be subject to another set of laws, like a double-jeopardy situation.

All of this was the reason why Paul called for the Jews to gather so he could explain this. But that was only the opening or "presenting" reason. More importantly, he wanted to tell them that the ultimate cause for his being imprisoned is that he holds to the **hope of Israel**. He should be far away from chains and imprisonment, but instead he is suffering for the good news. He is a faithful Jew proclaiming the faithful promises of God

that fulfill the Jewish Scriptures. He wants to tell this news to the Jewish people of Rome—not to "tattle" on their Jewish compatriots in Jerusalem or make the Jewish people look bad.

B. What is that hope? Let Acts define the term "hope" for us in Acts 2:26, 23:6, 24:15, 26:6-8. It is the expectation of **resurrection from the dead**. Without that, there is no 'hope' in the Christian sense of the term. If we just die and are no more, like the pagan thinks, then Christianity would be utterly false and life would ultimately be meaningless. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." Logically the pursuit of every pleasure would make sense in that scenario. And while that pleasure may include some doing of good, the impetus for doing true good comes from God.

I add that this expression of the hope is shorthand because Paul is not just thinking of the fact that his dead body will come back to life in a vacuum or that the resurrection will occur and he will land in heaven in the end. The hope of the resurrection is more than just heaven, and we know that because when people die, their spirits go to heaven already. There would be nothing special about "the resurrection" if all it meant was going to heaven, for people do that *without* resurrection. People are in heaven today prior to the Rapture. But they will experience resurrection of their bodies.

Paul is thinking of the entire plan of God as to where resurrected ones will live, what they will do, what society they will be in, and the King and kingdom that will rule that society. To be part of "the resurrection" is to be part of a bigger picture than just "my salvation." Think of the phrase "in the resurrection" that occurs in Matt. 22:30 and John 11:24 as more than a singular event, but as a state, a place, a kingdom. It is like "in the regeneration" of Matthew 19:28.

C. The Jewish Response, v. 21-22. The Jews said they have heard nothing of the supposed wrong that Paul did. They did not hear any evil about Paul. I suspect that was only a matter of time before the Jewish leaders would spread their propaganda around Rome. But Paul's audience did want to learn more about Christianity, because they had heard that it was spoken against everywhere. This is an honest answer. These ones, so far, were more reasonable, like the Bereans (17:11).

Pray with me that we would find some of our Jewish friends who would be open to hear about the gospel of Jesus. Pray also that God would open the minds of people. Like back then, today people have heard that Christianity is bad. They might have heard that religion is the source of most of the world's problems; or that Christians are intolerant; or that

the church is full of hypocrites; or that Christians hate certain types of people; or that the Catholics have a severe abuse scandal; or any number of other things. The deck is stacked against us. Satan has seen to that.

II. Paul's Second Meeting with the Jews, v. 23-29

The Jewish audience was gracious and offered to visit again, in even greater numbers, and in fact they had a whole-day seminar. Notice the main topics of his teaching:

A. Paul taught them about **the kingdom of God**. His method was explaining, meaning careful elaboration, and solemn testimony, which is to bear witness to something of great importance.

What specifically did he teach them? The Bible does not say here. But it is interesting that the book of Acts starts out with the same kind of language in Acts 1:3 and 1:6-7. The apostles did not understand the kingdom of God in the beginning of Acts; that situation prevails today in large measure. The apostle to the Gentiles understood it very well and is teaching it to others. We should be farther along in our understanding as well.

What we can understand from Acts is that the kingdom was a key subject of apostolic preaching (8:12, 14:22, 19:8, 20:25). It should be of our preaching. It was something that was forward looking (14:22). It was always associated with proclaiming Christ (but not, as I understand, in a way that equates the two but rather keeps them separate, 28:23, 31; 8:12).

What exactly did Paul solemnly teach about the kingdom?

0. We pray for it to come, like Jesus taught us in Matt. 6:9-13.

1. Jesus will be the king. He is presently king-in-waiting.

2. It will be universal, that is, over the entire world.

3. It will have Israel as the elevated nation.

4. In it, Christians will reign with Christ.

5. It is not the same as the church.

6. We await its coming, which corresponds to when Jesus returns.

7. You have to be born again to enjoy its blessings.

8. It will be a time of peace and harmony among the nations.

9. It will be a time of agricultural and material prosperity.

10. True religion will be openly evident and spiritual prosperity will be much greater than it is today. There will be an operational temple.

11. Justice will be served swiftly.

12. Jesus will be the high priest of the Melchizedek order.

B. Paul **persuaded them about Jesus from the Law and Prophets**. This refers to the entire Hebrew Bible. He skillfully took the Hebrew Bible and showed how it predicted Christ, and how those prophecies were fulfilled.

Again, it would be a fascinating study to fill out the details of this. Here are some starting points from the Acts 17:1-9 message in this series.

More or less direct prophecies: Gen. 3:15, Daniel 7:13-14, 9:25-26, Psalm 110, Isaiah 7:14, 9:1-2, Isaiah 53:8-10 (death for sinners), 61:1, Micah 5:2, Zech. 9:9, Deut. 18:15, Acts 2:25-30 (resurrection, from Psalm 16:8-11).

Implications: Isaiah 53:12 (implies resurrection). God's promises to the Messiah imply as well that He will be raised (Psalm 2:7, 110, Isaiah 55:3).

Analogies: Passover Lamb, scapegoat, likeness to the nation of Israel and her sojourn in Egypt and wilderness wandering, the elevated bronze serpent, and parallels with the righteous sufferer in Psalms.

C. There was a twofold response among the Jewish audience: some were persuaded and others did not believe, v. 24. We would not expect them to come to a group consensus as to Paul's teaching. This is normal, and we should not at all be surprised. Household conversions are rare, and a large "group" conversion would be highly unusual.

D. Paul's reply to the unbelieving in the group consisted of Isaiah 6:9-10 and a proclamation that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles. These words are tough for the Jews to hear—that they are stubborn of heart, cannot understand the truth, and are cannot be healed by God in that state. Pause and ponder for a few moments what I means that a person can hear and see, but not understand and perceive. Think about that. Think of the darkness that must surround your heart if you are in that state. Like face blindness—you can see but not perceive. Or like an auditory processing disability—you can hear but not understand. This is what it is like in the spiritual realm. Spiritual insight requires more than physical senses; it relies on the posture of our hearts toward God's truth.

Consider a historian who studies ancient texts. Despite the words being clear and in front of him, he may miss the deeper cultural implications and lessons due to a lack of contextual understanding. This mirrors our Christian walk, as we can read scripture and yet fail to let it transform us, simply going through the motions without true comprehension.

Imagine a man walking along a beautiful beach, focusing only on his phone. Although he can see the waves, the sun setting on the horizon, and the seagulls flying by, he completely misses the beauty around him. This serves as a reminder that we can often be physically present yet spiritually absent, failing to perceive what God is saying in the everyday moments of our lives.

In the early 20th century, an inventor named Christopher Sholes created the first functioning typewriter. Although the machine worked perfectly, many were skeptical about its practicality, failing to see its potential for transforming communication. Similarly, we can be surrounded by messages from God yet fail to perceive their significance in our lives, blinded by our preconceptions and distractions.

Imagine a factory with machines that produce thousands of items daily. Workers automatically repeat their tasks yet may lose sight of the bigger picture: the purpose behind their work. Likewise, Christians may attend church regularly and hear the message but still not grasp its transformative power, becoming mere spectators instead of active participants in God's mission.

E. Gentile salvation is a major feature of both Testaments—and another interesting study to undertake. In the vast scope of world history with all of its tribal deities, it is a significant truth that the God of the Jews is also the same God of the Gentiles. There is *one* God who is over all, Lord of Heaven and earth and all that is in them.

F. Verse 29 records that Paul's words raised the dispute level. They were true nonetheless. This was not a "safe space" for ideas about God that are not true, where you can hold any idea you want without getting pushback.

III. Paul's Ongoing Ministry, v. 30-31

A. For two years Paul was able to continue preaching and teaching (proclaiming and instructing) the people who came to him.

It is good to think about the difference of teaching and preaching for a minute. Preaching is proclaiming "this is the way it is" with exhortation. Teaching is instruction and explanation. The two activities overlap because illustration and argumentation and the like are helpful in both realms.

B. The content, once again, was the **kingdom of God** and teaching that which concerned the **Lord Jesus Christ**. Paul announced the kingdom of God and explained what and why and how about the Lord Jesus Christ (see above).

It is interesting to search the Bible for all the verses that refer to Jesus and the kingdom. There are over two dozen verses.

C. He was unfettered in his preaching. First, he did not have inner timidity. He was confident, not mainly in himself but in Jesus. He was also not hindered by outward persecution. No one told him he could not preach!

Application: We can be hindered by either internal or external things, but we must not allow either to stop us.

D. We do not know exactly how long Paul was in prison beyond the two years. It would be nice to have more chapters in Acts to fill out the narrative of Paul's life, but God saw fit to leave us in the dark.

Conclusion

A. **About this passage**. God promised Paul would get to Rome, and he did. Paul preached the word of Christ faithfully there for a long time before Luke's narrative finishes.

B. **About the book of Acts**. Acts is the history of the early church. While not everything recorded in it is normative for today, it does show us that Paul and the other apostles focused on evangelism and starting churches. That is a rock-solid place for us to be in terms of ministry philosophy. God saw fit that we have sufficient material to guide us for the rest of the church age. After that, we trust, Jesus will give further instruction and we have the prophetic teaching of the Bible that gives us a clue about what is coming.

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