

Acts 28: 16-31; “Paul with the Jews at Rome”, Sermon # 93 in the series – “Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 12th, 2023, in the Morning Worship Service.

Last Sunday I spoke to you about the fact that the apostle Paul was bound with a chain for the Hope of Israel. Paul’s ministry, whether it was to Jews or Gentiles, was concerning Jesus; Who was, and Who is, the Hope of Israel. He is both the Hope of the spiritual Israel of God, and the Hope of physical ethnic Israel who has never been cast off by God, even though in large measure they rejected Christ as their Messiah when He came to them. And they have still, for the most part, continued to reject Him all the way down through Church history until this very day.

In this chapter Paul spoke with the Jews of Rome, when they came to meet with him. He spoke to them from morning till evening, it says in verse 23. Paul’s great concern was to preach the kingdom of God and teach the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, and to do so with all confidence. This goal was accomplished with these Jews, even though they were – so divided among themselves as to whether what Paul said was true. So, here in this message I want to delve into Paul’s final written recorded message to them, and have us understand just how Paul ministered to people in this last stage of his ministry.

1st of all – Paul tried very hard to persuade these Jews concerning the Kingdom of God and concerning Jesus being their Promised Messiah. (verses 22-24)

Verse 22 says – “But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.” “So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.” “And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.” Now, it is very important to the forward progress of the gospel and the kingdom of God that every Christian understand the overview of God’s dealing with the Jewish people and nation during this Church age from the beginning of it.

Some of these men who were listening to Paul thought that Christianity was a sect, and not a fulfillment of what Moses and the Prophets had written. From the beginning, from the days of the apostles there was not agreement among the Jews concerning whether the Lord Jesus Christ was their Promised Messiah. This was what the apostle spoke to them about, solemnly testifying of the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets from morning till evening. He no doubt mentioned Moses’ direct reference to the Prophet whom God would raise up for the Jewish people found in Deuteronomy 18: 15-19.

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren.” “Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’” “And the Lord said to me: ‘What they have spoken is good.’” “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.” “And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.” Very solemn words indeed!

God says here that He would require it of them, the Jewish people, that they would hear the words of His Christ. And if they did not, they would be judged for it. We see here that there was, in the proclamation of the truth of God’s word, a presentation of prophetic truth in the Old Testament Scriptures. And then came the historic fulfillment, which took place in the birth, the

life, and the ministry of the Lord Jesus. And then as God had said, there would come a judgement which He Himself would make, based on whether His words concerning His Christ were heeded by His ancient people, the Jews. Little did they know of what was going to come to the whole Jewish nation in 70 A.D., when God would utterly destroy the city of Jerusalem and scatter the Jews throughout the world. This conversation which Paul had with these men was typical of the response of the Jews as a whole, as a people and as a nation. Some were persuaded and some disbelieved. Part of the problem in these men's minds was the lack of outward impressiveness in the Person of the Lord Jesus.

Paul probably spoke with these Jews concerning the atoning death of the Lord Jesus which was clearly prophesied in Isaiah chapter 53: 1-3. "Who has believed our report?" "And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" "For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and a root out of dry ground." "He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him." "He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." "And we hid, as were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him." It is very possible that Paul read these words to them, and then reminded them of the meekness of Jesus, and His purpose in coming into the world, to suffer for the sins of all of God's elect people, Jew and Gentile.

And yet he also would speak of the perfections and the spiritual strength of the Lord Jesus; His being "the arm of the Lord". He no doubt knew that it was Jesus' not coming to His people as a conquering political King which stumbled many of the Jews. And the fact that He would have to bear their sins, and that they could not trust in their own righteousness to save them; these things were troubling to them also. Verse 4 of Isaiah 53 – Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted."

Paul no doubt reminded them of how the Lord Jesus was rejected by the Jewish leaders, but that God's purpose was to use His death to make Him an offering for sin. Verse 10 – "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief." "When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand." When Paul showed them these verses, he could also have very easily have preached to them in Jesus, the resurrection from the dead as well. If he spoke to them from morning till evening, that was a good long time.

He no doubt had time to speak to them of the fact that the Lord Jesus was no mere man but God's Son. He could have shared Psalm 2 with them, about the Father saying to the Son there in verse 7 – "I will declare the decree: the Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.'" "Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession." He could have made the appeal to them of verses 11 and 12, that they would be wise; that they would be instructed, and that they would serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling at the greatness of all that had been accomplished by Christ in the great redemption that He purchased for sinners, among all the nations, anyone who would receive Him.

That they should kiss the Son, lest he be angry and they perish in the way, when His wrath was kindled but a little. He could have shown them from verses 1-3 that the leaders in Jerusalem were very wrong in plotting to put the Lord Jesus to death. This was probably very troubling to some of the Jews that Paul spoke to. They had a hard time believing that the whole Sanhedrim were sinfully very wrong when they took counsel against Jesus. Could it really be proved that all that they had done was against the Lord and against His anointed? Was Jesus really the Promised Messiah? Was He the Prophet like Moses? Were their leaders in Jerusalem only fulfilling the Scriptures and the purpose of God when they asked for Him to be crucified?

And so, even though Paul was speaking to them in the power of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless, they were not persuaded. They did not believe what Paul was telling them. We should understand that this is always the way that it is when the gospel is preached. People are only persuaded of the truth concerning Jesus when the Lord causes them to be born again, opens their eyes to the truth, and circumcises their hearts. As one hymnwriter puts it – All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down. Brethren, pray and holy manna will be scattered all around. For some of these Jews what Paul was saying was the fragrance of life leading to eternal life, and to some, it was the fragrance of death leading to death. But Paul spoke sincerely, as from God. He spoke in the sight of God in Christ. Even so, we ought to receive this word of Life and Hope in Christ, as life to us.

2nd – Paul reproved these Jews for their dullness & hardness of heart, using the Scriptures to do so. (verses 25-27)

“So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: ‘The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, ‘Go to this people and say: Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull.’ “Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.” Here we find an astonishing thing, that even when Paul had spoken all day to them concerning Christ and the kingdom of God, that these Jews could not agree among themselves as to whether what he was saying was true.

Paul knew then, that the Holy Spirit would not be striving any longer with those who disbelieved. When they refused to consider what he was saying, and they would not believe in Christ, he quoted to them this passage from Isaiah chapter 6. It is an amazing thing, but these words of the prophecy of Isaiah are quoted 6 times in the New Testament. The first time by Jesus in Matthew 13: 14 and 15, in his explaining why He spoke to the people in Parables. Also in Mark 4, verse 11, and Luke 8: 10, when Jesus said to his disciples – “To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them.”

Yet again it is mentioned in John chapter 12, verse 37, when John writes – “But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled...” Besides Paul mentioning this passage in Isaiah 6 here in Acts 28, we find him mentioning it in Romans chapter 11, verses 6 & 7 – “And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.” “But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.” “What then?” “Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.”

Paul is only speaking of the Jews here, although the principles of grace and works apply to all men seeking salvation. Listen to verse 8 – “Just as it is written: ‘God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.’” Paul is speaking of the whole time from when Isaiah received the prophecy in his time, until the present day when Paul was writing the epistle to the Romans. The eyes of Israel, physical, ethnic Israel, with the exception of those whom God has reserved to Himself in election, which he mentions in verse 5, have been blind to the great salvation in Christ Jesus.

Paul reproveth these Jews at Rome who disbelieved with these verses. But we should understand that when he did this, he was including the whole of the Jews, physical, ethnic Israel, when he says in verse 26, quoting Isaiah, “Go to this people and say: Hearing you will hear, and shall understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have

grown dull.” Because this had been the case generally with the Jews all through his ministry. And brethren, it has been the case all down through Church history to this present day as well. As sad as this is to say, you see this judicial partial hardening of the Jews still upon the Jews as a people and a nation, even now. But this was prophesied of, by our Lord Jesus in Luke 21: 24. In that place Jesus is speaking of the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and he says to his disciples – “And they (that is the unbelieving Jews) will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive in to all nations.” “And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

As it is evident in many ways, the times of the Gentiles are not yet fulfilled in Church history, and so Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jewish people is still being trampled down by Gentiles, and will be until the Jews come to faith in Christ in their national conversion, when they will see Him as their Savior. This also is mentioned in Romans chapter 11, verse 25 where it says – “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part (or a partial hardening) has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

That this cannot be spiritual Israel that is being talked about here, is evident from the fact that if you read the verse that way, it makes no sense. A blindness or partial hardening has happened to spiritual Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. This doesn’t make any sense. What we need to understand is this: That the partial hardening or blindness of the Jewish people and nation will not be forever. It will only be until a certain time. As it says in Romans 11: 26 and 27 – “And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” Paul is speaking of bringing the Jewish people into covenant with Himself through the New Covenant in Christ. In this case, it will be both an individual and a national covenant, so that they will be grafted into the Church.

Questions related to how many of them; all of them, or the vast majority of them, being saved, we can leave until the event takes place. My brethren, it was a great grief to Paul that these things were going to happen to his beloved fellow countrymen in God’s judging them for their rejection of Christ. He says so in Romans 9: 1-3. Let us learn to think of them with pity, and pray for their conversion. The gospel was sent to the Jews first. Paul says that in Romans chapter 1. And, you will notice that in all of his letters, Paul does not say that he is no longer a Jew, now that he has become a Christian. Quite the opposite. He called himself a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

But he also says that we who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and place no confidence in the flesh, are the true circumcision. This is the spiritual Israel of God, which is made up of Jews and Gentiles. Let us learn to distinguish rightly things which are related to one another. I mean spiritual Israel and the future of ethnic and national Israel. Not all physical Israel are spiritual Israel, it is true. But there has always been a remnant of Jews converted in every generation of Church history. But physical Israel, even though presently blind and hard will have a great future coming, in those days when the Lord brings back their captivity.

3rd – Paul, with apostolic authority gave the Jews bad news, and the Gentiles good news.

verse 28 – “Therefore, let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it.” “And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.” “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.” So, when Paul let these Jews know that the salvation of God had been sent to the Gentiles, it was a formal apostolic

pronouncement which he knew would be written down by Luke, and included in the Holy Scriptures.

It was a very gracious thing which the Lord did here for Paul, in his being able to dwell in his own rented house for two years and to be able to preach and teach the word of God to the people who came to him. We should all pray to be able to be useful to God as long as the Lord will lend us life, and not be too concerned whether our personal ministry will be to many people or few. Or whether, if you are a minister, you are preaching in a large church building or a house. If the great apostle Paul finished in this way, then so can we. If all of these Jews who came to talk to Paul fit into this house, when they listened to him and held conversation with them, then the house couldn't have been too small. Paul had Luke with him during that time, I believe. For near the end of his life, when he wrote 2nd Timothy, he says in chapter 4, verse 11 – “Only Luke is with me.” “Get Mark and bring him with you.” “For he is useful to me for ministry”. Let us also seek to be useful to Christ while we have life and breath.