

Kingdom Living

Acts 28:11-14

We are with Paul still on Malta as he is found there for three whole months – waiting for safe sailing to return – and continuing to enjoy the favor of the people there. Paul was their physician and preacher, and they were his protector and provider, even as they set sail.

Thus the New Testament Odyssey is drawing to a close, and with it, the great Book of Acts.

How do you write a fitting conclusion to such a book? How would you close the story? Paul has been driving toward this goal from at least chapter 21 – of going to Rome. But it is not with the king of men, but the King of kings with whom he has to do; it is not the Kingdom of men but the Kingdom of God, made of both Jew and Gentile, that is his concern.

This is fitting. The kingdom has played a pivotal part all through the book of Acts. **Acts 1:3** speaks of Jesus presenting Himself alive after His suffering, speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

In Samaria, Lystra, Ephesus, and now Rome, the good news of the Kingdom of God and the name of the Lord Christ was preached and solemnly testified to.

The kingdom marks then, the last words of this great missionary book. Look at these closing words beneath that great modifying theme – The Kingdom! Here is Kingdom Living, Kingdom Persuasion, Kingdom Hardening, and Kingdom Salvation.

And let us see that we are all sharers in and subjects of this Kingdom of God, a Heavenly Kingdom, the Father's Kingdom, the Kingdom of His beloved Son, the Powerful Kingdom by the Spirit, the Kingdom of Glory and of Gospel Grace.

See your estate in Christ here and now, and be moved to greater courage and contentment as you follow your King in His Kingdom. May you sing more solidly those simple lines:

*I'm a child of the King,
A child of the King:
With Jesus my Savior,
I'm a child of the King.*

See in verse 11 the first two of our points today – Our Kingdom Provision and Kingdom Confidence

After three months – roughly Nov. Dec and Jan. – Paul the Prisoner boards his third ship, another Alexandrian grain boat which had made it safely to that island and wintered there. We will see in this last lap, as Bruce calls it, the Apostle and his companions travelling half by sea and half by land to come to Rome. There is some question as to whether this boat is not sailing a little early, since the shipping lanes did not open until early March or in February. But in any event, here is the Lord's Provision for Paul, and notice the variety of ways our God cares for his creatures.

Here is a crew which made it to safe harbor in time, where Paul's crew had jumped the gun and was shipwrecked. As they boarded this vessel, did they think to themselves – 'wish I sailed on this boat instead of the other!'

Of course, every creature under the sun can say it is provided for by God; all good gifts come down from the Father of Light; there are none who don't owe him a debt of thanksgiving and worship. So couldn't everyone say, "My Father made and provided these things for me?"

And the answer would have to be yes and no. Yes, as the Creator of all men can look to God as their Maker, and thus their Father. But they are, most of them, strangers to their God, calling upon Him only distantly, and not drawing near to Him through the Son. And this failure to own the true God, is evident in the name of this ship – as having its figurehead the Twin Brothers, the twin gods, the sons of Zeus, Castor and Polux, the gods of smooth sailing and good fortune in storms.

That is why I want to hold the first two points together – **Kingdom Provision and Kingdom Confidence**. "Ah, this ship was saved because of her devotion to these two gods!" Really? The providence that surrounds us every day, is not the work of men's hands, the idols of wood and stone.

"Vain are the heathen gods, idols, and helpless; God made the heavens, and His glory they tell!"

We know we are the children of the King, not by the possessions we have, or the safety we are given or not given. If our confidence is set upon the shifting tide of wealth, health, pleasure or place, we would be like Chicken Little, running crazy at the first drop of rain!

Your being a child of the King in His Kingdom has everything to do with His Son, who has called you to be His friends, His Brothers, His Kingdom. Think of it – you, child of God by faith in His Son, cannot be more a child of God than you already are! You are beloved of God,

owned by Him, prized by Him, and kept by Him! It is an interesting thing – I can see God’s love to me in the gifts that surround me daily – in the gift of a wife, my children, my home, my health – but it is because I know Him who has given these gifts that brings the confidence of my soul.

We dare not say that the care we experience from God are big nothings; the point is that they are not big everything!

Men give their praise to the fates, to their own wisdom or effort; they sacrifice to their nets and plows – whatever brings success. But Christians know what superstition is involved in worshipping the Horoscope as these sailors did.

And see further here the nature of the Kingdom of God – it is not of this world, but it is in this world. Here is godly Paul and Luke aboard a pagan’s boat. But in truth, it is reversed; the pagan is dependent upon the Ark of the godly. Think of Sodom, which the Lord would have spared if it had only 10 righteous souls in it! The Lord cares for, and sustains the world for the sake of His glory in His elect.

Who would not want to have this **Kingdom Provision and Confidence**? Walking through this greatly troubled world – we are not satisfied or brought to full joy and confidence except in this way. And what a sure, steadfast and powerful way this is, the way of faith – trusting in the Savior!

Robert Leighton says this on being kept by the power of God: “Our faith lays hold upon this power and this power strengthens faith and so we are preserved. It puts us within those walls; it sets the soul within the guard of the power of God; which by self-confidence and vain-presuming in its own strength, is exposed to all kinds of danger. Faith

is a humble, self-denying grace. It makes the Christian nothing in himself and all in God. It is the property of a good Christian to magnify the power of God and to have high thoughts of it. And therefore it is our privilege to find safety in that power.” Quoted in Keddie, pp. 321-322

Everybody trusts something; you trust the only proper, reasonable and sure foundation – trusting in Jesus Christ, King of eternity.

Let us come next to our **Kingdom Safety** as Paul aboard this ship makes his way by God’s care to Syracuse of Sicily, to Rhegium in the toe of Italy, and to Puteoli, 175 miles north of the southern tip of Italy.

A little background on these places:

Syracuse – largest city and best port of Sicily, and was the capital there; originally settled by the Greeks in 734, it was taken over by the Romans in 212. It once stood with the great City States of Athens and Sparta, but dwindled over time. Today it has only half of the 250,000 which once called this port home. It has suffered the ravages of earthquakes, two horrible plagues, and was destroyed by Allied and German bombings in the 2nd World War.

Rhegium is the southernmost port of Italy; but it was not large, and most ships would pass it by for Puteoli in southern Italy. Claudius built a better harbor still further north, near the Tiber River, so the old way of off-loading the cargo and carrying it up Appian Way by land, was shrinking.

But the point here has to do with the navigation between these ports. They are three days in Syracuse, awaiting the right wind; they are a day in Rhegium before a southerly breeze arises, and they travel 175 miles north in only two days! What is fascinating is the language of

verse 13 – “we sailed around”. This almost certainly means they had to navigate by way of tacking back and forth, because of the winds and the danger. Here in this strait they had to cross between the famous Scylla and Charybdis; Scylla was a harsh rocky shoal on the Italian side, and Charybdis was a powerful whirlpool on the Sicilian side. They would become a proverb for being between a rock and a hard place; the choice between the frying pan or the fire!

As we have learned all along, then in Acts, being a child of God does not exempt you from trials and hardships. In fact the Gospel will bring with its blessings its own set of tests and adversities. There will be smooth-sailing times, as well as times of dangerous and hard sailing. The great motto of Calvin comes to mind – it’s a good one, you should memorize it: “Thankful in prosperity, patient in adversity, hopeful for the future.” There is no circumstance, good or ill, for which the believer is not equipped. We need to know what is called for in the various changes in life. The same tack will not do for all. We are not to rejoice with those who weep or weep with those who rejoice.

Yet it is the same Lord who is faithful in all things. Your citizenship and calling in His kingdom assures you of a safely kept life; and God has given you His love, His grace, His Word, His care – that you might not only be His but that He would mold you and bring you at last to your heavenly Kingdom.

So, on the one hand, all things – even our failures, our short-comings, our mistakes, and we even say, our sin – must work together for good; they cannot overcome a child of God harbored in the sovereign grace of His Heart and Hand.

But on the other, we are called to make the most of our present providences; we are not to merely float along, like a stick on the

stream. Let us be alive and zealous and real regarding our pilgrimage, our lives lived for Him. For we shall not pass this way again.

Then, thankfully, we do not pass this way alone; that leads us to our last two points – **Our Kingdom Fellowship and Our Kingdom Praise and Encouragement.**

Paul was welcomed by the brethren in Puteoli for 7 days; and later, as he makes his way to Rome, Christians from the city come to meet him and escort him back to the capital. There must have been considerable generosity – not only on the part of the believers in that city of verse 14 – but as well on the part of Julius the guard. You got to wonder what he was thinking of Christianity by now – he sees the warmth and welcome received.

And that is what we have in this bond. We can pick up with a fellow Christian just about anywhere, at anytime, and there is a fellowship, a communion, which the world does not know. In this everlasting Kingdom, every Christian calls God Father, has a home which is above, possesses the same faith, love, hope, patience and joy; all are marching toward the same Celestial City, sing the same praises, triumph over the same devil, and enjoy the same grace for their sin.

What did these believers do with Paul for seven whole days! They surely worshipped together on the Lord's Day; they surely sat at the Apostles feet to be taught; they certainly spent time in prayer for the church, for Paul's success in Rome, and so forth.

News of Paul's long-anticipated arrival spread from here northward to the saints in Rome. And so some of them make their way south to Three Taverns – a collection of shops and huts about 33 miles from Rome. And some come another 10 miles to the Forum of Appius, a

market-place, a meeting place of sorts; not the best of places; Horace called it a place crammed with Boatmen and stingy Tavern-keepers.

But what a picture. Paul is walking up the Appian Way – the most famous Roman Road – to the very capital of the empire, to meet with Caesar; he travels this highway which Longnecker calls the “oldest, straightest, and most perfectly made of all the Roman Roads”.

However, there are better things than what Man’s Kingdom can afford us here – a fellowship and worship that is out of this world, that is marvelous beyond words. This coming out to meet Paul is wording often used to escort royalty; something of an official welcome of some dignity. Remarkably, it is the identical phrase used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 – then we who are alive and remain will be caught up – raptured together with them – in the clouds, **to meet** the Lord in the air – that is, when Christ returns. We will go forth to Him to meet Him, and turn back then and escort him to earth, to reign forever, and to be forever with the Lord.

So if Paul was warmly welcomed in Puteoli, how much more do we see something of a triumphal entry here of the ambassador of heaven, of Jesus Christ the Lord of lords, and king of kings. This brought great joy to the heart of the apostle – he thanked God and took courage – verse 15.

We will have to end on this – the gratitude to God in all things, especially in the house of faith. Encouragement and strength should be drawn from the hand of our God, again, especially in the household of faith. The church should be a place of fellowship; of meeting one another before the throne of Jesus; Kingdom living should be rich in worship, praise and edification.

It is not that we sometimes don't get discouraged, or that we sometimes grow cold in our devotion – we do. But we should not rest there; we should shake ourselves off of such things, and come fresh to the Lord rich in abundance – joy in adoration and help for us to stand and walk.

Jay comments that either of these qualities are, on their own, excellent; thankful, taking courage. But they are especially so in union together.

I couldn't agree more; doesn't thanksgiving to God lead to strengthening, to courage? Can we be strong or courageous without a close and warm devotion with the Lord? See how the two play off one another – the more thanks to God, the more we are built up inwardly that He deserves all adoration and praise; the more we grow in grace and in the strengthening knowledge and fellowship with our King, the more we will give him the honor that is his due.

And this is done with benefit to others. Paul had wanted to be a blessing to the Roman Christians – those who had come to the Lord at Pentecost back in Acts 2; and here he is being blessed by the sacrifices and love of these followers of the Lamb. All of us need such Kingdom blessings – such **Kingdom provision and confidence, Kingdom safety and wisdom, Kingdom Praise and Encouragement** – in short, genuine Kingdom Living; otherwise, we will not Persevere – cannot persevere – cannot come to the end of our race, victorious through grace – as Paul makes it at last to his intended place of service, on his way to Spain.

For remember what he wrote to the Romans several years before in 15:29-33 – a good passage with which to close today, in anticipation of next week's message.

²⁹ *I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.* ³⁰ *Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,* ³¹ *that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints;* ³² *so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.* ³³ *Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.*