

Scripture Reading:

Acts 28:11 “After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. **12** And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. **13** From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, **14** where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome. **15** And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. **16** Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him. **17** And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: “Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, **18** who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. **19** But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. **20** For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.” **21** Then they said to him, “We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. **22** But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.” **23** 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. **24** And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.”

"Paul Gives His Final Defense"

There is a bit of a double-meaning in my sermon title this morning... We will be considering how the Apostle Paul approached the Jews in Rome and it is important to see that he not only defends himself personally, but he also gives another powerful defense of the Gospel. Paul is not defensive in his personal story and Paul is certainly not defensive with the Gospel...

- In both cases Paul tells the truth!

That is the nature and necessity of what we call Apologetics...

- The defense of the Faith!
- We are to be witnesses of Jesus and that simply means telling the truth about Jesus!

Luke gives us the details of Paul's opportunity to share the Good News with his people, the Jews...

This should not surprise us because going to the Jews first has been the pattern throughout the Book of Acts. It was how Jesus handled His ministry, coming to the lost sheep of Israel, it was how Jesus sent out His disciples, going only to the Jews and it was how he instructed His followers to be His witnesses after His ascension... Witnessing first in Jerusalem, then in Judea & all Samaria & finally to all the earth.

The promises to Abraham were to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth...

- But until the destruction of Jerusalem we see God's plan was to take the Good News first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles when they refused to believe.
- We will consider this in more detail next week, but for this morning we want to consider how Paul witnessed to the Jews in Rome and the lessons we should learn about our witnessing today.

Picking up our text at verse 16 we read: “Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.”

By God’s providential hand & Paul’s faithful service he is given special privileges here in Rome...

- Privileges that allow him to preach the Kingdom of Jesus to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles.

Yes, he is chained to a Roman guard, but he is not in prison and is allowed to have visitors in great numbers at a large resident that he rented. We know from his letter to the church in Philippi that he also had quite an impact on the soldiers themselves...

Philippians 1:12 “I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, 13 so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; 14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

We see here a clear example of what we studied last week and read again this morning from Romans chapter eight... God does work all things together for our good and the advancement of His Kingdom.

Just how many seeds did God use the Apostle Paul to plant here at the center of the mighty Roman Empire?

- Won’t it be exciting in heaven to see all the details of how these men and the other early Roman converts worked over the next three hundred years leading up to the conversion of Constantine!

As I said last week, we will have no surprises here at the end of the Book of Acts... Paul has arrived at Rome and even though he already has many contacts within the Christian church that was established there, he continues the pattern of his ministry, modeled on the life and command of Jesus: He would go first to the Jews. *[remind them of Paul’s love for his people]* Some historians estimate that there could have been as many as 40,000 Jews in Rome at this time with at least ten Synagogues and thus Luke says:

17 “And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together.”

This brings us to the first part of Paul’s defense... As we would say today, he is going to earn a hearing.

The fact that Paul was a Pharisee trained at the feet of Gamaliel would have gotten the attention of these Jewish leaders, and thus they accept his invitation to visit...

- But now Paul must explain why he has come to Rome as a prisoner...

“So when they had come together, he said to them: “Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, 18 who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. 19 But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. 20 For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.”

- Paul is not deceitful, but he is certainly careful!

Paul makes sure that they understand he is not a prisoner because he had violated the proper Jewish customs based on the Old Testament and that he had not appealed to Caesar as a way to prosecute his treatment by the Jews in Jerusalem nor the Romans.

- He has appealed to Caesar simply to clear his good name and passes over the fact that he was forced to do this to avoid dying at the hands of the Jews in Jerusalem.

His visiting Jewish leaders appear to be just as careful in their response...

21 “ Then they said to him, “We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. 22 But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.”

- It is not surprising that they had not heard about Paul’s case even after his appeal, because the whole reason Julius and his prisoners found themselves in the middle of the storm at sea was because they rushed the trip rather than waiting for spring.

Paul was known in many circles by this time and had written his Epistle to the Church there at Rome at least three years earlier, but if these Jews have any knowledge or rumors of Paul they keep it quiet for now. There had been trouble between the Jews and Christians there in Rome about ten years earlier which had led to both groups being banished for a time so they too were being very careful about what they said, especially in front of a Roman soldier.

In the end Paul does manage to get a hearing before his people...

23 “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.”

- It is amazing to see what happens here in at least three major ways...

The text say ‘many’ came... We don’t know how large this lodging was that Paul had rented but I don’t think it was a one bedroom flat.

It is also amazing to hear that the exchange went on from morning until evening... I don’t think this means that Paul preached for twelve hours, but rather they spent the entire day engaging with him as he “explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus.” *[use the example of what a long day with some visiting families might look like.]*

The last thing that may also be amazing to us as American Christians is the fact that Paul “testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets.”

- He argued from what we call the Old Testament!

We have seen this many times here in the Book of Acts and it should certainly remind us again that we cannot ignore the Old Testament!

Yes, we do have the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament which make it much easier to share the life and ministry of Jesus with people today.

BUT lest we forget, Paul and the other disciples that we have seen witness in the Book of Acts were **EYE WITNESSES** of the events that we have recorded in the Gospels and they **WROTE** the Epistles that we have to teach us today in the New Testament.

IF they needed the wisdom and history of the Law and the Prophets to convince people that Jesus was the promised Messiah and that His Kingdom was going to fill the earth, then I think it is safe to say that we need them no less.

- As we have often said, the Bible is God’s great story of salvation from Genesis to Revelation.

As has been wisely said by some, the Old Testament is the New Testament hidden and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.

- Neither Testament can, nor should, stand alone!

Those Jews who held on to just the Old Testament died in their sins not knowing Jesus as their Savior.

Many today who have left the Old Testament behind have reduced Jesus to just another wise man with some good things to say about how to live our lives.

- They too are in danger of dying in their sins, not knowing that they even need a Savior.
- Only with the entirety of God's Word will we properly see God as our Creator and Redeemer.

Only then will we know the gravity of our sin and the glories of His grace.

- What good would it be to claim the promise of God, asking that He save little Sophie and Rylie from their sins if we don't believe that they were born dead in their trespasses and sins as children of Adam?

So the Apostle Paul is able to witness to these folks for the entire day and in the end we see the reaction that we have often seen in the Book of Acts...

24 "And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved."

We will consider Paul reaction to those who harden their hearts next week, but for this morning I want to remind us that our witness is still important today. If we are to be witnesses for Jesus we must also be willing to earn a hearing: Allow me to use my neighborhood as an example...

Those who have visited our home know that we have some neighbors who are very close... They can hear most of what goes on in our home and if Linda and I had a regular habit of yelling and screaming at each other, it would make it very difficult to get those next door to hear the Good News about Jesus.

We have some neighbors behind us who have a habit of ignoring their front yard and letting the grass die... If I were the pagan, I could easily use this as an excuse to ignore what they might want to share about salvation. Of course our eternal salvation is more important than the condition of ones lawn, but sometimes it is a simple thing like a dry lawn that distracts us or others from what is important...

- Paul did not want the Jews he loved to be focused on that chain!

This does not mean that we have to live perfect lives to earn a hearing, but it should remind us that outward appearances or actions do make a difference.

- If you cut someone off on the freeway, it is not likely that you will be able to share the Gospel with them if you both happen to stop at the same station for some gas at the next exit.

The other important lesson to learn from Paul here is the fact that we will often have to deal with the sins of others before we can earn a hearing.

- Paul was in chains, not because of his actions, but the sins of others.

It might well have been another Christian neighbor who let the lawn die, or someone with a Christian bumper sticker that cut someone off on the freeway or friends who are Christians that battle all the time in their marriage that stand in the way of your getting a good hearing.

We must not allow any of this to dissuade us from being the witnesses that Jesus calls on us to be...

Just as Paul had to diplomatically explain the reason he was in chains we may have to set the stage for an important discussion by first explaining how some do not properly live out the truth of what has happened to them.

We must also be prepared to discuss Jesus from morning until evening!

- We must be able to see Jesus in ALL of the Bible.
- Only then can we share the Good News that people lost in their sin need to hear.
- Only then can we confront the humanistic world-view that dominates our day with the truth that people need to hear.

And just as presenting Jesus as the Messiah was offensive to many of these Jews here in Rome, so we must NOT be surprised when the Gospel brings offenses today as well.

- **We have seen this clearly on the world stage in recent weeks as the Muslim leaders have insisted that no one should be allowed to insult the Prophet Mohamed.**

Well, Mohamed claimed that Jesus was a mere prophet and not the eternal Son of God come in the flesh and I guess that makes him a liar... A charge that would surely insult the Prophet much more than a cheap trailer to a movie that no one has seen.

Now I am not suggesting that we begin a conversation with a Muslim friend or neighbor with the statement that Mohamed was a liar, but IF we do what Paul did here in Rome... Presenting Jesus as the ONLY Savior who can save them from their sins, in the end many Muslims are going to become outraged by such a witness, just as we have seen with many of the Jews here in the Book of Acts.

I heard another example of someone's "offense" on the radio this week with a caller wondering WHY people of faith have to push it on others... In his mind, everyone was entitled to have whatever faith they wanted, they just needed to keep it to themselves.

Obviously, history has shown us that tyrants are always ready and willing to fill such vacuums...

- **But as Christians we must see our need to follow the command of Jesus to be His witnesses as an act of love.**

We do not witness so that we can offend people, we do not witness so we can have a bigger church or claim that Christianity is the biggest religion in the world...

- **We bear witness to Jesus because He commanded us to do so!**
- **We bear witness to Jesus because that gives people the truth that people need to hear.**
- **It is Good News brought to a lost soul! *[the example of having a cure for cancer]***

John 3:16 is perhaps the most widely used verse in evangelism, and it is a good example of why we are obligated to share the Good News, IF we love those who we are able to witness to:

- **It should give us the proper motivation to earn a hearing and to share from morning until evening if necessary!**

John 3:14: "...as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Communion Meditation:

Romans 10:8 13 "...whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." 14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" "