

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #57

Acts 28:11-31

In the last several days, Mr. Speedy and I, along with some others, had the privilege of traveling through the country that was traversed by the Apostle Paul. Having seen it, I can tell you it is very tough country and Paul was a very tough man. It is estimated that in the course of Paul's ministry he traveled 20,000 miles. Those miles were traveled by foot, by horse and by boat. One particular city what we visited was Ephesus and I can tell you getting to Ephesus by a van is still no easy, smooth ride. There are twists and turns and then when you get there it is a tough walk through the city. We came in from the east side and Paul would have come in from the west side. It must have been somewhat of a relief when Paul made it to his destination. At least he could stay for a while before moving on through more tough country.

Paul's final assignment from God was to go to Rome. When he got to Rome, he would have completed his life's mission. But getting to Rome is no easy task. To get there you must sail out into the open seas of the Mediterranean and we may recall that a storm took the ship for a two week ride and ended up with a shipwreck and Paul and everyone else swimming to shore. Paul spent three months on Malta and finally it was time to go to Rome. He was almost done.

The trip to Rome was not easy. It was one filled with twists and turns, hardships, setbacks and even a shipwreck, but when we come to this part of Acts, he arrives. He made it. The point to see here is this:

IN SPITE OF THE HARDSHIPS AND THE SETBACKS AND THE SHIPWRECK, GOD'S SOVEREIGN WILL WAS PERFECTLY ACCOMPLISHED IN THAT PAUL ENDED UP GOING TO ROME.

Doing the will of God is not smooth sailing. Those who teach people that faith in Jesus Christ means that people will have a life free of poverty and pain are heretics who have not read the Scriptures. Doing God's will is tough. It is true that God gives the strength to do His will and it is true that He will reward one who does His will, but it will not be easy and that point is certainly stressed by the life of Paul.

In these final verses there are fifteen final facts that bring this book of Acts to its conclusion:

FACT #1 – Paul sails to Italy on a heathen ship. **28:11**

Paul was not going to sail to Rome on a Christian cruise that features the Gaithers or Charles Stanley; he is on an Alexandrian ship that had two figureheads on it for the two twin sons of the mythological Zeus, who were Castor and Pollux, of the cult of Dioscuri.

We can tell you from visiting the island of Patmos, which is a Greek island, that they still believe in this Greek mythology today. Our tour guide told us that the islands surrounding Patmos came into existence when some mythological god fell out of the side of another mythological god and crashed into the ocean. He was a little disturbed when we said “we don’t believe you or mythology because these beautiful islands were created by God.” But the truth is these heathenistic beliefs are still dominating our world today, just like in Paul’s day.

Think about this for a moment; here is the greatest apostle of God, who writes most Grace Age books of the Bible, and he is sailing to Italy on a heathen ship. God uses heathen travel agencies, heathen ships, heathen jets, heathen pilots, heathen captains to get His people where he wants them to go. Unsaved people build houses for God’s people. Unsaved people sell groceries to God’s people. Unsaved people sell automobiles to God’s people. Unsaved people give jobs to God’s people. God always looks out for His people and often He will use the unsaved world to help him do it.

FACT #2 – Paul sailed to Syracuse and spent three days there. **28:12**

Syracuse (called Siracusa today) was the capital of Sicily. It was located about eighty miles north of Malta. It was a very prosperous city, which today has a population of more than 100,000 people. According to **verse 12**, the ship stopped here for three days. It is possible it stopped for trade purposes or it is possible it stopped for wind purposes; but regardless of the reason, the Apostle Paul spent three days in this city.

I doubt that most people of Syracuse had any idea that the greatest biblical scholar of the Grace Age was spending time in their city. I have no doubt that Paul witnessed while there, but there is no hint that the majority of people were interested in hearing what he could teach them.

FACT #3 – Paul sailed from Syracuse to Rhegium and stayed there one day. **28:13a**

Rhegium is an Italian seaport which sits opposite to the northeastern point of Sicily on the southwest coast of Italy. It has a population today of about 165,000 people. This time of year typically still has snow on the mountaintops and winds are still blowing out of the north. However, we may notice that a very unusual south wind began to blow so after spending one day in Rhegium, they sailed to Puteoli.

I can only tell you that it must have broken Paul’s heart to spend one night or three nights in one of these cities where the people were so lost. This is one thing that moved my heart in Turkey. City after city and the people are lost and about the only thing I could do was to pray that God would save people.

It is very clear to me that if God chooses to raise up a church in a city where His Word is loved and taught, it is a very rare demonstration of His grace because this does not exist in all cities of the world.

FACT #4 – Paul sailed from Rhegium to Puteoli the next day. **28:13b**

Puteoli was a city on the north shore of a bay (called today Naples) that is located about 170-180 miles north from Rhegium. Herodotus says that a ship could sail about 150 miles in 24 hours. This was a famous watering place of the Romans and it was the most accessible harbor near to Rome.

According to historians, Cicero had a villa here and Hadrian had a tomb in this city. The very pier that Paul would have walked on in getting off this ship still remains to this day.

FACT #5 – Paul met some Christians in Puteoli and stayed with them for seven days. **28:14a**

Paul was able to spend a week with Christians who lived in Puteoli. Just imagine the blessing of having Paul there. It must have been a great encouragement for Paul to learn that there were Christians in Puteoli and that his apostolic ministry had been greatly used by God. For seven days these believers had the privilege of listening to the great apostle of grace.

FACT #6 – Paul arrived in Rome . **28:14b**

Now **verse 16** gives us the moment when Paul actually enters Rome proper. This text reveals that they ported their ship in a place that let one travel to Rome. This point intersected the Appian Way, which was the road leading into Rome. At this point Paul was about 125 miles to the south.

FACT #7 – Paul was met by many believers prior to entering Rome . **28:15**

When Paul reached the Market of Appius, located about forty miles out of Rome, he was met by believers, who went out to specifically meet Paul. Not only that but some other believers met up with them ten miles later when they got to a place called “Three Taverns,” which was thirty miles out of Rome. When Paul saw these believers coming because he was there, he thanked God and took courage.

It must have been a great encouragement for Paul to be received so warmly, when he had been criticized so severely. When you have believers rally around you and support you when you are doing God’s will and work, it is a tremendous help.

FACT #8 – Paul was allowed to stay by himself in Rome with one soldier with him. **28:16**

Paul traveled on the Appian Way into Rome in A.D. 62 and was treated very differently than the rest of the prisoners. All prisoners were in Rome but instead of being jailed like the rest of the prisoners, Paul was allowed to live by himself. He was allowed to live with a soldier who guarded him. Paul would later say in Philippians 1:13 that he was able to present Jesus Christ to many of the Roman soldiers.

Everywhere Paul went, he had friends. God raised up people, including Roman soldiers, to help him and care for him.

FACT #9 – Paul calls the leading Jews three days later to explain why he was in Rome.
28:17-20

In our travels to Turkey it becomes very obvious that Jews had synagogues in every city. We know that when John wrote the book of Revelation Jesus said these synagogues were the synagogues of Satan.

Now these leading Jews are all unbelieving Jews. These Jews would have lead synagogues and religious things in Rome. These leaders were not grace promoters or Christ promoters. Paul had been in serious trouble with Jews in his previous ministries, so what he decided to do was to call a meeting and get these men together and address things straight up.

Paul got them together and informed them that he had not done one thing wrong to the Jewish people or against Jewish customs. He said the Jews arrested him and wanted him dead and they turned him over to the Romans and they tried him and the Romans were willing to let him go, but he appealed to Caesar and that is why he was in Rome.

Paul says I am a prisoner for preaching about the hope of Israel, who is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not only the hope of Israel, He is the only hope for the rest of the world. Paul was in trouble because he preached the pure grace of God—faith alone in Christ alone. He preached that Jesus Christ was not a way to God, He was the only way to God. That is what got him in trouble with a religious world that loves works.

FACT #10 – Paul is informed by the Jews that they had not heard anything but would like to hear what he has to say. **28:21-22**

The Jews inform Paul they did not get any letters or verbal report of anything about him. In fact, we have not heard anything badly, but we would like to hear what you have to say.

This was a major switch for Paul. Usually Paul was at odds with the Jews, but now in Rome the Jews want to hear what he has to say. We must be careful not to stereotype everyone into the same category. If most people reject our message, it does not mean all people will reject it.

FACT #11 – Paul teaches the Roman Jews about Jesus. **28:23**

A day was set up for Paul to address these Jews and a large number showed up to hear him. He taught from morning to evening and he tried to persuade them to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation.

It is clear from this verse that Paul showed how the Law of Moses proved us all guilty and how the prophets predicted that one would come who would be a sacrifice for us so that we might be saved.

The grace Gospel of Paul teaches that the Law shows that we deserve the wrath of God and the prophets predict a Savior would die in our place so we could escape the wrath of God.

FACT #12 – The Jews respond to Paul's message. **28:24**

Some Jews believed and some did not believe. Paul hadn't been in Rome long, but already things were happening. Think about this, he is a prisoner and God is using him to reach many in Rome, including some leading Jews.

Some people believed and some would not believe. Here is the greatest apostle in the world presenting his powerful message of grace and the response is some believed and some didn't. It is interesting that Luke seems to emphasize that each person was responsible to believe. Some of the Jews believed and some would not believe.

People who actually do believe are elected by God, but the way God has designed it is that we perceive it as our choice. From a human perspective we make a decision to believe totally and only in Jesus Christ or we make a decision to reject Jesus Christ. In all reality, the one who chooses to believe is the elect and the one who doesn't is not the elect, but the perception we all have is that it is our choice.

Paul preached and some believed and some didn't. We can be certain that if this is the response Paul received to his presentation of grace, this will be our response too.

When we are doing God's will and when we are accurately presenting God's grace Gospel, there will be some who will be influenced by our witness and there will be some who won't.

FACT #13 – Paul spoke one parting negative word to the Jews. **28:25-28**

One must admire the commitment of Paul to preach the truth. He does not back down when these leading Jews rejected Christ, but instead he quoted Isaiah and said this nation was as blind as could be.

They had hardened their hearts against the truth of God and that is why the Gospel had come to Rome. The grace Gospel of salvation has been sent to the Gentile world and you think about this as you read **verse 28**; if you have believed on Jesus Christ, this Gospel has come to you.

FACT #14 – The Jews departed having a great dispute among them. **28:29**

Paul had not been in town long and the pot was stirred. God's truth about grace is not neutral. It is living and active and it is sharp. God's grace is an explosive doctrine and when you present it accurately it causes reaction among religious people.

FACT #15 – Paul stayed a two full years in his own rented quarters preaching and teaching.
28:30-31

Paul was in Rome and he was preaching God's grace Gospel centered on the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is God (Lord); Jesus is Savior (Jesus) and Jesus is the Jewish Messiah (Christ).

Two key things Paul did with his time:

1) Teach God's Word; 2) Write God's Word.

Now the book of Acts ends with Paul staying in Rome and people coming to him to hear him teach.

According to Clement and Eusebius, from the years A.D. 62-68, Paul had two Roman imprisonments. This one here and then he was released for a while for about a year and then was rearrested in A.D. 64-65 and ultimately killed by Nero. Another view says after two years Paul appeared before Caesar and was released for three to five years, went to Spain, then came back to Rome and was executed.

But the book ends somewhat odd. It ends not with what happened to Paul, but with what Paul was preaching. You see the point of Luke was to show how the Gospel of Jesus Christ spread out to the whole world and the way it did was through Paul who ultimately ended up in Rome.

It had not been a smooth trip to Rome, but Paul made it and he did accomplish the will of God.

The message throughout this book of Acts is a message of pure grace. It does not matter if you are Jew or Gentile. It does not matter what your sin or guilt—if you will believe on Jesus Christ you will be saved.

That message is the message that God sent to the world in the book of Acts.