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18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834  
Sunday, June 30, 2019

## Acts 28:17-31 “Paul: Ever Faithful in Witnessing”

Intro. In this passage of Scripture we find the apostle Paul having arrived in the great city of Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire. The city was 8 centuries old at this time. It was run down at one time, but Augustus, the first of the emperors, had done much to beautify Rome. When Paul arrived, Rome was at the height of its imperial power. Paul must have seen some impressive, beautiful buildings. Nero was the Emperor. He was so bad that he killed his own mother! By this time Rome probably had a population of more than 1 million. There were people there from all over the world. Though the city had its beauty, it also had its slums. There was a great contrast between the rich and the poor. What’s new under the sun?

Though Paul wanted to arrive in Rome as a free missionary (Rom. 1:15), he arrived in Rome as a prisoner. And yet, he sought for ways to be a witness and to serve the Lord no matter what his lot in life may be. Paul was given some freedom as a trusted prisoner. Instead of staying in a prison, he was allowed to rent a house while awaiting trial, even though he still remained bound to a Roman soldier almost at all times (Eph. 6:20; Php. 1:7-16; Col. 4:3, 17). As we would expect, soon Paul began to tell others about Jesus Christ. In fact, v.17 indicates that he made contact with the leaders of the Jews in just three days’ time. That was just enough time to secure living arrangements and rest a little. This was in character for Paul. Whenever Paul went to a new city, he spoke to the Jewish people first. The Jewish people were the chosen people of God, and so they were to receive the first opportunity to be saved (Rom. 1:16; cf. Rom. 10:1).

The Jewish people had known about God for hundreds of years. The father of their nation, Abraham, was born about two thousand years before Christ. Fourteen hundred years before Christ, Moses led the nation out of Egypt. Century after century the people would go from periods of belief and prosperity to periods of unbelief and ruin. By the 8<sup>th</sup> century before Christ, God spoke the words to Isaiah quoted by Paul in vv. 26-27. They had heard the message about God for so long that the message no longer had any effect on their lives. So like their ancestors, they rejected the salvation God offered them.

The parallel for our day is obvious. America has heard the gospel for hundreds of years. Today the good news about Jesus Christ saturates the air waves. Most every home has a copy of the Bible. Yet this message has little effect upon the lives of Americans, and even the lives of many church members. Have we become like the Jews of long ago? Does that not concern you?

I want us now to look at this text of Scripture and examine this issue that is before us. How are we to live in the midst of a gospel hardened people?

### I. BE FAITHFUL TO WITNESS AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY

I draw this point from the example of the apostle Paul. In spite of his imprisonment, He knew He had arrived in Rome under the sovereign will of God. He knew his ultimate purpose was to be a missionary for Christ, so he carried on with his ministry as if nothing had happened! His first duty was to witness to the Jews who were there. For over 10 years most Jews had rejected Paul’s message. But he never gave up. He never stopped trying to win them! Only 3 days after arriving in Rome, Paul “called the leaders of the Jews together.” Paul evidently received

information from some Jewish Christians about “the leading men,” to whom he issued an invitation to come to his quarters (v. 17a). It turned out to be a great opportunity, for we read in v.23, “So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging....” The fact that many came must have been encouraging to him. Furthermore, he was able to speak all day, according to v.23. However, I doubt that the presentation was a monologue by Paul. It probably included a time for questions and answers, and perhaps even some debate. It is also clear from v.23 that Paul shared Christ with them.

After this encounter, Paul continued to make the most use of his imprisonment. He was now in the most influential city in the world, and he was going to make the best of it. So vv.30-31 indicate, “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<sup>1</sup> the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.” Evidently sizable crowds gathered in his house, for Paul preached (*kerusso*) to them. He also taught people concerning Jesus as Lord and Messiah. He did so with “confidence”, or boldness (*parrhesia*). He was able to speak freely, without anyone hindering him, as we see in the last of v.31. What an example! That is not all. From the book of Philippians we learn that Paul witnessed to the soldiers who were chained to him, and many in the elite Praetorian guard (Phil. 1:13; 4:22) heard the gospel and believed! Thus, Paul said in Php. 1:12, “the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.”

Let me tell you what motivated Paul to be faithful in witnessing. These are some of the reasons why we should share our faith:

A. Because Many Are Interested in Spiritual Truth. In v.22 we see that the Jewish leader seemed interested in hearing what Paul had to say. Don’t assume that people are not interested in what you have to say. Thom Rainer and his research team said that the most eye-opening discovery that they made about the unchurched person's attitude towards us Christians is that most of them would like to hear about Jesus Christ from us. Yet the vast majority of the unchurched with whom he and his team spoke had never had a Christian share their faith with them.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, we should witness:

B. Because at Least Some Will Believe - Notice in v.24 that “some were persuaded by the things which were spoken....” Here we see that we can always hope that at least some will believe. It was a great victory to have even a few believe, especially when you consider the negative attitude toward Christianity they had to begin with. In fact, notice what the Jewish leaders said in the last of v.22, “for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.”

Jesus had said, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” One thing about fishing is this: you don’t catch them all, but you are likely to catch at least some!

I hope we all have been challenged by the faithfulness of Paul to his calling. He never quit trying to share the Gospel with Jew and Gentile alike, in spite of frequent rejection, especially from the Jews. May we be as faithful to share Christ at every opportunity. May we be as faithful to the other ministries that God has called us to. If you are a teacher, are you faithful? If you are in the choir, are you faithful? If you serve on a committee, are you faithful?

Something else about Paul is that he was faithful in every circumstance. Being a prisoner was bad, but he made the most of every opportunity. We would not have several of Paul’s prison

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<sup>1</sup> Often in Acts evangelism is described as teaching (5:21, 25, 28).

<sup>2</sup> Thom Rainer in *Pulpit Helps*, April 2005, pages 23, 31.

epistles in our Bible had it not been for the fact that he allowed God to turn something bad into something good.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, as we live in a gospel-hardened society:

## II. GUARD YOUR TESTIMONY

In order to be effective, a courtroom witness must be credible. Even so, in order to be an effective witness for Christ, we must live in such a way that our message is credible. I believe that is one reason why Paul starts off by explaining why he was a prisoner. In vv.17-18 Paul 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, who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death.” He rightly believed that he had to give credibility to himself before they would listen to him. He explained that while normally he would have been happy to submit to Jewish justice, under the circumstances it was not available, so in v.19 we see that he had been compelled to fall back on his Roman citizenship and “appeal to Caesar.” Now he stands before them, chained to a Roman soldier, not because he had done anything wrong, but as he says in v.20, “because for the hope of Israel,” which was bound up in the promise of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

I believe that we need to guard our testimony as well. If you or I end up in prison, it will require some heavy explaining why we are in prison. If you embezzle money, or drive drunk, and get put into prison, you will not be an effective witness for Christ. If you’re not living right, and people know it, and you try to tell people that Christ changes lives, they will not believe you. So be careful about what you do, what you say, and where you go. Don’t mess up your credibility as a witness. If you ruin your testimony, it is hard to get it back. Don’t do anything to hinder your testimony and reputation.

## III. KEEP ON TELLING THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Paul kept telling the gospel message. He did not come up with a new message that would have better acceptance. He was called to proclaim the gospel. Notice in v.23 that Paul “testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets....” He certainly labored to prove to them that the gospel of Christ was the true and necessary fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. No doubt he gave many examples.

Even so, we need to guard against the temptation to abandon the gospel in favor of a new message. There is only one gospel, and there is only one Savior. Paul said in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” The way Luke ends the book of Acts, with Paul faithfully sharing the gospel, is no doubt intended to challenge us to do the same. Pervading this whole passage is the theme of the priority of evangelism for the Christian.

Two aspects of the Gospel message are brought out in v.23. First, our message is:

A. Concerning the Kingdom of God - Notice how this message is summarized in v.23, Paul “testified of the kingdom of God....” Here, as elsewhere in Acts, this is a comprehensive term for the Gospel. God is the rightful Ruler of the Universe, and the world is in revolt against Him. We

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<sup>3</sup> Paul probably wrote his Prison Letters—Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon—at this time, though scholars are not unanimous about this.

have sinned against God. So we are to call upon people to repent, and bow at the feet of the Messiah, who is the promised King, the son of David. We need to tell people that Jesus conquered death, and He is Lord. God has a purpose and plan to establish His kingdom first in the hearts of believers. Then, He is moving history toward the establishment of a kingdom here on earth, with Jesus as King, and we shall reign with Him!

Tragically, Israel said concerning Jesus, “We have no king but Caesar. We will not have this Man to reign over us.” What rejection! How that must have struck at the heart of God.

Have you entered into the Kingdom of God by yielding your life to Jesus as Lord? A true salvation experience requires repentance of sin and a willingness to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Romans 10:9 says, “if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

B. “Concerning Jesus” the Savior – Notice also in v.23 that Paul was “persuading them concerning Jesus...” There is no gospel without Jesus! Furthermore, notice back in v.20 that Paul witnessed to them by stating that the real issue was “the hope of Israel.” They would have understood the phrase to refer to the hope of the coming Messiah. Most of the messianic “testimonies” from the Old Testament which have already been quoted in Acts were adduced, no doubt, and more as well. And there is no reason to doubt that the death and resurrection of the promised Messiah were included in the presentation. He would have shared the prophecies of Isa. 53 and Psa. 22 about the One who would suffer and die for our sins.

When we talk to people about the Lord, be sure to include Jesus in your presentation. Peter said in Acts 4:12, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (KJV). Don’t just talk about your church, or morality. There is no good news unless we talk about Jesus. After all, the ultimate answer to the problems of the human race is Jesus!

Finally, as we live in a gospel-hardened nation, we should:

#### IV. WARN PEOPLE TO BELIEVE THE GOSPEL WHILE THEY CAN

As Paul presented the gospel, he must have asked the Jews present to respond to his message. No gospel presentation is complete without an invitation. [Luke used two words to describe Paul’s speaking in v.23. His twofold manner was this: he expounded and testified, which appealed to their understanding. He set forth in detail prophecy after prophecy, and their fulfillment in Jesus. Secondly, he sought to “persuade”, which meant that he appealed to their wills and affection. Both elements should be in our witnessing, teaching, and preaching.]<sup>4</sup> Then we read their response in v.24, “And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.” As we have seen, some believed. But on the other hand, most probably did not. Those who rejected the message had stubborn hearts that did not *want* to believe.

As you share your faith with people, you need to be prepared for the fact that most will not accept Christ, especially the first time you talk to them. And so we need to be willing to follow Paul’s example and warn people of what can happen when they reject Christ. As the unbelievers were leaving, Paul was filled with grief at their unbelief. So he issued a warning to those who had resisted his message. (He had the last word!) Beginning in the last of v.25 Paul said, “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

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<sup>4</sup> Move to pt. III?

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.””” His words had greater force, for his words were a quote from Isaiah the prophet, whose authority was unquestioned by the Jewish nation. But it was fitting to quote Isaiah, for Paul most likely had quoted Isaiah in sharing the gospel (v.23b). Also, the passage is from chapter 6 of Isaiah, which included his call to the prophetic ministry. Isaiah had a personal encounter with God, and how he would need that! God warned Isaiah not to expect a favorable response from the people. The effect of his ministry, divinely ordained though it was, would be but to make the spiritually deaf still more deaf, to make the spiritually blind still more blind (there are none as blind as those who will not see). The same fire that melts wax also hardens clay. Even so in Paul’s day the sons of Israel, who should have been prepared by their Scriptures for the reception of the Gospel, closed their minds and hearts against it. So Paul warned them not to make the same mistake that their forefathers made.

When Pharaoh refused to yield to the Lord and hardened his own heart, then the next time he refused the Bible says that God hardened his heart. Hardness of heart is a judgment from God. His heart became so hard that he refused to let God’s people go even though it could cost him the life of his firstborn.

Even so, we need to warn people that if they reject the gospel, they may become hardened to the gospel. God will patiently wait for you to accept Christ for a while, but the day may come when your opportunity will be over, and He will send His messengers elsewhere. I must point out that it wasn’t more than 10 years later that the Romans came and destroyed the nation of Israel, and literally thousands of Jews lost their lives, and therefore lost any other opportunity to believe on Christ.

Now what are we to do when people harden themselves against the Gospel? Well in v.28 Paul warned, “Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” Don’t beat your head against a hardened brick wall. Take the message to others who are more open to the Gospel.

When is God’s deadline for America? I fear that we are becoming increasingly pagan, though we remain somewhat religious. Paul warned in 2 Tim. 3:5 that in the last days, people will have “a form of godliness but denying its power.” Unsaved friend, when is God’s deadline for you? How do you know you will have another opportunity to accept Christ beyond today? The fact is you don’t know. Proverbs 27:1 says, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.”

**Conclusion:** The book of Acts does not give the final conclusion of Paul’s life and ministry. Instead, Acts closes with Paul still preaching and teaching. Acts is the record of unfinished evangelism. This work must continue today. Will we be like Paul? Will we be faithful to share the same Gospel message? And when you hear that message, will you harden yourself against God’s message and warnings? Don’t do that. Yield to the Lordship of Christ today!

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954); H. Leo Eddleman, *An Exegetical and Practical Commentary on Acts* (Dallas: Books of Life Publishers, 1974); Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Acts* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1943); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931); W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Outline Studies in Acts* (Grand

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