

NO GIMMICKS: THE LORD JESUS CHRIST REIGNS
(SUNDAY, JULY 8, 2018)

SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 6; ACTS 28:16-31

INTRODUCTION

Are you surprised how the book of Acts ends?

If the book of Acts is part of Paul's legal defense, then it makes good sense that it ends without talking about Paul's eventual release.

The book of Acts was finished to this point. It was used in Paul's legal defense along with the book of Luke.

We believe Paul was set free after this first trial, but the book of Acts already had concluded.

Theologically the ending of Acts also fits in perfectly with the message of Acts.

The mission given to the church is bigger than any apostle or person save the Lord Jesus Christ.

The book of Acts is really about the work of Christ, His rule over heaven and earth from the right hand of the Father, and the only way of salvation through His sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection.

In this final part of Acts we see again Paul's desire to reach his own people without any degree of compromise. Of course, Paul in no way used tricks or gimmicks. He faithfully shared the Word confident that the Lord Jesus Christ reigns.

During his second Roman imprisonment Paul wrote 1 and 2 Timothy. Listen to 2 Tim. 2:8-9.

2Tim. 2:8 Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, **9** for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, *even* to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.

Faithfully share the Word because the Lord Jesus Christ reigns.

We will look at Acts 28:16-31 in three parts – Paul's two meetings with Jews in Rome and then the concluding two verses of Acts.

1) PAUL'S FIRST MEETING WITH JEWISH LEADERS, 16-22

What was Paul's strategy in spreading the gospel when he entered a city?

As we saw repeatedly throughout Acts, if there was a synagogue in a city, Paul used that synagogue as a place to reach Jews and Gentiles who were connected with the synagogue.

Based on archaeological evidence, we know that Rome had at least three synagogues and likely even more.¹

Why didn't Paul visit any of these synagogues?

The obvious answer is that Paul was a prisoner. He was not free to go wherever he wanted. As we see in verse 16, Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with a soldier who guarded him.

So, if Paul couldn't visit a synagogue, what could he do? He could call for leaders of the synagogues to come to him.

From what we see in verse 17, Paul wasted no time in calling these leaders. It was just three days after arriving in Rome that he called for the leaders of the Jews to meet with him.

In verses 17-20, Paul explains his situation to these leaders who know next to nothing about Paul.

Paul emphasized four things to these leaders which summarize what we have seen already in previous chapters.

First, Paul pleads his innocence in terms of doing anything against the Jewish people or the customs of our fathers.

Of course, charges have been brought against him, but Paul can say with a clear conscience, I am innocent of all these charges.

Second, Paul summarizes what we see in Acts 24-26. The Roman leaders who examined Paul believed that he should have been set free.

¹ Boice, 426.

But why wasn't Paul set free?

He explains the reason that we have seen before in verse 19. Jewish leaders pressured the Romans to keep Paul in prison.

And because of this pressure, Paul was forced to appeal to Caesar.

Notice that Paul states under this point that in making his appeal to Caesar, he was not bringing a charge against his own people or nation.

As James Boice points out, in many cases if you are sued, it is common to counter sue. But Paul had not tried to do anything like this.

Then Paul in verse 20 makes his fourth and perhaps most important point.

Why is Paul a prisoner? It is for the hope of Israel.

What does Paul mean by this phrase?

While this is the only time this exact phrase is found, throughout the book of Acts, the word hope is used.

Though the word hope is used in a less theological way, most of the time the word hope is connected with the resurrection of Jesus Christ and its significance for Israel and for all of God's creation.

Isn't this a very important point for us to consider?

Why do we continue to persevere in our work?

We know that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. And we believe that God's purposes not just for our own lives but for all of creation will not be frustrated.

Listen to a most significant passage that speaks of hope from Romans 8.

Romans 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. **23** Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. **24** For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? **25** But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance.

Do you see how it is deep truth that must sustain you? There are no tricks, gimmicks, psychological techniques that we look to.

You must be anchored by God's truth.

Now this doesn't mean that everything in life becomes easy. Not at all. But as Paul stated just before what I quoted,

Rom. 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

There is no place for the Christian to give up, to call it quits.

No, as long as God gives you life, you are to be seeking to serve Him no matter what the obstacles or challenges that you face.

Now, the response of the Jewish leaders in verses 21 and 22 is somewhat surprising, but we have to take their words as being an honest response.

In these two verses they explain what they know and what they don't know, what they have heard and what they haven't heard.

Concerning Paul, they say in verse 21, they have not received any official correspondence from Judea nor have any Jewish brethren made any sort of official report against Paul.

Isn't this somewhat surprising? You would think that given all that took place word would have gone out warning people about Paul and his dangerous message.

On the other hand, maybe the Jewish leaders realized that since Paul was in Roman custody the best thing to do was to just be quiet.

We do keep in mind that there were other serious issues that Jewish leaders were facing in Jerusalem. It was hardly just a glorious time of peace and prosperity for them.

So, the Jewish leaders in Rome had not heard anything previously about Paul but they were aware of the Christian faith in a negative way.

Look at verse 22, **for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.**

The Greek word translated as sect is where we get our word heresy. But the word sect doesn't have to be a negative word. It can simply mean a group that has distinct beliefs or practices.

The Sadducees were considered a sect.

And notice from verse 22 that they were interested in learning more from Paul.

And this is what setup the next meeting that Paul would have with them and with other Jews.

2) PAUL'S SECOND MEETING WITH JEWISH LEADERS, 23-29

I asked earlier about Paul's strategy when he came to a new city. We could ask a related question. What was the typical outcome for Paul's ministry in various synagogues?

In summary we could say both fruit for the gospel and powerful opposition and division.

That is what we see here.

As we think about this second meeting we should keep in mind the words of Paul written just a few years before.

Rom. 9:1 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, **2** that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. **3** For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,

These are some of the strongest words you could use in expressing sorry and desire.

Paul wanted to reach the lost, both Jews and Gentiles. He gave himself to this word but certainly not through any tricks or gimmicks. He faithfully and passionately declared God's Word.

Verse 23 says that for an entire day, Paul explained, solemnly testified, and persuaded them concerning the kingdom of God, the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ, using all of the OT Scriptures to do so.

James Boice points out this is another sermon or time of teaching you would love to have as a recording or a transcript.

But then he correctly points out that the book of Romans is really an excellent summary of what Paul would have argued and explained on that day.

Recall that Romans was written as Paul was making his way to Jerusalem before his arrest and years of imprisonment and house arrest.

So, of any book that sets forth a summary of Paul's theology it would be the book of Romans.

Listen to a summary outline of Romans in light of Paul's conversation with these Jewish leaders.

A key summary word of the book of Romans is righteousness, a word used 30 times in the book of Romans.

The first part of Romans, 1:1-17, presents the gospel as the revelation of the righteousness of God.

This is followed by showing God's righteousness in His wrath against sinners – Gentiles, Jews, and everyone! (1:18-3:20).

Then in chapters 3 and 4, we have an explanation of the saving righteousness of God, through Jesus Christ.

This is followed by chapters 6-8 which focuses on hope as a result of righteousness by faith.

Then in a very relevant section, Paul speaks of God's righteousness to Israel and to all the nations, 9:1-11:36. We will speak more about this in just a moment.

Then starting in chapter 12, Paul focuses on how the truth of the gospel and God's righteousness applies to all of life, 12:1-15:13.

Paul concludes by speaking of his own mission before giving a final summary of the gospel of the righteousness of God.²

Now, based on what we see from this chapter, Paul probably did not cover everything that we have in the book of Romans.

Verse 24 states that some were persuaded, and some rejected the truth.

The meeting ended when Paul quoted the powerful passage from Isaiah 6:9-10.

² Lane T. Dennis and Wayne Grudem, eds. *The ESV Study Bible*. Accordance electronic ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), paragraph 20835.

When Paul boldly applied this passage to those who were listening they could take no more from Paul.

Look carefully at how Paul introduces this passage in verse 25.

The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers.

Here we have a beautiful summary of the doctrine of Scripture – how it is God-breathed through the men that God called to share His word, through the working of the Holy Spirit.

Did Paul ever get to the truth of Romans 9-11 when he met with these important Jews in Rome?

That we can't say, but it is worth considering these chapters in light of Acts 28.

Did Jewish unbelief show that God was unfaithful to the promises he had made to the Jewish nation?

The answer is of course, no, but what an explanation is given to this deep question in Romans 9-11.

First, no one is ever saved except by the electing grace of God. This is the deep and weighty anchor of this entire passage. God is sovereign. Man is not, though we are responsible before a holy God.

Second, the OT itself prophesies and shows how Israel would reject her own Messiah. This is why Paul so often turned to the book of Isaiah.

Third, this rejection though part of God's plan does not excuse those who reject. The Jews pursued a righteousness through the law rejecting the only way of righteousness. And even today we continue to see people want salvation on their own terms and according to their own efforts.

Fourth, God always has a remnant. Even in the dark days of Elijah, God reminded him that there were 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

Let us never make the mistake of thinking we alone are faithful. No, God always is calling His elect and leaving a witness of His grace and truth.

Fifth, though in this part of redemptive history, God is mainly calling those of the nations, even this is for Israel's good.

Finally, Romans 11 speaks of a time when there will be a greater outpouring of God's grace and salvation among the Jewish people such that all Israel will be saved.

The powerful picture that Paul uses is that of an olive tree. God can cut off branches. He can be grafted in new branches. God can graft in branches that were cut off.³

Rom. 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!

34 *"For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?"*

35 *"Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?"*

Rom. 11:36 For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.

3) PREACHING THE KINGDOM OF GOD, VV. 30-31

This will not be our final time in the book of Acts. I am planning at least one other message and perhaps two messages in review and conclusion.

But let us consider today the final two verses of this incredible book.

They almost seem anticlimactic, but they are not.

If it is the case that Acts was written as part of Paul's legal defense, then it makes sense that Acts ends without us knowing the entire picture.

For two years, A.D. 60-62, Paul lived in his own house under house arrest. During this time he was able to receive visitors. During this time he also preached about the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

This word confidence is a key word in the book of Acts used a total of 5 times.

It was used earlier to speak of the boldness of Peter and John in Acts 2. It is used in a prayer and the fulfillment of prayer in Acts 4.

³ Taken from Boice, 429-430.

Significantly then it is used by Luke to describe Paul's continued ministry from the heart of the Roman Empire.

Eph. 6:19 and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel,

What else did Paul do during these two years of house arrest?

He did his own writing – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon and maybe worked with Luke on his two writing projects – Luke and Acts.

These six books represent a little over 30% of the entire NT in terms of word count.

Another thing that we know kept Paul occupied during this time was prayer.

Eph. 1:16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my **prayers**:

Phil. 1:4 always in every **prayer** of mine making request for you all with joy,

Col. 1:3 We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **praying** always for you,

Col. 1:9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to **pray** for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

Philem. 4 I thank my God, making mention of you always in my **prayers**,

Paul's entire time under Roman custody and later his death took place under the reign of Emperor Nero.

Nero was in power from 54-68; he took his own life June 9, 68.

During the first part of his reign, Nero was somewhat sane, but closer to the end of his reign is when we see the full evil that was in his heart.

We believe that Paul was released after his trial. He continued his ministry for several years before again being arrested.

According to tradition Paul returned to Rome after the great fire in A.D. 64. Eusebias says that Paul came back shortly after that, in a time of great hostility to believers, was arrested, and then martyred.

So, one thing that we can say is that Paul was not faithful because it was an easy time for ministry.

Paul was not dedicated to the gospel because he made a lot of money or achieved the world's approval.

He proclaimed the gospel because he knew that Jesus Christ is Lord and is the only Savior.

CONCLUSION

Consider the challenges maybe that you face in being a witness – maybe fear or lack of confidence in knowing how to answer objections, or other barriers.

As we come to an end to the book of Acts we can consider several points.

First, the gospel message preached by Paul in chapter 28 is the same as preached by Peter in chapter 2.

The results of preaching are also the same. Some do come to believe, and others reject the message, maybe for a time, and others sadly permanently.

The work of the Lord Jesus Christ is not frustrated or hindered today any more than it was during the time of Paul.

We might be frustrated. We might not see much or any fruit, but our Lord Jesus Christ is not frustrated. His plans are not being hindered in our own age.

Faithfully share the Word because the Lord Jesus Christ reigns.

Prayer

Hymn 496

Benediction – Acts 20:32

So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.