

## Scripture Reading:

**Acts 28:7 “ In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. 8 And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. 9 So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. 10 They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary. 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.”**

# "Paul Travels to Rome"

As we have taken our long journey through the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts we have often reminded ourselves that Luke is writing an orderly account for his friend Theophilus so he can have confidence in the truth that has been delivered.

- This is something we must remember as we draw near the end of Acts and study this final chapter.
- There will be no surprises!
- Luke is not writing a mystery novel where we do not discover who-done-it until the final pages.
- Luke is not writing a thriller where we are shocked or surprised by an unexpected twist in the plot at the end of the story.

Let us once again, with ears of faith, hear how Luke began his orderly account, which the Holy Spirit inspired and brought forth to be almost a third of our New Testament...

**Luke 1:1 “Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.”**

Luke goes on in his Gospel to tell us of the coming of Jesus, the Messiah who came to save His people from their sins. We learn of His birth, His life & ministry, His suffering, His death & burial and then His resurrection and ascension to the Father's right-hand.

- The ascension of Jesus is the end of Luke's Gospel and the beginning of the Book of Acts as Luke continues his orderly account.

The people that Jesus came to save now comprise the Church, the Body of Christ, the Son's bride who is being adorned and made ready for Jesus. The Holy Spirit comes in power at Pentecost to ensure that this is accomplished and that the Kingdom of the Son fills the whole earth as was prophesied in the Old Testament. The second part of Luke's orderly account, the Book of Acts is not just the story of Peter or the other Apostles, not just the story of the Apostle Paul and not even just the story of the early Church...

- It is the story of how the Holy Spirit will bring glory to the Son by advancing His Kingdom!

Luke began the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of his orderly account with these words:

“1 The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. 4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; 5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." 6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" *[still asking the wrong question!]* 7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

- We have now spent over one hundred sermons considering together how the Spirit of God is carrying out His task!

As Luke brings his orderly account to a close we will see the same message: The Apostle Paul will reach Rome, the religious and political center of the ancient world and from there we find him “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”

During the visit to the Island of Malta, we saw the dangers of idolatry which continue down to our day as well. Last week, we studied the importance of miracles and how we must trust the Holy Spirit to use them as He will.

- This week we see the Holy Spirit taking Paul on the final leg of his journey to Rome.
- May God grant us the insight to see how God delivers Paul, but also to know that He will take us where He wants us to go today!

Paul & Luke & Aristarchus spend over three months on the Island of Malta and they had quite an impact on this Mediterranean Island...

- An impact that can still be seen today!

Luke now gives us the details about how they reached Rome *[mention the map]*

11 “After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island.”

Julius and his prisoners are able to board another Alexandrian grain ship that had harbored safely during those winter storms and thus they can finish the trip to Rome that had started many months earlier.

12 “And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days.”

- The delay here appears to be weather related and many believe that it gave Paul an opportunity to plant the church on this island.

13 “From there we circled round and reached Rhegium.”

The sailing was still tough after the three day delay and after they reach the southern tip of Italy they finally have more favorable weather...

“And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli,”

- This major Roman port was the destination of the Alexandrian ship...

- Here Julius would make preparations for the final journey to Rome by land and probably needed some time to put all of his records back in order, having lost all in the ship-wreck.

This time gives Paul another opportunity to minister to some Christian brothers as he had in the first days of the journey back in Sidon.

Luke tells us, “the next day we came to Puteoli, 14 where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days.”

Obviously the Roman Centurion Julius has grown to trust Paul and he gives him leave to make this visit, though he was likely accompanied by a soldier as he would be when he reaches Rome.

- Paul is still a prisoner, but God is gracious in allowing him to encourage the Saints here in Puteoli.

We don't know exactly when a church was started here, but it could have been right after the Day of Pentecost when thousands of foreign visitors were present in Jerusalem as the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Church and at least three thousand people were saved. *[Luke's account is NOT exhaustive: The Spirit was working in ways far broader than these accounts]*

In any case the Apostle Paul has seven days to fellowship with these Saints and to encourage them in their walk. After this week, Luke simply says, “And so we went toward Rome.”

- The final leg is traveled along the famous Appian Way where many triumphant Roman generals marched back to Rome in victory.

The road where Spartacus & his fellow rebel slaves were crucified by General Crassus who then made a triumphant march back to Rome on this same highway. Now another prisoner was making his way to Rome via the Appian Way... A prisoner who would also die at the hands of his Roman captors!

- But not before he had proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of Jesus!

Had Emperor Nero known who was about to march into his city he might have sent his generals to kill Paul, but that would not have stopped the march of Christ's Kingdom.

- Word travels quickly that Paul is near and the Saints rush to meet him on the way!

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.”

- The end of Paul's long journey was in sight. The prayers that he had asked these Saints to lift up on his behalf had been answered.

Paul had requested such prayers near the end of his Epistle to the Romans where we read:

15:30 “Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, 31 that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.”

- Yes, those prayers were answered AND those prayers were needed!

Paul's journey was filled with all the trials that he anticipated in Jerusalem along with many traveling perils he may not have anticipated...

- But His God has brought him to Rome safe & sound just as He had promised Paul when he was first imprisoned in Jerusalem.

Now Paul is being greeted by many of the Saints who had read and responded to his Epistle to Rome written years ago.

I am sure that many of those who Paul named in the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans came out to meet him in the way:

- In that final chapter, Paul sent his greeting to Priscilla and Aquila along with at least twenty-six other Saints.

I won't butcher all those Roman names here this morning but I hope that our study of this final leg of the Roman voyage makes that chapter with all those names much more special next time you read it!

I am sure some of those Saints were remembering Paul's final promise to them in Romans 16:20,

- "And the God of peace shall crush Satan under your feet shortly."

Paul and the other Christians at this time were still under the protection of Rome as we have seen on this journey. Rome was the final great empire that God showed Daniel in the King's dream, that were to reign until the coming of Jesus, the stone cut without hands that smashed the great statue.

- As we know from the Book of Revelation, Rome would soon turn from a protecting Empire to a devouring Beast under the sway of Satan, and thus the promise by God that he would soon be crushed under their feet.

In just a few hundred years, the Mighty Roman Empire will be all but forgotten and Christendom would be filling all of Europe with more and more blessings and freedoms as the Kingdom of Jesus filled the earth. Soon, the Emperor Nero would begin the first of many vicious campaigns to destroy the Church leading to the martyrdom of many Saints. But just as King Herod failed to kill the baby Jesus, so Nero and all those who follow in his ways have failed to kill the Church or destroy the Bible.

- Down through history, many have tried and many have failed, but the Kingdom of Jesus continues to grow, because as we studied again last week...
- The Holy Spirit knows where history is going and He will make sure that all of God's purposes are fulfilled.

#### So what does all of this mean for us today?

First and foremost it means that we should continue to have the confidence to know that the Spirit of God is taking history where He intends it to go!

Just as Satan's rule over Rome was crushed by the Gospel, so all the nations of the earth will some day kiss the Son as declared by Psalm 2!

This is more fully explained by the Apostle Paul in First Corinthians chapter 15 where at verse 20 we read:

**"20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**

**21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.**

**23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.**

**24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."**

- That is the hope of the Gospel that we are to believe and work for today, tomorrow and every day until the Spirit of God has finished His work!
- Do we find this hard to believe?

Sure we do IF we are honest... Think of all the bad news we have to weigh us down or even the bad theology many of us learned that actually expected things to get worse and worse before Jesus could return!

- Does such a view of history seem overwhelming to us?

Again, YES, if we are honest, but we must remember the principle we are taught when facing mammoth tasks... How do you walk a hundred miles?

- One step at a time!

Or the more humorous question of how to eat an elephant...

- Again, one bite at a time!

So how does the Spirit of God fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus?

- He uses one simple step of obedience at a time!

Yes, it is all those little things that add up to worldwide conquest for Jesus!

Each child who learns to honor their parents... **IN THE LITTLE THINGS!**

Each mother who learns to see the joy of obedience in washing those same dishes after lunch that she did after breakfast, or changing that diaper that was new & fresh just moments ago!

Each husband who shows REAL love to his wife, not in the grandiose fanfare that Hollywood tells us to seek, but rather in remembering to actually tell her that you love her on a regular basis, by opening her door, honoring her in front of others and yes, by even changing a diaper or doing those dishes occasionally!

- THESE are the 'good works' that Paul tells the Saints in Ephesus that they were created in Christ Jesus to do, as His workmanship!
- These are the simple things that God the Holy Spirit will weave together into the glorious tapestry that is the history of Christ's Kingdom filling the earth.

Lest you think I am exaggerating, think about all the practical commands that follow Paul's solid theology at the end of Romans, first or second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians [some of which we read this morning], Philippians, Colossians and of course ALL the practical things required of church leaders in the Pastoral Epistles.

It is easy to focus on Paul's triumphant entrance into Rome on this glorious day, but we must remember all the obedient steps that led up to it...

- Paul's willingness to face the danger in Jerusalem.
- The Roman Centurions who protected Paul by simply doing their job.
- All the Saints who cared for and ministered to Paul during those years of imprisonment.

We must even remember all those pagan sailors who served on the ships and the residents of Malta who cared for Paul and the others. *[it should remind us that God will use whatever means He wills to accomplish His purposes... Our disobedience or apathy will not thwart His plan]*

And finally we should remember those faithful Saints there in Rome who prayed as Paul had requested.

- ALL of those small steps came together to produce a journey that changed all of history!

May we be those who remember this whenever we are tempted to be discouraged by that next little task we are called upon to do, or face the next trial that God has placed in our path...

**Always remembering the truth that Paul wrote years ago to these Saints who are now coming out to see him as he enters Rome:**

**Those very familiar words of Romans 8:**

**“26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose”**

**Communion Meditation: Romans 8**

**“If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**