

“Concluding Lessons from the Book of Acts”  
(Acts 28:30-31)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we saw Paul’s testimony to the Jews at Rome.
  - a. Paul called the leaders of the Jews together to explain why he was there: not because he wanted to charge his people, but because his people wanted to kill him.
  - b. They hadn’t received word about Paul, but they had heard about this “sect” of Judaism that was being spoken against everywhere.
  - c. They were intrigued; they wanted to know more about it; and so Paul was given the opportunity to explain – and that’s what he did, very carefully and earnestly seeking to persuade them of the truth.
  - d. It’s interesting that though they had a Gospel witness from the believers already there, it was necessary for Paul – an apostle and eye-witness of the resurrection – be there to confirm that Word, before the end should come (AD 70).
2. The result was that some believed and some didn’t.
  - a. There were those whose hearts were opened by the Lord to receive His Word, embrace His Christ: they were saved.
  - b. But there were others who refused to believe; and so Paul left them with the warning from Isaiah: God left them in this hardened state as judgment against them for their hardness of heart – when men resist God’s truth and Spirit, He gives them over to greater hardness as judgment for their sins.
  - c. He also told them that God was sending His Gospel to the Gentiles, and that they would listen – he said this to make them jealous, which was God’s purpose in doing so – that they might turn to God and be saved.
  - d. And all this because the Lord was still holding the door of mercy open for them.

B. Preview.

1. This morning, we see what Luke records of Paul’s remaining stay in Rome.
  - a. He tells us how long he was there: 2 years.
  - b. He tells us what Paul was doing while he was there: welcoming all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God to them, and teaching them about the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - c. And he tells us that he was able to do this openly, without being hindered.
  - d. The Lord also gave Paul a bit of a rest, as he was for two years in his own rented quarters – probably the longest Paul ever spent in any place outside of prison. While evangelizing, he moved from house to house and from city to city, living the life of an itinerant. He also didn’t have to fear retaliation by

the Jews during this time, since, as we saw before, they had given up the chase.

2. From these things, I want us to draw a few concluding lessons from this book:
  - a. How we ought to do what we can to support the work of the ministry: the brethren were willing to support Paul in Rome for two years.
  - b. What we ought to be doing to advance God's kingdom: Paul was willing to remain a prisoner for two years while teaching and preaching at every opportunity.
  - c. Finally, how when we're willing to do God's work, He opens the door for that work to progress: He allowed Paul an open door in the very heart of the Roman Empire for two years.

## II. Sermon.

- A. First, let's consider how we ought to do what we can to support those who are doing the work of the kingdom: we see this in the brethren's continued support of Paul at Rome (v. 30).
  1. We've seen the communion of saints.
    - a. The brethren inviting him to stay at Puteoli for seven days.
    - b. The brethren coming for miles to encourage him.
    - c. His companions providing his needs at Rome.
  2. Consider now that they sustain Paul for two more years in Rome.
    - a. Paul was not working; he had no means of his own; he had spent the last several decades of his life evangelizing.
    - b. He couldn't have afforded these private quarters, but his companions could, and they were willing to do so.
      - (i) This shows us that we should be willing to lay ourselves out for the cause of the Gospel.
        - (a) In our prayers, giving and hospitality.
        - (b) Remembering that everything we give to God's cause, He will return to us.
      - (ii) We should especially be encouraged to do so when the work we're supporting is truly honoring to the Lord, as Paul's.
- B. Second, let's consider what we ought to be doing to advance God's kingdom: Paul was willing to forgo freedom and comfort to preach and teach the Gospel (vv. 30-31).
  1. First, Paul remained a prisoner in Rome for two years.
    - a. See the lengths Paul was willing to go.
    - b. His life belonged to Christ, and if Christ wanted him to remain in Rome for two years or for twenty, his love for Christ constrained him to do so.
    - c. We're no different than Paul. Christ purchased us also by His blood.
    - d. And so no matter what Christ calls us to do with our lives, let's submit to it and do it, knowing it is the path He has chosen by which we will glorify Him.

2. Second, not only was he willing to submit to Christ's will to stay at Rome for some time, he made the most of this opportunity to advance Christ's cause.
  - a. We might question whether this was the best use of Paul's time.
    - (i) It may not seem wise to us to keep a man like Paul in prison for so long.
    - (ii) Remember that Felix had kept him in prison for two years already (Acts 24:27).
    - (iii) Then as much as another year passed from the time Paul appealed to Caesar and his arrival at Rome.
    - (iv) Now Paul would spend another 2 years in Rome.
    - (v) This was a total of five years he was incarcerated.
  - b. But we need to remember two things:
    - (i) First, the work continued even though Paul was in prison.
      - (a) God is not dependent on any one man to do His work.
      - (b) We should never begin to think that we're indispensable to God.
    - (ii) Second, Paul was not idle during those five years - the Lord was using him even while he was in prison.
      - (a) We've already seen what the Lord did with Paul at Jerusalem, before Felix, Festus and Agrippa, aboard ship among the soldiers and crew, and on Malta among the governor and natives of the island.
      - (b) Paul was about to do the same thing in Rome: He writes in Philippians 1:12-18, "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in *the cause of* Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter *do it* out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice" (Phil. 1:12-18).
3. How did Paul advance the Gospel?
  - a. Though his freedom was limited, his speech wasn't.
    - (i) Paul was a prisoner, yet he was still a preacher.
    - (ii) He was bound, but God's Word was not.
    - (iii) He had earlier written to the church at Rome that he wanted to see them that he might minister his gift to them and encourage them in the faith (Rom. 1:11). Now he had that opportunity.
    - (iv) Someone once wrote, "When we cannot do what we want in God's service, we must do what we can" (Henry).

- b. He might not be able to go to them because of his incarceration, but he could talk to those who came to him.
  - (i) On his part, he welcomed them – he turned no one away.
  - (ii) Wherever there was an audience, Paul was there willing to speak.
  - (iii) When it's not about us, but about serving the Lord, there is no end to opportunity: we should always take the time to help those who come to us with spiritual concern.
  - (iv) Of course, we pray and hope the Lord will send people to us; but we can't always expect them to come into this building.
  - (v) Since we have our freedom, we are to go where they are with the Gospel.
- c. And so what did Paul do when they came?
  - (i) He preached the kingdom of God.
    - (a) He declared what Scripture had to say regarding the redemptive kingdom of Christ.
    - (b) He heralded the Lordship of Christ and the extension of His kingdom, and how no one comes into this redemptive kingdom apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
    - (c) This was what he was called to do as God's ambassador – not to talk about unimportant secular things, but infinitely precious and eternal things.
  - (ii) He taught concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.
    - (a) Of His incarnation, doctrine, life, miracles, death, resurrection and ascension.
    - (b) Christ is central to the Gospel – the message of what He has done to save sinful man from death through His obedience and atoning death on the cross.
    - (c) These are the things he preached and taught – remember, he was seeking to advance Christ's interests, not his own.
    - (e) And that is what we are to be about as well: it's so easy to get caught up into making things more comfortable for ourselves on earth, when we should be focusing on doing so for ourselves in heaven.
  - (iii) And he spoke about these things openly.
    - (a) This means he spoke boldly, with great confidence, being fully convinced that what he said was true – in other words, he spoke without being ashamed of what he held.
    - (b) Often our problem with being open with the Gospel is that we're not convinced or are ashamed of it; and yet it is the only hope of eternal salvation.
- d. We need to remember that it was also from Rome that Paul wrote his prison epistles: Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon.

- C. Finally, let's consider how when we're willing to do God's work, He opens the door for the work to proceed: we see this in fact that Paul was able to continue his work in the heart of the Roman Empire.
1. He did these things unhindered.
    - a. The Lord, having done so much to get him there, continued to open the doors for him to teach and preach: when the Lord opens the door, no man can shut it.
    - b. The Jews didn't try to stop him, the Romans still didn't see it as a crime.
      - (i) Nero was emperor, there were many Jews and Gentiles in Rome who hated Christianity, yet the Lord gave him liberty to preach.
      - (ii) And the Lord blessed his efforts so much that there were even those in Caesar's household who were converted (Phil. 4:22).
    - c. In light of this, we need to pray and look for the open door, the opportunities the Lord gives.
      - (i) Every day we have the opportunity to participate in the bread of life; while there are many around us perishing for lack of spiritual food.
      - (ii) Let's be encouraged by this to break that bread and feed the hungry.
  2. And the Lord continued to work with Paul to the end of his ministry on earth.
    - a. The year was now about 61 A.D. Paul would be released 2 years later (A.D. 63), before the burning of Rome in A.D. 64.
    - b. Henry writes, "Tradition says that after his discharge he went from Italy to Spain, thence to Crete, and so with Timothy into Judea, and thence went to visit the churches in Asia, and at length came a second time to Rome, and there was beheaded in the last year of Nero. But Baronius himself owns that there is no certainty of any thing concerning him betwixt his release from this imprisonment and his martyrdom; but it is said by some that Nero, having, when he began to play the tyrant, set himself against the Christians, and persecuted them (and he was the first of the emperors that made a law against them, as Tertullian says, *Apol.* cap. 5), the church at Rome was much weakened by that persecution, and this brought Paul the second time to Rome, to re-establish the church there, and to comfort the souls of the disciples that were left, and so he fell a second time into Nero's hand. And Chrysostom relates that a young woman that was one of Nero's misses (to speak modishly) being converted, by Paul's preaching, to the Christian faith, and so brought off from the lewd course of life she had lived, Nero was incensed against Paul for it, and ordered him first to be imprisoned, and then put to death" (Commentary).
    - c. Another author writes, "This first imprisonment came at length to a close, Paul having been acquitted, probably because no witnesses appeared against him. Once more he set out on his missionary labours, probably visiting western and eastern Europe and Asia Minor. During this period of freedom he wrote his First Epistle to Timothy and his Epistle to Titus. The year of his release was signalized by the burning of Rome, which Nero saw fit to attribute to the Christians. A fierce persecution now broke out against the

Christians. Paul was seized, and once more conveyed to Rome a prisoner. During this imprisonment he probably wrote the Second Epistle to Timothy, the last he ever wrote. 'There can be little doubt that he appeared again at Nero's bar, and this time the charge did not break down. In all history there is not a more startling illustration of the irony of human life than this scene of Paul at the bar of Nero. On the judgment-seat, clad in the imperial purple, sat a man who, in a bad world, had attained the eminence of being the very worst and meanest being in it, a man stained with every crime, a man whose whole being was so steeped in every nameable and unnameable vice, that body and soul of him were, as some one said at the time, nothing but a compound of mud and blood; and in the prisoner's dock stood the best man the world possessed, his hair whitened with labours for the good of men and the glory of God. The trial ended: Paul was condemned, and delivered over to the executioner. He was led out of the city, with a crowd of the lowest rabble at his heels. The fatal spot was reached; he knelt beside the block; the headsman's axe gleamed in the sun and fell; and the head of the apostle of the world rolled down in the dust" (probably A.D. 66) four years before the fall of Jerusalem" (Easton).

- d. But let's not forget, though his body was destroyed, yet his soul entered into glory: to depart and be with Christ is very much better (Phil. 1:23).
- e. Paul is probably the most useful servant the Lord Jesus ever possessed. We would do very well to learn from his example and do what we can to advance Christ's kingdom on earth. Amen.