

“The Communion of Saints”
(Acts 28:11-16)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we considered the compassion the natives at Malta showed Paul and his companions.
 - a. The people who lived there saw the shipwreck, and how these men narrowly escaped the sea.
 - b. They also saw their needs, as they were wet from the sea, wet from the rain and cold from the weather.
 - c. But they did more than see these needs - they did what they could to meet their needs.
 - d. This reminded us of God’s common grace or goodness to all men:
 - (i) He restrains the sin of all men and puts it in their hearts to do good things, both to preserve His people and to further the progress of the Gospel.
 - (ii) Sometimes unbelievers outstrip believers in the good they do to others.
 - (iii) If we don’t understand common grace, we won’t understand how this can be.

2. But we also saw that common grace is not enough to save anyone.
 - a. The Lord performed miracles through Paul – by preserving him from the snake bite, by healing Publius’ father, and by healing those on the island who were afflicted with disease.
 - b. These were to confirm His Word – since He never performs miracles for no reason.
 - c. These natives might have done things that were outwardly good, but they didn’t do them out of love for God or for His glory.
 - d. They were still far from perfect and far from God – they needed the perfect righteousness of Christ given only through faith, which is why Paul preached and the Lord performed miracles – common grace isn’t enough to save.
 - e. If we don’t understand this then we might think some of the people we meet are good enough without Christ – that is never the case.

B. Preview.

1. This morning, we see the end of Paul’s journey to Rome.
 - a. They stayed on the island for three months, until the bad weather had passed.
 - b. Then they boarded an Alexandrian ship that took them the rest of the way to Rome.
 - c. But we also see that both on the way and when they arrived at Rome, Paul was greeted and ministered to by fellow believers who had heard of him and wanted to help him.

2. It’s this fellowship and ministry that we want mainly to consider.
 - a. First, we see the faithfulness of the Lord to His promises in bringing Paul safely to Rome.

- b. Second, we see the importance of the communion of the saints in the brethren's ministry to Paul on the way and at Rome (also an expression of God's faithfulness).
- c. And finally, the goodness of the Lord again displayed in the kindness He shows Paul at Rome.

II. Sermon.

A. First, let's consider the faithfulness of the Lord to His promises in bringing Paul safely to Rome.

1. After the rough and dangerous voyage to this point, the rest of the trip was calm and easy.
 - a. Malta had been a rejuvenating experience, but it was not their destination, so they pressed on.
 - (i) Sometimes when we find places of rest in our Christian experience, we want to stay there; but this isn't God's will.
 - (ii) We must press on to reach our destination. We must risk the storm again.
 - b. It was now three months later; winter had passed (v. 11).
 - (i) They wouldn't foolishly attempt the sea again during the stormy season.
 - (ii) Though they hadn't listened to Paul at first, they had learned a valuable lesson.
 - (iii) Hopefully, they also learned the lesson Paul had sought to teach them (remember the miracle of safety by staying on the ship).
 - (iv) If we'd only listen more carefully to God's Word at first, we could spare ourselves a great deal of trouble.
 - (v) This is something you children would be wise to do – listen to your parents: they are trying to help you steer a straight course to avoid wrecking your lives.
 - c. The ship they boarded was also Alexandrian, as the last ship – this one, however, had been Providentially protected by God.
 - (i) Luke tells us it had the twin brothers for its figurehead (v. 11) – Castor and Pollux, one mortal, the other immortal. The Roman poets made these two fictitious characters those with power over storms.
 - (ii) Luke mentions them most likely to show Theophilus (1:1) how superstitious these men were.
 - d. First they landed at Syracuse in Sicily, an island at the very south of Italy (v. 12).
 - (i) They stayed there for three days, probably because of some business the ship had there.
 - (ii) It was a very old city; Paul had never been there.
 - (iii) There didn't appear to be any Christians there; but Paul was not given the opportunity to evangelize: he was on his way to Rome.
 - e. From Syracuse, they went to Rhegium, a city in Southern Italy (v. 13).
 - (i) They weren't there for long, but long enough for a legend to develop within the Roman church.
 - (ii) Henry writes, "There, it seems they stayed one day; and a very formal story the Romish legends tell of Paul's preaching here at this time, and the fish coming to

the shore to hear him, – that with a candle he set a stone pillar on fire, and by that miracle convinced the people of the truth of his doctrine, and they were many of them baptized, and he ordained Stephen, one of his companions in this voyage, to be their bishop, – and all this, they tell you, was done in this one day; whereas it does not appear that they did so much as go ashore, but only came to an anchor in the road.”

- f. From Rhegium, they went to Puteoli, further up the coast, about 130 miles from Rome (v. 13), and leaving Puteoli, they arrived at Rome (v. 14).
2. We should pause for a moment and again remind ourselves of the Lord’s faithfulness in keeping His promises.
 - a. The Lord had been telling Paul that He would take him to Rome.
 - (i) When Paul was at Ephesus, where the Lord had been doing a mighty work of revival, “Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome’” (19:21).
 - (ii) After his trial at Jerusalem, where Paul’s comments split the Pharisee and Sadducee parties, Luke writes, “But on the night *immediately* following, the Lord stood at his side and said, ‘Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also’” (23:11).
 - (iii) And so it came to pass.
 - b. The Lord will keep His Word – nothing of what He has said can possibly fail.
 - (i) As a Christian, you have the greatest insurance policy in the world.
 - (ii) The Lord has made you many promises, and He will keep every one of them.
 - (iii) If you will only trust that He will, you will never need to worry.
- B. Second, let’s consider the importance of the communion of the saints in the brethren’s ministry to Paul on the way and at Rome.
 1. First, we see the brethren show hospitality to Paul at Puteoli (v. 14).
 - a. When they arrived at that city, they found certain believers.
 - (i) These were converted either at Pentecost or had heard the Gospel from those who had been.
 - (ii) They, and the brethren we will see in a moment, may also have been part of the recipients of Paul’s letter to the Romans.
 - b. Julius allowed Paul to stay with them for seven days.
 - (i) This was probably another kindness Julius extended to Paul for saving him and those on the ship (although it wasn’t Paul, but the Lord Jesus who saved them).
 - (ii) Notice that when the Lord does something marvelous through His children, even the world will sometimes show gratitude, especially when that good thing He does benefits them.

- (iii) Sometimes we might mistake this gratitude for conversion – but we must always remember that without saving faith, evidenced by love for God Himself, there is no conversion.
- c. We are told these brethren were found because Paul and his company searched for them (v. 14).
 - (i) We see something here of the catholicity of the visible church – here, a long way from Jerusalem and Antioch, are true believers.
 - (ii) Notice Paul didn't avoid them, because of differences that might exist, but looked for them – he asked if there were any of the Way there – and when he found them, he rejoiced.
 - d. These brethren also invited them to stay with them seven days, which would include at least one Lord's day.
 - (i) This way, Paul might preach to them.
 - (ii) They ministered to Paul and Paul ministered to them – each was encouraged by the other's faith, expressed according to their gifts and circumstances.
 - e. This is something of what is meant by the communion of the saints.
 - (i) We have brethren who are scattered throughout the world, because the Gospel has reached many places.
 - (ii) Whether or not they are of our culture, nation, language, social status or age, if they are believers, they are all members of the same body, and we have communion with one another in Christ.
 - (iii) Wherever we go, we should seek to have communion with believers.
 - (iv) We should do the same when they come to us and use what we have of our gifts and supplies to minister to their spiritual and physical needs.
2. When they arrived at Rome, Paul saw another demonstration of this communion.
- a. Here other Christians came to meet him (v. 15).
 - (i) The Christians at Puteoli had probably sent word out as to about when Paul would arrive at Rome.
 - (ii) When they heard, they went to Rome to meet up with him, probably because they knew how much this servant of God had done in service to Christ's kingdom and how many the Lord had converted through his ministry.
 - (iii) They also knew how much he had suffered for Christ's cause, and of course, they had learned a great deal from him – from the letter he had sent to the church at Rome – and knowing he was on his way to stand trial there, as well as to bear witness to the Gospel, they came to minister to him.
 - (iv) Some came from the Market of Appius – 51 miles from Rome – others from Three Taverns, which was 28-33 miles from Rome.
 - (v) Far from being ashamed of Paul because he was a prisoner, they traveled for miles to show him honor.

- b. And Paul was encouraged by their efforts.
 - (i) Nero was Caesar at that time, which would be enough to cause anyone concern, especially a Christian.
 - (ii) But when Paul saw this display of love and concern, he thanked God.
 - (a) God was the One, after all, who put it in their hearts to come to him.
 - (b) Whatever good thing we receive in this life, it comes from the Father of lights.
 - (iii) He also took courage.
 - (a) This cheered him up – now he could enter Rome in chains as cheerfully as he had entered Jerusalem in freedom.
 - (b) It is an encouragement to us while on our way to heaven to meet with fellow-travellers, especially during difficult times.
 - (c) Whenever we see an assembly of earnest Christians, we should thank God and be encouraged that we're not alone.
 - (d) This is another blessing that comes from the communion of saints: the fact that we're not alone in anything we have to face – we are members of one body and touched with the cares and triumphs of each member.
 - (e) Paul writes, “But now there are many members, but one body. . . . if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:20, 26).
 - (f) That’s what it means to be a part of the same body/family.
- C. Finally, let’s consider the goodness of the Lord again displayed in the kindness He showed Paul at Rome.
1. When they arrived, Paul was delivered into custody.
 - a. He was at his journey’s end, but he was still a prisoner.
 - b. A soldier was appointed to guard him.
 2. But he was shown favor.
 - a. He was allowed to stay by himself: apparently his friends provided lodging for him (v. 16).
 - b. The only requirement was that he be attended by a soldier.
 - (i) The soldier didn’t appear to be antagonistic.
 - (ii) Certainly the Lord can show His captives favor in the eyes of their captors, as He did to Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 39:21) or to Jehoiachin in Babylon (2 Kings 25:27-28).
 - (iii) When God doesn’t deliver His people from bondage, He still gives them reason to be thankful.
 3. We’ve seen the kindness of the natives of Malta through God’s common grace, and the communion of saints through God’s special grace. Next Lord’s Day, we’ll consider the continuing judgment of God on the Jews as evidenced by their hardness of heart.
 4. But for now, let’s remember what we’ve seen of the communion the Lord has given us within the body of Christ and be thankful for it. Amen.