

Scripture Reading: Philippians 2:12-18

Introduction

This morning we arrive at the end of our series from the book of Acts which we began back just over a year ago on September 24, 2017 (This is sermon #44 of the series)

If you are the type of person who prefers a movie or a story come to a neat conclusion with everything wrapped up at the end you probably are not going to like the end of Acts

Because, while we have reached the end of Luke's historical record, we don't find resolution there and Acts doesn't actually end as much as it just stops and we are left with a number of unanswered questions and no real sense of closure

Looking back, we will recall how Acts begins where the gospel of Luke leaves off as Luke continues writing what is really Volume 2 of his "orderly account" to his friend Theophilus

Luke states as much in **Acts 1:1-2** where he begins:

"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen."

From this introduction we deduced that Acts was going to be about what Jesus **continued** to do through his church, his body, here on the earth after he had ascended

Then in **Acts 1:8** we saw the form that this continued mission was going to take where Jesus told his apostles:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

And we tied this revelation to the Great Commission found in Matthew 28 to come to the conclusion that the mission that Jesus began and that was sustained by the apostles in Acts still continues today

The responsibility of all believers is to continue to be his witness and to make disciples until the Lord returns to rapture his church from the earth

As we progressed through the book we saw Luke concentrate primarily on the ministry of Peter and how the Lord granted him the privilege of being the first to open the gospel to the Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles

And then Luke just stopped following Peter and we last saw Peter give his address at the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 after which Luke shifted the focus of his account fully to Paul's ministry

That wasn't at all because Peter's ministry had ended or had suddenly become unfruitful or unimportant but simply because it fit Luke's purpose in writing to focus on Paul and how Paul took the gospel more widely to the Gentile world

Luke's account records Paul's remarkable meeting with the risen and glorified Christ on the road to Damascus and his transformation from vicious opponent to the fledgling church to arguably its most influential proponent and exponent

Luke then records how Paul undertook three ministry journeys as he took the gospel far and wide planting churches in many cities and towns among the Gentiles in spite of suffering persecution at virtually every turn

And in recent weeks we have been looking at how Paul was unfairly arrested and held in protective custody and taken through several trials and hearings before being transported to Rome to stand trial before Caesar at his request

Now, as we come to our passage this morning we will see that Paul finally arrives in Rome after being caught in a violent storm and shipwrecked on the island of Malta where Paul continued ministering to the inhabitants of Malta

We will see that Luke ends his record of Paul's life and ministry and the book itself just as abruptly as he ended his account of Peter as he leaves Paul still awaiting his audience before Caesar

Luke just leaves his readers hanging and longing for resolution

But, actually the way Acts ends is perfectly appropriate because the mission hasn't ended yet

It didn't end when he switched his focus from Peter to Paul and it didn't end with the deaths of the apostles

The mission continues to this day and the job of the church and her members won't be completed until we are taken up to meet the Lord in the air

We still have a job to do so let's dig into this final section of Acts and see what we can learn from these final details of the last leg of Paul's journey to Rome and his time there that will help us as we continue the mission

Please join me in Acts 28 as we pick up the account with the final leg of Paul's journey to Rome found in verses 11-16
(Acts 28:11-16)

After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

After spending the winter on Malta the centurion, Julius enlisted another ship to take the party northward toward Rome Luke tells us it was a "ship of Alexandria" which means that it was likely another grain hauling ship on its way from Egypt to Rome as was their first, ill-fated ship

This leg of the trip was much less eventful as they successfully made their way from Malta to Cyprus and two ports on the coast of Italy and then overland to Rome via the Roman highway known as the Appian Way so there isn't a whole lot to remark on as far as the actual journey goes

However, we do get another glimpse into the early church that is beneficial for us to take note of

From this section of the account we see the need for believers to show hospitality and to bolster one another

I. We must encourage one another

After sailing from Syracuse on the island of Sicily to Rhegium on the "toe of the boot" of Italy and then along the western coast a bit more than halfway to Rome the ship docked at Puteoli (pyoo-TEE-o-lai)

Puteoli is known today as the modern city of Pozzuoli is located on the Gulf of Naples and in Paul's day it was a major port for commercial vessels supplying Rome since the coast nearer to Rome is much more rugged and unsuitable for docking ships

But the truly interesting thing about Puteoli for our purposes is that Paul found "brothers" there

We don't know exactly how or when the gospel had arrived in Italy but it had and there was a church in Puteoli

And the believers there welcomed Paul along with Luke and Aristarchus and invited them to stay with them for seven days

We can't say for certain why there was a seven day layover in Puteoli but it's been theorized that perhaps the centurion took time to reequip his troops after surviving the shipwreck on Malta

But the fact that Paul was once again given such latitude speaks to his sterling character and his way with people

We know the penalty for a prisoner escaping was severe but apparently Julius believed Paul presented no such danger

And we see a genuine example of Christian hospitality as the Christ-followers in Puteoli opened their homes and their pocketbooks to care for Paul and the others for a full week

If they knew Paul at all they likely only knew him by reputation and had never laid eyes on him but they weren't put off by his arrival in chains because the one thing they knew was that Paul and the others were fellow believers and that was enough to cause them to shower the travelers with love

Love should be the hallmark of Christ-followers as Jesus said to his disciples in **John 13:35** –

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

And the believers at Puteoli certainly had love for Paul and the others and so did the believers at Rome

When they heard that Paul and the others were on their way up the Appian Road they made a walk of 40-odd miles south to the city of Appius and some joined them at Three Taverns; another town about 10 miles to the north of Appius

And the expression that Luke uses is the same that was used to describe an official delegation that would be sent by a city government to welcome a visiting dignitary – kind of like rolling out the red carpet

Paul was given a hero's welcome in spite of the fact that he was a prisoner and he was no doubt joyously escorted the rest of the way to Rome by those who had come to meet him

What a testimony that must have been to the rest of the travelling party and we wonder what Julius, the soldiers, and the other prisoners must have thought about the way Paul was received

We've already looked at how Paul's demonstrated character must have affected Julius but we also want to notice that the Roman believers must have behaved in such a way that their presence caused no alarm to Julius and the soldiers and that they were welcome to be around Paul

We should endeavor to follow their example and behave in such a way that we would be welcomed anywhere

And in **verse 15**, Luke records that Paul “thanked God and took courage” as a result of their whole-hearted welcome

Far too often the church can be a harsh place that is full of critics and it's been said that the Christian army is the only army in the world that shoots their own wounded

The believers here in Italy could well have shunned or avoided Paul as they waited for the outcome of his trial but they rushed to love on him and encourage him and that should be the pattern we see in the church

The world has enough people who are willing to treat believers harshly and unkindly without us helping them and the followers of Jesus Christ should be known for their love and encouragement of one another and for showing friendliness and attractiveness to those who are outside

In the middle section of our passage we see that Paul wasted no time in meeting with the Jewish leaders in Rome and that in his initial meeting he laid out his case before them

What Luke records for us is very brief and it's unknown if this is just a summary of a longer discourse but we have previously seen the details and what we see in Paul's two meetings with the Jewish leaders is that he once again spent little time on defending himself but instead he got right to the heart of the matter of laying the groundwork for the gospel

From his example we see that we also **must remain on message** and not get bogged down with things that are secondary

II. We must remain on message

Notice how in **verse 17** Paul uses the passive voice when he says, “I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans”

I believe this was Paul’s way of keeping the matter of who did the delivering ambiguous enough to show that while the Jews were certainly agents in the delivery it was really God who was behind it

God wanted Paul in Rome and he used the hatred of the Jews against Paul and the provisions of Roman law to facilitate that outcome

And Paul got right to the point in **verse 20** when he said that he was a prisoner only because he dared to claim that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah

All Israel was looking forward to the coming Messiah, “the hope of Israel” so that was acceptable but it was unacceptable to some to say that Jesus was the Messiah and so they sought to kill Paul

And it was only by God using Rome to protect his servant that he was now in Rome awaiting trial

It’s an amazing thing given how hostile the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem were toward Paul is that they didn’t bother to send any letters of support for their case to Rome and they sent no one to Rome from Judea to testify against Paul

Over the past couple of weeks we’ve seen how Paul’s accusers had provided **no witnesses** and **no proof** of any crime that Paul had committed and how one official after another had come to the same conclusion, that Paul was innocent

Now it seems that they didn’t even bother mounting an argument at all – either in writing or in person as **verse 21** says

Perhaps they were satisfied now that Paul was out of their vicinity and no longer their problem and content to know that he couldn’t be spreading his gospel while in custody

And the initial meeting ends as we see in **verse 22** with the Jewish leaders saying they wanted to meet with Paul again to hear his views

They especially wanted to hear what he had to say about Christianity or “this sect” as they called it about which they had seemingly heard nothing but negative reports

Follow along as I read **verses 23-28** –

When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet:

“Go to this people, and say, “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’

Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

We don’t know how much time elapsed between the first and second meetings but Luke tells us that when they came to meet with Paul the second time that even more of them were there to hear what Paul had to say

And Paul spared no effort as he made his case for Christ to this audience of influential and powerful Jewish leaders

We’ve seen previously how Paul addressed the gospel with a Jewish audience by starting with Old Testament prophecy and showing how Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled all of them

Paul did the same in this case as Luke records that Paul thoroughly expounded the Scriptures as he testified to the unfolding, historical nature of the kingdom of God and tried to convince them that Jesus was proven by Scripture to be the Christ

Some believed; others disbelieved

In **verse 24** we see that Paul's message had mixed success in that some believed or "were convinced" but others "disbelieved" which once again means they actively or willfully chose to not believe

This was not a matter of them being unclear on what Paul was saying or that they were in need of more information or that they simply couldn't believe for some other reason – some made the conscious, deliberate choice to disbelieve

Not everyone who Paul presented the gospel to accepted it but his method was sound and he stayed on message throughout his ministry with the only variance being in his approach as he faced different audiences

We also need to be careful to major on those things that are critically important and not allow ourselves to be sidetracked by relatively minor matters that might keep someone from hearing the gospel

Our methods can and must change as we strive to present Christ to the people we encounter

For instance, some may be more convinced by a rational, well-reasoned argument that relies on logic while another person might be better reached through a personal account of what trusting in Jesus has done for you

Another might prefer a more historical approach of prophecy fulfilled such as Paul used with Jewish audiences while others might benefit from the argument from creation as we saw Paul use with the philosophers in the Athens

Every person is different and we will be most successful when we know our audience well enough to present the gospel in a way that will resonate with them

Paul's plea from Isaiah

When Paul saw that some were choosing to disbelieve what he had endeavored to show them during their all-day session he made one last attempt to persuade them by citing another prophecy from Isaiah

One that directly concerned their attitude

In **verses 26-27** Paul quotes from **Isaiah 6:9-10** in showing that it was prophesied hundreds of years earlier that the Jews would predominantly not believe and be saved

In quoting this passage Paul wasn't trying to insult or enrage his audience but to show them what Scripture had to say about their unbelief thereby shocking them into recognizing their error

Jesus himself quoted this same passage from Isaiah for the same reason as we see recorded in each of the gospel accounts

But when Paul said that the result of the Jews rejecting the gospel was that the gospel and the salvation that comes from it had been sent to the Gentiles the Jews began arguing amongst themselves and they left the meeting

We saw this same reaction in Acts 22 when Paul was speaking to the mob in Jerusalem and they listened patiently right up to the point when he mentioned that God had sent him and his message of salvation to the Gentiles

And **Acts 22:22** says that when Paul uttered the word "Gentiles" they lost their minds and became enraged all over again

Paul knew what was truly important was not whether he would be found guilty or innocent when he stood before Caesar but that he use this opportunity that God had given him to do everything he could to get his countrymen to accept Christ

To that end Paul stayed on message as he took a great deal of time to lay out a compelling case for the gospel

We also need to recognize what is truly important when all is said and done and endeavor to stay on message

III. We must continue the mission

Then in the final two verses of Acts Luke tells us what Paul did during the next two years that he spent in Rome

He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. (Acts 28:30-31)

And we see in these verses that Paul **continued the mission** that Jesus had given to him

In **verse 31** Luke first says that Paul spent his time “proclaiming the kingdom of God”

To “proclaim” is to preach or to announce but more than that Paul was proclaiming to prompt a conclusion

From what we’ve seen throughout what Luke has shown us in Acts, we can deduce that Paul presented a biblical basis for accepting that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah and that he was doing so in order to lead people to that conclusion

Then we see that Paul was “teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ” which indicates that he was seeking to increase the knowledge of those who were listening

Paul not only wanted people to make the right decision but also to increase in their understanding

Notice also how Paul did his proclaiming and teaching

First we see that he engaged in those activities with **everyone who wanted to hear**

Paul welcomed everyone to hear his message and we need to do the same being careful not to exclude anyone either purposely or accidentally through giving them the feeling that perhaps they aren’t worthy

I imagine there were even a number of guards who were chained to Paul who heard without wanting to hear and I’m sure Paul spoke in a way that they too would understand that salvation was available to them too

Second we see that he engaged in those activities **with all boldness**

Paul wasn’t shy and he wasn’t apologetic about his witness

Paul knew the truth and he wanted desperately for everyone to know the truth

Third Paul engaged in those activities **without hindrance**

This includes no hindrance from the Roman government, no hindrance from the Jews, and no hindrance from Paul himself

God saw to it that the gospel message went forth freely during these two years so that Paul could say in **Philippians 1:12** that his imprisonment had “served to advance the gospel”

And in the next verse (**Philippians 1:13**) that the facts of what he was proclaiming and teaching became known “throughout the whole imperial guard”

Tradition tells us that several of Paul’s guards became Christ-followers as a result of being chained to him and hearing his witness

In addition, we know that Paul also wrote his **epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon** during this time

Paul’s imprisonment was not wasted time where he simply idled away his days awaiting trial

He knew that even though he was living in a rented house in Rome at his own expense and not free to move about as he had been on his missionary trips he still had a mission to complete and he was diligent to continue it

Circumstances for us are also not always going to be what we consider ideal but they may just put us right where God wants us so that we can reach the audience he has for us

And people are not always going to be convinced by our witness but that doesn’t excuse us from witnessing –

Like Paul, we must continue the mission that we have been given

Conclusion

Luke was a terrific historian who was thorough, accurate, and compelling in his writing his gospel and the book of Acts

He set out to give Theophilus a complete and accurate understanding of “the things that have been accomplished among us” as he said in his opening to the gospel that bears his name

But for those who like to see things neatly wrapped up and tied with a bow, the ending of Acts is dissatisfying as Luke simply ends the account with Paul continuing to minister as he awaits his trial before Caesar

While we can't say it with absolute certainty, it seems most likely that Paul was acquitted when his case was finally heard

After all, his accusers had failed in all their previous attempts to convict him and they didn't even bother to provide support for their accusations to Caesar

Roman law would demand that Paul be set free under those circumstances

And Paul seemed confident that he would be acquitted as he wrote to the Philippians that he was trusting in the Lord that he would soon follow Timothy and visit them soon

Although it isn't specifically stated in Scripture it seems best to determine that Paul was freed at this trial and continued to minister for another three years or so before being arrested once again and ultimately executed by Nero

It would have been during this second incarceration that Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy

Regardless, the mission that is narrated in the book Acts didn't end when Paul lost his head to the edge of a Roman sword as tradition tells us happened

It also didn't end with the death of the last apostle, John when he finally succumbed to old age on the island of Patmos

It continues to this day and will continue until the end of the age

The baton has simply been passed on to subsequent generations and it is now our job to carry the mission forward

To that end we need to be diligent in staying on message as we present the gospel to those around us and to follow the urging of **Hebrews 10:24-25** which says:

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

The mission continues but the day is coming when it will end and every day brings us ever closer to that day

We want to be found faithful when that day comes and be able to say like Paul did as he saw the end of his life approaching in **2Timothy 4:7**:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Let's pray

We will close with the hymn #446, “We've a Story to Tell to the Nations”

Notice what the verses say –

We've a story to tell to the nations that shall turn their hearts to the right

We've a song to be sung and a message to give – we can and must tailor our message to the best advantage

We've a Savior to show to the nations – ultimately, it's all about showing the world who Jesus is not only by our words but also by our deeds

Please stand and join together in singing hymn #446, “We've a Story to Tell to the Nations”