

Rome At Last

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- [0 : 0 0] Bibles to Acts 28. We're in that final chapter of Acts. We're going to read from verse 11 through the end of the chapter.
- ! Last week we left Paul and those 275 other men that were shipwrecked on the island of Malta for the winter.
- And that's where we pick up today's reading. After three months, we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island.
- It was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. From there we set sail and arrived at Regium.
- The next day the south wind came up and on the following day we reached Patoli. There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them and so we came to Rome.
- [1 : 0 5] The brothers there had heard that we were coming and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the three taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men, Paul thanked God and was encouraged.
- When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself with a Roman soldier, with a soldier to guard him. Three days later, he called together the leaders of the Jews.
- When they had assembled, Paul said to them, My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans.
- They examined me and wanted to release me because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had any charge to bring against my own people.
- For this reason, I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain. They replied, We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you.
- [2 : 2 3] But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect. They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying.
- From morning till evening, he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the law of Moses and from the prophets. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe.
- They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement. The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet, Go to this people and say, You will be ever hearing, but never understanding. You will be ever seeing, but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused. They hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn, and I would heal them. Therefore, I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen.

[3 : 44] For two whole years, Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance, he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, how many of you were here last week? Okay. Then you heard your pastor say something that was not true, and I come with a correction.

When Paul was bitten by that poisonous snake, the islanders concluded that he must be a what? A murderer. That though he had escaped from the perils of the sea, justice had caught up with him and was now punishing him for his crime.

But when he didn't swell up and drop dead, they changed their minds and said he was a god. To which I said, they were wrong on both counts.

He was no murderer and no god. And in so speaking, I was wrong on one count because as someone pointed out to me afterwards, he was indeed a murderer, wasn't he?

[5 : 02] He was the ringleader of those killing Christians and persecuting them. So that's my correction. But he was a forgiven murderer, wasn't he?

For Paul had repented and trusted in this Christ that we just sang of. Yes, he was guilty of murder, but Jesus died for murderers and his blood cleanses from every sin.

And so Paul was cleansed from the guilt of his murder. God's justice did not catch up with him on the island of Malta to punish him for his sin of murder.

No justice, God's justice had been satisfied at Calvary when Jesus took Paul's sin upon himself and was crushed instead of Paul.

So that sin was already served. The punishment was already paid for in full by the Lord Jesus. And so Paul finds himself forgiven.

[6 : 08] Jesus, God's son, had taken the rap for Paul and he never got over it. That's what causes him to cover the globe, as it were, that was known to him, the whole then known world, with this gospel.

The rest of his life, you see, was devoted to testifying to the gospel of God's grace. Let me tell you what this God has done for this sinner and will do for you.

That consumed his life. It took him on three missionary journeys through Asia, not just in Jerusalem, but throughout Judea and then through Asia and as far as Europe, where many of our forefathers have come from.

And along the way, first on board ship and then on the island of Malta, Paul had laid hold of opportunities to tell others about his great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And so it is that he now finally arrives at Rome. And it all happened just as Jesus said it would. We look first at the last leg of this journey.

[7 : 14] And what we notice is that it is uneventful. I'm not even putting it up on the screen for you today. We're told where they docked and where they put off to the next place. After three months wintering in Malta, they set sail and 12 days later, they arrived in Rome.

And it wasn't so much the journey now that draws the commentary of Luke, the writer. But he tells us something else that I find interesting.

He tells us something about the ship that they took the rest of the journey to Rome. And he draws our attention to an interesting point that this ship had a figurehead.

a figurehead of twin gods of Castor and Pollux. I suppose, if some of you can remember, there used to be hood ornaments on cars and right up front there was this big hood ornament.

And so these ships had these massive ornaments up front. And here there was the twin gods, the children, the sons of Zeus, this made-up god of the pagans.

[8 : 22] And there they are. And these gods were superstitiously, Castor and Pollux, were superstitiously worshipped as gods who protected seamen on their voyages.

So we understand why this ship would have Pollux and Castor mounted on the front. But now remember who's on this journey.

These 270, however many there were besides Paul and his team, 276 total, they had heard a different message about who protects from the storm from Paul, hadn't they?

Paul had said it's not Castor or Pollux that protects us at sea. It's the God who made the sea. It's the God whose I am and whom I serve.

He's the one that kept us safe at sea. What a testimony these 270 plus had received. But how sad to see men who lived all of their life as they worked in danger of the sea.

[9 : 35] And instead of trusting in the God who made the sea, are found trusting in idols. worthless, imaginary gods, the sons of Zeus.

But you know, it's no different than today. What do you see on some cars on the dashboard? You see an image of Mary or an image of Christopher, the patron saint of protection, of travelers.

There they are, fastened, just like Pollux and Castor. And people putting their trust in them to get them to their destinations safely.

Though some trust in idols, we will trust in the name of the Lord, our God. The God who made winds and waters and controls them. The God who made all things and rules over them.

so they traveled and when they landed in Puteoli, it's the last port before they start the journey on land in Italy. And when they come to Puteoli, they found some brothers there, which tells us that the gospel had already come to Italy before Paul got there.

[10 : 52] And we must ever remember that what we read in Acts is just a tiny bit of what God was doing in building his church. He's following Paul, but don't think that that's all that was going on with the gospel.

Somebody had already brought the gospel to Italy so that when Paul arrives for the first time, he's meeting a group of brothers in Puteoli, and they invited him to stay for seven days.

It's amazing, isn't it? It seems that by now the centurion who's in charge of Paul is just about willing to do whatever Paul wants. So Paul's friends say, why don't you stay for seven days?

And the centurion says, yeah, that's a good idea. And we'll do what you want, Paul, because Paul was so much a blessing to the people that were traveling with him.

And so they stayed the seven days. And from there, they traveled the last hundred miles to Rome on the famous Roman road called the Appian Way, which I'm told you can still see the remnants of in southern Italy today.

[12 : 01] Well, the news of Paul's coming to Rome traveled faster than Paul himself. The news got there that Paul is on his way, and some of the brothers in Rome now heard that Paul and his team were coming, and they traveled some 40 miles out to meet him, and then escorted him back to Rome.

Now, that's the type of an official welcome that was usually given to important dignitaries. when someone important came to a city, they would send out a welcoming party to meet them and then to travel the last stage of the journey together with them.

Well, here we find this weather-beaten old apostle of Jesus Christ receiving an official welcome by these brothers in Christ.

Christ. And he says, Luke writes, at the sight of these men, Paul thanked God and was encouraged. He's thankful.

This is a longing fulfilled at last. As you read the book of Romans that he wrote three years earlier, he says, I've longed to come to see you, but I've been hindered. I want to come and see you.

[13 : 23] And now at last, his longing is fulfilled. And he's thankful for these brothers in Christ who are coming to welcome him. They're not indifferent.

Oh, so what? This guy named Paul's come. No, they're excited and they travel 40 miles out to meet him. And Paul, the kindness, the grace, the love of God in these brothers warms his heart, makes him thankful, encourages him.

And most of all, I believe that these were visible representatives of the church of God in Rome. And that had to be encouraging to Paul. Again, here's visible witness that in the very heart, the very center, the capital of the pagan Roman empire, here is a church of Jesus Christ, even in this place, that I didn't have anything to do with planting.

And he thanked God and he was encouraged. I think if we get the idea that the Apostle Paul is such a courageous, stalwart man that he never needed encouraging, we've got the wrong picture of Paul.

He belongs to Isaiah 40, 30 as well, of those who grow weary and tired. He's in that group and need encouragement. And here it is, just the sight, just the sight of these brothers coming is enough to make him thankful and to lift his spirits.

[14 : 49] Let us remember that when our missionaries come to us. That when you come with interest to meet them, to greet them, to tell them of your prayers for them, your thankfulness, that they are out there laboring with the gospel and you take an interest in what you've been praying about and this one that they're working with and that endeavor, their hearts are encouraged.

Remember Paul. Paul needed to be encouraged. How much more are missionaries as they return? Remember that. Your interaction and interest with them is a real encouragement to them.

And let's remember this as well when our brothers and sisters are alone or shut in or grieving or are in some need that your very presence to go and be there can be great encouragement to them.

Paul was encouraged at just the very sight of his brothers. May God use you and me to bring encouragement from heaven to these who are needing a word.

Needing not just a word of encouragement but our presence to encourage them. Well the last 40 miles must have been full of rich fellowship for Paul as he told them about what God had done on the high seas and on the island of Malta and as they told him what God has been doing in building a church right there in the midst of the pagan Roman empire's capital.

[16 : 22] And so we came to Rome. Loaded words aren't they? Because what have we heard? We've heard about five or six chapters earlier when Paul was down in Jerusalem and was arrested and things weren't going like he had thought and maybe hoped it would that the Lord Jesus came to him one night and says take courage Paul as you have testified about me in Jerusalem so you must testify about me in Rome.

And so we came to Rome. And so I guess so think of what all they came through to get to Rome.

The last five chapters have read like a suspense novel and we've we've been on the edge of our seat wondering how is he ever going to live through this to make it to Rome? Two assassination plots on his life by Jews.

One time 40 plus of them who swore they would never take another bite of food or drink until he's dead. These guys mean business. Oh how's he going to make it to Rome?

Two assassination plots. A Roman governor who just leaves Paul in prison for two years as a favor to the Jews. Ah this will please him. Forget Paul.

[17 : 44] Let him rot in jail. Fourteen days on the hurricane force winds at sea that nearly sunk him to the bottom of the Mediterranean. The sailors who tried to abandon ship and leave them to sink all on their own.

The soldiers plot before making for the shore to kill all the prisoners of whom Paul was one. The dangerous swim to shore in the midst of that storm that nor Easter.

The snake bite by the venomous snake. And so we came to Rome. Paul was living in the very shadow of death.

But you know he was immortal until he got to Rome. He was invincible. He could be bitten by a deadly snake. No matter.

His life is not in general. He's making it to Rome. Why? What made it so sure? The worst storm that the sailors had seen. No matter. His life is not in jeopardy.

[18 : 47] Why not? Because the word of the Lord Jesus determines history. And Jesus said, you're going to Rome to testify about me.

And it all happened just as Jesus said it would. Psalm 33 praises the Lord for this very reason.

That the Lord foils the plans of the nations. He thwarts the purposes of the peoples. Like assassination plots on his servant.

But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever. The purposes of his heart through all generations. Like Paul making it to Rome to testify about him there. God is to be praised.

And you are to be encouraged. You are to take encouragement for this child of God. Has God promised to bring you all the way to heaven? Has he not said that goodness and mercy would follow you all the days of your life and at last you would dwell in the house of the Lord forever?

[19 : 51] Then you are heaven bound as much as Paul was Rome bound. And you are heaven bound with a promise as much as Paul was Rome bound with a promise.

And he will finish the good work that he has begun. And he will keep you by his mighty power. And he will not let anyone snatch you from his hand. And no matter what threatens you along the way, he will rescue us from every evil attack and will bring us safely to his heavenly kingdom.

Second Timothy 4 18. The Lord Jesus has promised I will lose none of all those that the father has given me, but will raise them up at the last day.

And it must be for the Lord rules over all things to bring his promises to pass. And one day it will be said of you, sister. And so she came to heaven.

And of you, brother. And so he came to heaven. Just as surely as it said of Paul, and so we came to Rome.

[21 : 01] And you'll find that everything happened just as Jesus said it would, that not one of his promises has failed, that not one of his believers is missing. These things are not something that are just true for apostles.

They're true for everyone on the receiving end of a promise. you can go to the bank with it. It's yours. The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me. Psalm 138, 8, for you.

Well, there's encouragement. They arrived in Rome. And when they arrived in Rome, Paul is not thrown into the common prison with all the rest of the prisoners, is he? He's rather allowed to stay by himself with a soldier guarding him.

Kind of like house arrest, I suppose. Being chained to a Roman soldier, but with many freedoms given him. We keep seeing this.

Kindness to Paul, the prisoner. Where does it come from? It comes from our kind God. But he gives him favor in the eyes of even the centurion and these soldiers. He's not thrown in with the rest, but he's given his own rented house.

[22 : 11] And there he has special favors given. Remember, the centurion and the commander and the governors were confused as to what he'd done wrong.

And it seems that God had given him favor because of that with them. So Paul knows he's in Rome to testify about Jesus. And so he wastes no time getting down to business.

Now, when Paul came to a new place, what was his custom? What did we see in his missionary travels? Well, he first would go to the synagogue, Wundi, and he'd preach to the Jews there. And then when things got so hot, he would leave and go to the Gentiles.

Well, he can't go to the synagogue. He's in chains and he's in house arrest. So what does he do? Guess I can't be useful. Guess I can't do anything for God. My usefulness is over.

I just sit here and lick my wounds and wish I was out preaching. No, he sends out an invitation to the leaders of the Jews, those who would attend synagogue, those who would lead synagogue worship.

[23 : 15] And he says, come, I want to talk to you. I want to see you. And so they came. I want you to notice the Christ-like spirit of the apostle here.

You know it's the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem who were seeking his death sentence. You know it was the Jewish leaders all over the world who stirred up persecution against him.

And yet when he comes to Rome, the first thing he wants to see are Jewish leaders. He's come with the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Gentiles.

He doesn't turn away from them in fear or in revenge, but instead he moves toward them with the grace and the love of God in the gospel.

And in the first place he seeks to remove any unnecessary offense between him and them. He's a Jew, but he's preaching a message that hasn't gone down well with Jews and he wants to remove any unnecessary offense.

[24 : 25] We see it right off the bat. He calls them brothers, my brothers. Not brothers in Christ, but brothers as to the nation. We're one. We're one people.

I'm one of you. And he assures them that he has nothing against his Jewish people or against their true religion. And that he's not come to Rome to make any charges against the Jews.

I'm only here to give my defense against their false accusations of me. In fact, the Romans already examined me and they found me, they were ready to release me.

They couldn't find anything worthy of death like the Jews said I was. And when they were ready to release me, it was when the Jews objected and continued to push for the death penalty that I was left with no other recourse but to appeal to Caesar.

And that's what I did to be heard by the high court of Caesar in Rome. That's why I'm here, you see. I wanted you to know that so that you would understand I have nothing against the Jews.

[25 : 29] It's for the hope of Israel that I'm bound with this chain, he can say. For the hope of Israel.

Who or what is the hope of Israel? It's Jesus the Messiah. What was the hope of Israel for all the years in the Old Testament? It was that God is sending a Savior to take away our sins.

God is going to redeem us. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins. Psalm 130 verse 8. He's going to send a Redeemer. What was the hope of Israel?

It was Jesus the Messiah. And Paul said that's why I'm on trial here. I'm in chains for the hope of Israel. All hopes of salvation are found in Christ alone.

Well the Jewish leaders respond to Paul that you know we haven't received any letters from Judea. Bad reports about you. but we are very anxious to hear your views because we know that people are speaking everywhere against this sect.

[26 : 37] That would be Christianity. That would be the religion of Jesus. And you preach that Paul so we're very anxious to hear what you have to say. I want you to admire the providence of God once more in the book of Acts.

How he has prepared both a preacher and an audience here at Rome. And haven't we seen that throughout the book of Acts? As he starts to bring the gospel to Gentiles.

He's got Cornelius and a whole house full of them. And he's got Peter over here in Joppa. And he has a way of bringing the two together. And preparing Peter to preach to Gentiles.

And preparing the Gentiles to receive his word so that they come together. Another time it's Philip. And it's an Ethiopian unit going back to his homeland of Ethiopia.

Heading out of Jerusalem on an old country road. And God has a way of bringing Philip on that road to meet up with that Ethiopian unit. Prepared preacher, prepared audience.

[27 : 42] Folks that's what we're seeing here again this morning. You talk about a prepared audience. These Jews lived in the Old Testament scripture. These are the leaders.

These are the synagogue rulers. These are the ones choosing the scriptures and reading the scriptures. They're Old Testament prophets and Moses. And here is Paul, a Jew, who is raised and taught under Gamaliel, a leading teacher of Israel.

And when they have objections to the fact of Jesus being Messiah, nothing new to this preacher. He had the same objections.

Probably had better arguments against Christianity than they could ever raise. And God brings together these Jewish leaders in Rome and the Apostle Paul here in this house arrest.

Christ. And we stand in awe of God bringing his choice servant, his prepared spokesman to these Jewish leaders of Rome.

[28 : 54] So that on the arranged day they came in even larger numbers to hear Paul. They heard him the first time, they set a date for another meeting, and they came out in larger numbers.

You talk about a prepared audience, they were eager, they wanted to hear. And so from morning till evening he testified about the Lord Jesus, just as Jesus said he would in Rome.

Blessed Rome to have the choice of apostle to bring the gospel to you. A prepared man for a prepared people.

Who has God sent you to? You know you're a prepared believer if you're Christian. God has been preparing you. And the people he's put you among, believe me, he's doing something in their lives too.

Lay hold of these opportunities. Even as Paul chained, house arrest, he finds a way, doesn't he? He finds a way to testify to the gospel of God's grace.

[30 : 01] Well his message is summarized in two points. Don't miss it. The kingdom of God and Jesus. And those aren't two opposing truths. Those aren't one thing has to do with what's going to happen in the millennium in the future and then there's Jesus.

No, no. These two things are together. Paul is preaching about the kingdom of God and Jesus. In fact, the kingdom of God is called the kingdom, the good news of the kingdom.

It's the gospel of the kingdom. And we see Paul preaching the kingdom of God and Jesus. Notice in verse 31, it's also a summary of what he preached for two whole years there in Rome.

The kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. And he did so using their own Old Testament scriptures to persuade them. So we must know what is this kingdom of God and who is this Jesus?

And how are they related? Because that was the only message that Paul brought to Rome. The kingdom of God and Jesus. It can all be boiled down to that.

[31 : 11] Well, God's kingdom had been foretold throughout the Old Testament scriptures. In so many ways, it had been said there's coming this wonderful kingdom of God's people living under God's perfect rule and blessing forever.

And its king will be a king who gains his citizens by crushing the head of the serpent, Satan, delivering them from bondage to sin and death.

But who in doing so will have his heel bruised? And who will be the suffering servant of the Lord who will be bruised for their transgressions and will be punished to bring them peace with God?

He will be a king who reigns over his people in grace and truth in unfailing love. And his reign will be worldwide, not just over the Israelites, but he will reign over a people from every nation.

And so Paul's taking them to the Old Testament scriptures, to these passages talking about this glorious coming kingdom and the king. And then he announces that this kingdom has come in the coming of the king, Jesus of Nazareth.

[32 : 27] The king's coming is proof that God's kingdom has come. He sent his king. He's here. And so the apostle makes clear to these Jewish leaders that God's kingdom is all about the Lord Jesus Christ, his king.

That this Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament, all that the prophets said about this coming king and kingdom. It's all fulfilled here in Christ, in his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, and his reign over the universe.

That his reign is forever and ever. This is the promised king of David's lion. This is David's son, yet David's Lord. This is him. And he would have taught them that his kingdom was primarily spiritual at this time.

He didn't come with armies of soldiers. No, he comes and he reigns in the hearts of his people by grace. But that this kingdom will be completed and perfected when Jesus returns.

When the king comes back to reign forever and ever and to put all of his enemies under his feet. And then his believing people will live with him in a purified earth, a new heavens and a new earth where the curse is absolutely gone for good.

[33 : 53] The home of righteousness. righteousness. And I'm sure he told him that the bad news is that none of us are qualified for this kingdom. You've got to be righteous to get in. Well, how righteous?

You've got to be righteous with divine righteousness. You've got to have a righteousness that matches God's righteousness. And because we're all sinners who've rebelled against God's kingdom, against his rule, we're under his wrath.

this Jesus whom we crucified, God has made both King, Lord, and Christ. That's the bad news.

But the good news is that as he died, he was dying for his people. He was bearing their transgressions. He was taking the punishment our sins deserve so that we could be right with God, reconciled, forgiven.

But not everyone just automatically enters the kingdom. As Jesus said, you must be born again even to enter the kingdom of heaven. You must turn from your rebellious ways.

[34 : 54] That was the message of John the Baptist and Jesus. Repent. Why? Because the kingdom of God is at hand. How do you receive the kingdom of God? You turn from going your way and you come and you surrender to the King in faith and obedience.

You come and you worship the King. God is so it's a message a gospel message.

That's what the kingdom of God is. That's what Jesus is about. It's about the gospel of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. You must trust in his curse bearing in order to be forgiven of your sins.

You must see that he alone has the righteousness to give to you and he gives it to you freely as his gift to all who believe on him. And in this way God qualifies us to share in the inheritance of the saints and the kingdom of light.

It's in this way that he translates us out of the kingdom of darkness and puts us into the kingdom of his dear son. It's the kingdom of God and Jesus is the king and you need to be converted to him and put your trust in him and enter the kingdom of God.

[36 : 07] You see Paul wasn't just dumping information about the kingdom and about Jesus. Without a care as to what they did with it. He's out to convince them. He's bringing up his best arguments.

He wants to persuade them. He wants them to trust in Jesus and to receive him as their king and savior. He wants them to believe on him as their only hope of salvation and to enter this kingdom and enjoy it forever with him.

As always Paul was out to convert them. Well what was the response? It was mixed wasn't it? As he's preaching some are nodding.

That's exactly what I read in the Old Testament. Wow I never realized that Jesus did that and that and why he fulfills the whole thing. And others are shaking their heads and frowning.

Nope it's not like that. That's not it. a mixed response. You know the gospel of Christ always brings division.

[37 : 15] In fact Jesus says it sometimes brings division to households between husband and wife, son, daughter, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law.

That the division comes upon meeting Christ in his gospel. There's this separation. So you got the whole of humanity coming and there's Christ in his gospel and it's a V and it just separates the whole human race into two groups.

Those who believe and those who would not believe. And that's what we find happening here in this rented house as Paul is preaching the gospel of Christ. And it was all according to the prophecy of Simeon when he held the baby Jesus in his arms remember.

And what did he say about that baby? He says that this child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.

This Jesus, this little babe will cause some in Israel to fall and others to rise. Interesting. He's a stone, the Bible says.

[38 : 32] He's a stone. To some he's a stumbling stone. And upon meeting Christ, they stumble. He's a rock of offense. They take offense at who he is and what he claims and what he commands and they stumble and they fall and they fall into hell.

And it's the same stone that some stumble over is a cornerstone and some people put their trust in him and rise to everlasting life.

Same Jesus, two responses to him. And it was happening in this home that day. Yes, no. No. They came as one group, all eager to hear him, weren't they?

And upon hearing the gospel and meeting Christ in the gospel, they were divided. They disagreed among themselves.

And that's the way it has always been and always will be with Christ and his gospel in this world. Expect it. It happened when Paul preached. It happened when Jesus preached.

[39 : 45] Believe me, it's happened under my preaching. And it will happen to the end of the age. So we're not thrown off by it. And let's be sure that we don't blame the gospel for the division.

We don't blame Christ in his gospel. Oh, it's his fault that there is division. No, as Simeon said, it's rather that in meeting Christ, the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.

So here we are in this room, if it was pitch dark, and suddenly somebody turned the lights on, and it found us doing all kinds of evil deeds. Did the light cause us to do the evil?

No, the light just revealed what we were. And that's what happens when the gospel comes. It reveals the thoughts of many a heart. You all look so beautiful this morning, and everyone's smiling and happy and all the rest, but I can't see your hearts, but I'll tell you what brings out the heart is Jesus and his gospel.

And as the light of the gospel dawns on people, it brings out the thoughts of the heart. And some are saying, that's the Jesus I need, and others are saying, I don't want him.

[40 : 59] I don't want him. What is the gospel doing to you this morning? It's come again to you? What's it revealing? What kind of thoughts is it stirring?

Are you surrendering to Jesus? You're just throwing yourself into his arms to be saved by him? Or are you resisting?

Resisting? Paul's final statement is not his own words. It's the words of the Holy Spirit spoken to the forefathers, their forefathers through Isaiah the prophet.

And so Paul's coming to them not with his own words. He wants them to be sure that you don't think that these words are coming out of a man's brain. These words came out of God's mouth. And God the Holy Spirit spoke them through his prophet, his mouthpiece Isaiah.

And though they were 700 years old, they not only described Isaiah's hearers, they were describing some of these in the house who were hearing the gospel from Paul.

[42 : 07] And there is no other Old Testament passage quoted more often than this one. six times in the New Testament, this passage is quoted more than any other verse in the Old Testament.

That should surely demonstrate something of its relevance and of its importance. And it's a sobering word of judgment and warning. Here's the words that God spoke through Isaiah.

And he spoke them to Isaiah at his commissioning when he first called him to be a prophet. You may remember this from our study in Isaiah. Isaiah. He said in verse 26 here, go to this people and say you will be ever hearing but never understanding.

You will be ever seeing but never perceiving. Do you get the picture? They're hearing. They're hearing a whole lot. They're ever hearing. But they're never understanding.

And they're ever seeing but never perceiving. So the problem is not a lack of light and truth. Not at all. They're ever hearing the truth proclaimed and ever seeing the light of the gospel.

[43 : 16] They had the scripture. Who more than the Jews? They had the scriptures and the prophets galore. But the truth never sank in. They never got its meaning. Which was Jesus.

And their need for him. The inner lights never came on with perception. Now here's the million dollar question. why not?

Why didn't they get it? Why didn't they get him? Why didn't they see Jesus? Well these verses are quoted in different places in different ways.

But the way they're quoted here. It's God's explanation of the problem. Listen to it. Verse 27. For. Because. This is why they never understand.

Because this people's heart has become calloused. Hardened. They hardly hear with their ears. And. Don't miss it. They have closed their eyes.

[44 : 16] That's important. Otherwise they might see with their eyes. Hear with their ears. Understand with their hearts. And turn and I would heal them. You see how the Holy Spirit lays all the blame squarely at their feet.

Why were these people shaking their heads? It wasn't a lack of light and truth. It was shining brilliantly in the gospel as Paul preached it.

No it's your fault Paul is saying. It's your fault the Holy Spirit is saying. The light is sufficiently clear but you have closed your eyes.

You don't want to see. So answer me. If you stumble into a highway and are killed by a car and it's because you closed your eyes and would not see whose fault is it?

Well it's your fault. It's your fault. You have no one to blame. And that's what God the Holy Spirit is saying to these people who refuse the gospel. Don't you come with some idea about the sovereignty of God and say it's his fault that I can't see.

[45 : 31] Don't you come and say it's his fault that I don't perceive. Now I said there are other passages where this truth is used to teach the sovereignty of God but that's not the way it's used here.

It's here used as an explanation of why they can't see and he says it's because you have shut your eyes and your unwillingness to see is the reason you don't see.

you don't want this Jesus to save you from your sins because you love your sins. You don't want him to rule over you as your king because you love being king and doing it your way.

You don't want to be dependent upon him for mercy because you want to do for yourself and earn everything that you get. It's your own stubborn unwillingness to believe that keeps you from understanding.

it's your own callous hard heart that accounts for your never perceiving. Otherwise you would see you would hear you would understand you would turn and I would heal you.

[46 : 43] Do you see? The Savior is set forth in the gospel with such beauty and glory. He's plain enough. that were it not for your unwillingness and malice toward him.

You'd see and turn and you'd say this is it. I need him and I'm coming. And what would he do? He would heal you. He would heal you.

You see the wholesome effect of the gospel. What is the gospel as it's preached? As people turn to Christ he heals them. From the plague of their heart.

The sin that keeps them guilty. It keeps them in bondage. It keeps them in that deadness of hard state that we just sang about earlier. And everyone who turns to God is healed.

I would heal you. I would heal you. And so the Bible is ever pointing sinners. Come. Come to me and I will heal you. And how are we healed?

[47 : 46] It's by his wounds we are healed. Isn't it? The great physician is wounded and we are healed. So come you sinners poor and wretched. Weak and wounded, sick and sore.

Jesus ready stands to save you. Full of pity joined with power. He is willing. He is able. He is able. He is able. He is willing. Doubt no more.

Could it be that some have sat through the whole series of the book of Acts and you have heard the gospel of Christ and you have seen its life changing power to save. You are some of the most privileged people on the planet not for hearing me but for hearing the gospel.

There are people who are living and born and live their whole lives and go to their graves they have never heard once the name of Jesus. You have sat through the whole book and you have seen this gospel permeate the world and you have seen people transformed by it and there are people here who have been the same and yet you refuse it.

Oh hear this word of warning. Don't trifle with the gospel. You never walk away from the gospel as you come to it. You either leave softened and repenting and turning and being healed or you leave harder.

[49 : 02] Every time you refuse to come to Christ your heart gets more calloused and harder. Beware. Paul closes with these words therefore in light of your rejection of the salvation of Jesus I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles and they will listen.

If you will not listen and receive this gospel of salvation the Gentiles will and they had already been receiving it all around the world. If Jews refuse to come to the feast what is to happen?

You're to go out into the highways and byways and compel the Gentiles to come in. Why? Because my feast must be full. And there's no reason why any Jews should complain that the Gentiles are in.

And they are out because they didn't want to hear. And the Gentiles received. He's hoping to provoke the Jews to jealousy. He's saying these things because he's trying to persuade them to end their rebellion and to come to Christ.

And so the book ends with Paul waiting two whole years for his trial. We think our trial system and our court system is backed up two years before Paul gets up to give his answer against the accusation of the Jews.

[50 : 19] And what's he doing? He's making good use at the time isn't he? He's not sitting around moping but he's laying hold. He's rolling up his... He knows why he's in Rome. He's here to testify about Jesus.

Can't be out preaching. Can't be doing it in front of a court trial. Well let me do it right here. And so from that rented home he welcomed all who would come to him for two whole years boldly and without hindrance he preached the gospel of the kingdom and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And no doubt there were many conversions as we've already seen that some were convinced and believed. And this growing church at Rome is established more and more by a living apostle who is with them to teach them.

And from this home he wrote letters to the churches and sent them out by way of his fellow workers. And from this home he prayed for the churches and for the spread of the gospel worldwide.

From this rented house in Rome Paul's prayers reached heaven and drew down the grace and power of Christ in places hundreds and thousands of miles away.

- [51 : 31] Folks we've got access to that same throne don't we? I think we sometimes attribute too much to Paul's preaching and not enough to his prayers but eternity will show what was accomplished by his prayers for the unconverted to be saved.
- My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved. Know how God answered that prayer. Come to heaven and you'll see all that were saved in response to it.
- The very same throne of grace open to you and me. Let's pray God's power down upon gospel labors around the world. Paul is busy from this rented house and then there's the soldiers themselves chained to Paul.
- We've got to remember them don't we? Can you imagine what it must have been like for them to be chained to the apostle Paul? That means they couldn't help but hear his preaching.
- Every word of it. His teaching. His witnessing. His fellowshipping with believers that came to him. His dictating letters. His singing of praises to God. His reading of the scriptures for the practice was to read aloud.
- [52 : 39] His praying. They heard it. Who heard it? These soldiers. Their ears were used to hearing the vulgar harsh language of soldier talk.
- And they're hearing the holy praises of Jesus being sung and spoken of and prayed. And then they're going back to the barracks to tell the others.
- Do you know what this guy's saying about this Jesus of Nazareth? Somebody else is on duty. Chained to the apostle to hear him. Two whole years.
- If somebody was chained to you for this week what would they hear of the gospel? What would they see of your spirit in the midst of your trials?
- Paul's in prison. And these soldiers saw his attitude in prison. Well you don't have somebody chained to you but believe me you've got people watching you.
- [53 : 45] And they're watching. They're watching. And they're listening. Because maybe they've heard that you're a Christian. And you want to draw attention to yourself. You just let it be known that you're a follower of Jesus.
- And suddenly the eyes are upon you. And they seem to have an idea of what Christians should live like don't they? And what should come out of our mouths. And how we should live.
- And very often they know quite a bit. And we. We are to represent our Savior to them. As Paul wrote to the Colossians.
- Make the most of every opportunity. That's what he was doing even as he wrote to the Colossians. From his house arrest. Making the most of every opportunity. Being careful how he lived among those who were unbelievers.
- Speaking with grace in every word. So what we see is that the word of God was not bound even if Paul was. That's the glory of the message of the book of Acts.
- [54 : 45] That Jesus said at the beginning. You will be my witnesses. And I will give you the Holy Spirit to empower you to be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Samaria and all Judea and to the ends of the earth.
- And we followed that gospel out all the way to Rome. The capital of the Roman Empire. And here for two years unhinderedly. unhinderedly.
- It's going forth. Yes Paul you must testify about me in Rome. And even though he's under house arrest the Lord Jesus makes sure that there he can testify about his saving grace.
- Let's ask what we can do in the situation that we're in to advance the gospel this week. To rejoice in our savior to give him the praise. Let's sing from the overhead.

One the race. One is the race that needs Christ. Stand with me and we'll sing to a familiar tune. Let's pray.

[55 : 52] We thank you father for sending your son to be the king of this kingdom and what a gracious king he is. That he would lay down his life for his citizens. That he would purchase us with his own life's blood.

And then that he would rise again victorious over sin and death and hell. And ascend into heaven and that he's coming again one day to put all the kingdoms of this world under his feet.

To gather his own into his barn. To burn the chaff with fire. We give you thanks for including us. We thank you that the gospel is calling one and all this morning to come to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

To enter the kingdom. And we pray that you would give it fruits. That even in this place there would be those who this day agree with the gospel.

Agree with the testimony of God about his son. That this God has given us eternal life. That this life is in his son so that he who has the son has life.

[56 : 58] And he who has not the son of God has not life. Thank you Jesus. Use us as your spokesman. To tell your praises.

We ask in Jesus name. Amen.