

Day 7 : Acts 28:24-31 – Paul At Rome (II)

Prayerfully read: Romans 14

Understanding

As in Paul's ministry at other places, his preaching caused a division (v24) – some believed, others disbelieved. They all heard the same message, at the same time, from the same speaker – but their responses were different.

The explanation for this was to be found in the prophecy of Isaiah – a prophecy also quoted by Jesus (Matthew 13:14-15). The problem was not in the message or the messenger – but in the hearts and ears of those hearing it. They were too spiritually hardened, too proud and resistant to God to be able to receive the message. The gospel was too humbling. Israel had crucified its own Christ! The law had not brought them salvation! The only way of salvation was to trust in a crucified Christ who had endured the law's curse! This was humbling – too humbling for proud hearts.

As at other places, Paul, on seeing that the Jews had now heard the gospel but largely rejected it, turned to the Gentiles. This is the story of Acts – the gospel has gone from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. It began with a few Jewish believers in an upper room – the church is now worldwide, dominated by Gentiles, and the gospel is now being preached even to Caesar's household – some of whom would be converted (Philippians 4:22).

Paul continued as a prisoner for 2 years, preaching boldly to the audience who came to him (v30-1). From what he says in Philippians 2:24, it seems that he was released. Church history is inconclusive on what happened to him afterwards. Some believe that he travelled on to Spain as he planned (Romans 15:24). He was re-imprisoned and we believe not released again (2 Timothy 4:6) - church history records that he was beheaded by the Roman tyrant Caesar Nero.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- The continuation of the book of Acts is... you and me. The gospel is being preached in our corner of the earth. There is much opposition. A few believe – but many others scoff. But we have a risen Lord Jesus Christ who has purposed to advance his church until every one of his enemies has been defeated (1 Corinthians 15:25-28). Does this encourage you? What difference will it make to you today?
- What other lessons have you learnt from Acts? How will it change you?

The Acts Of The Apostles

Daily Bible Reading Notes

Week 16 (Chapter 27:1-28:31)

Grace Church Belper

<http://www.gracebelper.org.uk>

(For previous weeks' notes, visit
<http://www.gracebelper.org.uk/readingnotes.php>)

Day 1 : Acts 27:1-12 – Journey To Rome

Prayerfully read (above and): Romans 8

Understanding

Luke now turns his attention to the final part of his account – the journey to and arrival in Rome, the heart of the empire.

Use of “we” and “us” now resumes, showing that Luke had rejoined Paul to accompany him on this journey – as had Aristarchus, who had been with Paul before in the riot at Ephesus and on the journey to Jerusalem (19:29, 20:4) – and would even share with Paul in imprisonment (Col. 4:10, Philemon 24).

The “Augustan Regiment” (v2) was a band of 600 Syrian soldiers. The name of the centurion (Julius) probably indicates that he became a citizen during the reign of Julius Caesar (Augustus). This man was kind to Paul, allowing him to visit his friends at Sidon (v3). This area had been evangelised by those scattered after Stephen's death (11:19), had been visited and encouraged by Paul and Barnabas (15:3), and Paul had previously stayed in nearby Tyre for a week (21:3-6). We see that Paul was not alone, but God had provided for his support in several ways. The only good way to get an idea of the route which the ship took is to find a map!

When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth some years earlier (2 Cor. 11:25-26), he had already been ship-wrecked three times and spent a day and a night in the ocean. There was debate on the ship about whether it was safe to proceed, or whether they needed to stay for the winter. (The “fast” mentioned in verse 9 is Yom Kippur (the Jewish “Day of Atonement”), which falls in late September or October). As an experienced traveller, Paul urged them against it – but was outvoted by others on-board who wanted (possibly for commercial reasons) to press on.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- No Christian is intended to survive on their own – God intends us to help and encourage one another in the church. Even Paul was not left alone.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- If I am a Christian, what can I do practically to encourage and build up my fellow believers in the church? Do I feel the need of such encouragement myself? If I do, then I know that probably others do so too – so what can I do to help them? We all know how even little gestures of kindness can mean a lot to us, don't we?

Day 6 : Acts 28:17-23 – Paul At Rome

Prayerfully read: Romans 13

Understanding

Paul was kept under “house arrest” (v16, v23) - unable to travel, but at liberty to receive guests. He used this opportunity to the full, inviting the Jews to come and hear him. Now in God's providence he had a wonderful advantage – he was guarded by his very own soldier (v16), and so had nothing to fear from any of the gospel's enemies!

Paul explained to the Jews what had happened to him. He made clear that he was no traitor to Israel or to the law – he had appealed to Caesar not out of disloyalty, but for his own protection. He was not a prisoner because of any wickedness – but because of his faithfulness to the God of Israel. The “hope of Israel” (v20) was the Messiah, and the life that came through him.

The Jews at Rome had not heard any news concerning Paul. Whether this was because none had been sent, or because of the limited travel possible during winter, we do not know. It seems plausible though that for the Jews living in Israel, Paul was out of sight and out of mind.

When the Jews came to Paul, he preached to them the same things which we have seen throughout Acts – explaining the new order which had been brought in through Jesus, and how this perfectly agreed with all that was written in the Scriptures.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Again we see that God's providence achieves his promises perfectly – but not predictably. Paul preached at Rome, and was safe – because he was under arrest!
- There is one gospel, for all people, everywhere. It concerns Jesus Christ, his person, his coming, his work on the cross, his resurrection and ascension and return and role as the final judge. It is this gospel, or nothing!

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Have I believed the gospel? Is Jesus Christ everything to me? Is the reality of what he has done the daily food and drink for my soul?
- What was Paul's attitude to the spread of the gospel? Why might we expect him to have kept silent at this stage? What can we learn for ourselves?

Day 5 : Acts 28:11-16 – Journey To Rome

Prayerfully read: Romans 12

Understanding

Syracuse is a port of Sicily; Rhegium is on the southern tip of Italy; Puteoli is within a hundred miles of Rome; Appii Forum and Three Inns are much closer still.

Notice that as they approached Rome, they found believers – who they stayed with for seven days, hence including a Lord's Day. This brought great encouragement to Paul (v15). Paul had written to the Christians at Rome many years earlier from Corinth – but had never seen them himself.

Paul, as an uncondemned Roman citizen, was still being allowed a considerable amount of freedom (v14, 16).

Doctrines (Teachings)

- God intends Christian believers to depend on one another – as the different parts of a single body do (1 Corinthians 12:13-27). Even Paul depended on other Christians. We should say, “especially Paul” - because being so fully involved in faithful service which brought him so much suffering, he had even more need of the support and encouragement of other believers. We should never think of Christian leaders or mature believers as supermen or superwomen – we should see them as just like ourselves, weak and needing daily encouragement, which we can help to provide.
- God's promises will all be fulfilled. Paul came to Rome – though it was a very long and eventful journey. Christ shall build his church (Matthew 16:18) – but not in a single day!

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- How can I bring encouragement to other believers? Why is this necessary? How does verse 15 shed light on this? Can you think of times when others have given you precious encouragement?
- How do you think of the church, and of the believers within it?

Day 2 : Acts 27:13-26 – In The Storm

Prayerfully read: Romans 9

Understanding

Had the plan been successful, the journey round to the other side of Crete would have taken less than a day. When it seemed like a favourable wind was blowing (v13), they set off – but very soon, it all began to go wrong. The wind named in verse 14 was a tempestuous north-easter – sending them out into the Mediterranean.

Clauda (v16) is now called Gozzo. This gave the sailors some time to do what the storm had not before allowed – to take some steps to secure the boat and prepare for what was ahead. The Syrtis of verse 17 is a gulf off North Africa known for its shallows and shifting sandbars, where they feared the might run aground. Despite the precautions though, when the ship was blown back into the open sea they began to take on water again, leading them to eventually throw overboard both the cargo and the ship's equipment.

Because of the continuing storm, they were unable to see the sun or stars (v20), which meant they had no way of calculating where they were. Eventually, the whole crew (apparently including Luke, v20), lost all belief that they would come out alive.

Paul, though, knew otherwise – for God had already revealed that he would preach in Rome; but more than this, an angel appeared especially to encourage him (v23) to confirm it. Not only this, but he told Paul that as a token of God's favour, the rest of the passengers' lives would be saved too.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- God is in perfect control of all things – but this does not mean that he will ensure that everything goes easily for us. The comfort of God's sovereignty does not lie in a promise that he will keep us from trouble – rather, it is that he will be with us in the midst of trouble. In the tempest, Paul could say: “God, to whom I belong, and whom I serve”.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- What is your reaction to trouble and difficulty – even to the prospect, like the passengers here, of being completely ruined? Do you draw daily comfort from the fact of the sovereignty of God? What does this sovereignty mean – what does this passage say? How does that help? How does this passage help us to respond to those who say that God cannot be in control of our troubled world?

Day 3 : Acts 27:27-38 – Approaching Land

Prayerfully read: Romans 10

Understanding

The wind had moved round, and was now, unknown to the passengers, pushing them westwards. “Twenty fathoms” (v28) is about 120 feet. When the sailors found that the depth was decreasing (v28), they put down anchors in case they should be dashed to pieces in the dark (v29).

The sailors, though, decided that they would improve their own chances of survival by making their own escape, and leaving the ship. Paul, though, realised that something was up. If the sailors left the ship, the passengers would perish – and this time the centurion believed Paul, and the lifeboat was cut away.

We are not told why nobody had eaten for two weeks – it may have been loss of appetite through fear of death, or some other reason. But Paul encouraged them to eat, expressing his confidence (from the vision he had had, v24) that the whole number of passengers would survive.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- God's sovereignty is not normally expressed by direct and dramatic interventions – but through seemingly “ordinary” things turning out – eventually – just right. God had promised Paul that the whole number of passengers on the ship would survive. But what happened involved narrowly avoiding running aground, a scarcely foiled plot by the sailors to escape, and the acceptance by the people of Paul's wise advice to take some food for their strength. It was through – not apart from – these things that God's promise, that the whole ship would survive, was kept. If God has decreed the outcome of something, then he has also decreed all the steps along the way in all their “ordinary” details. God's sovereignty, then, should encourage us to act with confidence – not because he is not in control and needs our help, but because as we act in a godly way, he will take care of the outcome according to his purposes.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- What does God's sovereignty mean to you? What should it mean – how does this passage help us to think rightly about it? How is it a comfort, and how is it a challenge? Should God's sovereignty make you feel weak and helpless? Or should it give us great confidence? What difference will it make to you in the things you have before you in the next day?

Day 4 : Acts 27:39-28:10 – Shipwrecked

Prayerfully read: Romans 11

Understanding

Malta is a very small island in the Mediterranean sea. If you have a map, you will see what a marvellous thing it was that they should land there, rather than being blown around endlessly, or shipwrecked on a bigger land mass.

It was not possible to make any kind of smooth landing. The ship became stuck, and the fierceness of the sea started to break it up – just as God had said to Paul would happen (v22).

The penalty for allowing prisoners to escape was death (including public shame and torture), and rather than risk that the soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners (v42). But Julius the centurion (v1), for Paul's sake, would not allow it. Instead, those who could swim (which is much fewer in those times than today) were commanded to jump overboard and swim for land; and the others were to cling on to whatever they could that would carry them. Luke records that the whole number of passengers (two hundred and seventy six, v37), made it safely to land.

Paul's surviving the snake-bite fulfilled the promise of Mark 16:18. Of course, both the opinions which the islanders had of him – murderer or god – were wrong. But in God's providence, and through the miracles that were performed, the passengers of the wreck came to be well received, and provided with their needs for the following journey (10:9-10).

Doctrines (Teachings)

- God has set the boundaries for the beginning and ends of our lives (Acts 17:26). Until our appointed time comes and we have done all that God intends us to do with our lives, we are immortal! This of course is not an encouragement to recklessness, because God normally uses ordinary means. But it is an encouragement to be bold and to do all that we can for God and the gospel, whilst we can. The world is not ruled by impersonal fate or justice (v4), but by the sovereign God.

Applying

- Are you ready to die?
- In the light of the fact of the end of your life (whether through death or the return of Christ), how should you live?