

“PAUL IN ROME.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Texts for the Sermon: Acts 28:11-28

Acts 28:11, a ship of Alexandria, the pagan’s false hope.

Finally, we are heading to Rome. Luke begins by telling us they set sail on a ship of Alexandria. What an interesting providence of God, a picture of how life is in our fallen world.

Two ships, both of Alexandria in Egypt, both bound for Italy, both ending up on the island of Malta, one wrecked and one safe. Such are the twists and turns of life in this fallen world. Sometimes all is well and sometimes all is stormy. We are taught by Paul to learn from both.

Philippians 4:12-13, 19 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me. ... 19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

God supplied a ship. Then Luke gives another detail about this ship.

It is dedicated to the twin gods, Castor and Pollux, the gods of the sea, the “patron saints” of sailors. I spoke last week of the folly of the superstitions of the islanders concerning Paul’s snake bite. Here we see again the superstition of the world. *These sailors put their hope in false gods*. Not unlike those who follow the Horoscope and make decisions based on it.

Again we are reminded of this fallen world we live in, a world polluted by gods, idols, sins, superstition and great wickedness. We live in a world dedicated to Satan and evil.

I John 5:19 ... the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

We are called to live in this world, Paul set sail on a ship dedicated to gods. But while we are in the world we are not to be of the world.

Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God.

We are not to be of this world, but we are to be sent into this world, to be salt and light, to witness to the truth while believing none of the lies, to show a world desperately looking for hope, where the true hope is.

Acts 28:12-16, from Malta to Italy, Paul is encouraged to continue in hope.

Their itinerary took them from Malta to Syracuse on the island of Sicily, then after three days there on the Rhegium on the southern tip of Italy for one day, then on up the coast to Puteoli for seven days before journeying over land 140 miles along the Appian Way to Rome.

Here Paul encounters Christian brothers. They stay seven days, perhaps so they can share one Lord's Day together. How often has Luke told us of the presence of believers all along Paul's missionary journeys. In Acts 21 at the end of Paul's third missionary journey, Luke told us:

Acts 21:4, 7-8 ... landed at Tyre, ... 4 And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. ... 7 ... at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. 8 On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist.

You never know where you will find Christ's people. The seed of the Gospel has gone before and there is evidence of the church of Jesus Christ in this region. The brothers came to Paul and were a blessing and encouragement to him.

Their actions strengthened Paul and refreshed him in on his journey. What a help to have companionship coming to the great city of Rome where he had never been before. What a strengthening of spirit, in case he had any anxiety about coming before Emperor Nero.

Paul thanked God took courage. After being in the company of Roman soldiers, pagan sailors, and superstitious islanders, what a welcome breath of fresh air, what strengthening of faith and renewing of hope.

We all experience times when our faith falters or wanes, when we become discouraged, when doubt enters our minds, when our strength to go on is weak. So we know the great blessing and benefit of friends who come along side and lift us up. Think about those you know who could use a good word, a cup of cold water, a helping hand, a listening ear.

We are not meant to be isolated, alone, going about the faith solo. When we are alone, we spiral down, don't remain alone, don't face life alone.

It is important for Christians to gather, to be together, to encourage one another by their presence. What we are doing here is not just for each of us individually but for each other. Don't take lightly this gift.

What we have been through these past couple of years has shown us how great a gift and benefit the fellowship of being gathered together is. I urge us to take this more seriously than ever.

For those of you watching at home, I know some of you are doing so for reasons of health or distance, but for the rest I urge you for the sake of your own souls, but also for the sake of your brothers and sisters and our encouragement in hope, to gather with other believers.

Jesus calls us out of the world into His body, His Church, and that is not just a spiritual reality, but a physical, tangible, fleshly embodiment. Thank God and take courage from the fellowship of the saints.

Rome at last. Finally Paul has arrived. Some of you have been to Rome. Can you imagine walking into Rome through the gates, chained to a Roman guard? What would Paul be thinking?

What humiliation, what embarrassment and shame? Or what glory, the fulfillment of God's promise, and the opportunity to preach the Gospel in the heart of the Roman Empire?

On his arrival to Rome, rather than being put in a prison with all the other criminals, Paul is allowed to stay in a private house with a guard. What a gracious providence.

Notice again how God often does not deliver us from our trials, afflictions, difficulties, but He is with us in them. In the clouds of His providence, there are silver linings of His grace.

Acts 28:17-22, Paul's sixth defense, the Jew's false hope.

What graciousness on the part of Paul. More than any other man, he was hated and harassed, spoken ill of and violently mistreated by the Jews, and yet what does he do? He would have had many good excuses for avoiding his own people, but he reaches out to them first.

Paul was never without hope for his people, for the seed of Abraham. He did not wish anyone to be denied the wonderful hope of the Gospel.

Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

If ever there was a case of loving your enemies, this is it. Paul loved his enemies to the very end, he never ceased trying to win them over. He called them brothers. He wanted them to have the hope that was promised to them, that he had.

Oh that we would be as gracious toward those who mistreat us, that forgiving, that willing to extend a hand. Love your enemies, speak well of them, speak hope to them. Hold on to no bitterness.

Since we started this last section of Acts in Acts 21, this is now Paul's sixth defense of the Gospel. He assures them of three things.

First, he had done nothing against the nation of Israel and **second**, he had done nothing to violate the true worship of God. He had great respect for the Law of Moses and temple worship. **Finally**, he assures them it was not out of disrespect of the Jewish leaders and the Jewish courts and Law that he appealed to Rome. He had no ill-will or animosity toward his people.

Because of the hope of Israel.

Paul says he is here for one reason, ***the hope of Israel***. What does that mean? What is the hope of Israel, or rather, who is the hope of Israel?

The hope of Israel is the Messiah, longed for and looked for by all Jews. The Jews longed for nothing more than the Kingdom of God.

The problem is the Jews looked for a temporal Messiah, a Messiah to deliver them from Roman rule, a Messiah who would restore Israel's glory and make her great. They were looking for a political hope, an economic hope, a "make my life better" hope. They had no interest in a spiritual kingdom of holiness and love brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Are they any different than us? Do we hope in the false hope of a political hope, an economic hope, a "better life here and now" hope, a "move to another state" hope, a "get a better job" hope?

Psalm 118:9 It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.

Psalm 146:3-5 Put not your trust in princes, ... in whom there is no salvation.

4 When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.

5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.

Our hope, our future, is directly tied to Christ and His coming kingdom. Paul is in bondage with chains for this hope, this freedom. There is no other hope.

Acts 28:23-28, Paul preaches true hope of Israel.

This must have been the best home Bible study in history, led by the Apostle Paul himself. The leaders of the Jews came in great numbers and listened to Paul all day long. We are given a very short account of a very long meeting.

Acts 28:23 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.

Paul expounded and explained the Gospel just using the OT, the five books of Moses and all the rest of the books of the Prophets. He sees Jesus in every book, as indeed, He is there.

We spent some time in our Life Group coming up with possible OT texts Paul might have used. I commend it to you as a fruitful exercise.

By using the OT Paul showed them this sect was nothing new, not some made up thing, but God had already revealed Jesus as the Christ, as the Messiah, all through the OT. What had been promised by all the Prophets was now fulfilled in Jesus.

Paul lifted up Jesus by every means possible from the OT and urged them to receive Christ, to confess and believe for the salvation of their souls.

After a full day of preaching, proclaiming, exhorting, explaining, listening to questions and answering them, some of the Jews were convinced by what he said and others were not.

Why is that? Is it the fault of the messenger and his message, is it some inadequacy in the Word of God? Why do some resist, remain unconvinced? The problem is not the Gospel, but the human heart.

Isaiah 6, losing your hope.

Paul said, before you go let me make one last comment, a warning about walking away from your only hope.

Just as there are many passages in the OT that point to the truth and light of Jesus, so also there are many passages that speak to the consequences of not taking God at His Word and believing in Jesus.

This is a serious warning about the judgment of God. Paul is courageously and fearlessly wielding the sharp double-edged sword of the Spirit before the unbelieving Jews.

Isaiah's prophecy is now being fulfilled by their stubborn resistance and rejection of the Gospel. To reject the salvation Jesus offers is to bring judgment upon yourself. By rejecting God's Messiah, God rejected them. They closed their ears, so God closed their ears.

Whenever and wherever the Word of God is preached and proclaimed, one of two things happen. The result will depend on who is really paying attention.

For some it is the power of God for their salvation and deliverance from sin and death. For others it is the power of God for their judgment and renders them without excuse on the day of judgment.

“The same sun which melts wax, hardens clay. And the same Gospel which melts some persons to repentance, hardens others in their sins.” Charles Spurgeon.

Are you listening to God? Are you hearing what He is saying to you? Are you paying attention? Everything depends on your hearing God well. Eternity is at stake.

Whatever is distracting you from Jesus and the Bible is a very costly distraction. I wonder if any generation before ours has had as many possible distractions as ours. We live in a dangerously distracting world.

The Google Play Store has 3 million apps. Apple App Store has another 3 million. TikTok is the biggest distraction with over a billion users. There are almost a million shows to watch on TV and streaming platforms.

What does it profit a person to be great at Minecraft or Fortnite or up on all the latest viral TikTok or YouTube videos and lose his soul?

Are we distracted? I got distracted just looking up how many distractions there are.

As one writer put it, we are amusing ourselves to death. The distractions are dulling our hearing and blinding our eyes.

Heb. 2:1 We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

Are you growing dull toward the good news of the Gospel, over the hope of Israel and our hope? Are you drifting? Are you being blinded by the world's light? This is Satan's work.

II Corinthians 4:4 The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

This happened to the pagan sailors with their gods. This happened to the Jews who listened to Paul for one day and remained unbelieving. We have been listening to Paul since chapter 9 of Acts. Are we believing or unbelieving? Are we convinced? The Christian life requires listening and paying attention.

If we ignore or reject, the time will come when God will pass us over. Paul is urging us to wake up and see the kingdom of God in our midst, to see our hope in Jesus Christ.

Implications and application.

This doesn't come naturally so we must ask for the Spirit's help.

Psalms 25:4 Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.

I believe, help my unbelief. Ask and you will receive.

II Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Paul was willing to be in chains for this hope, for our hope, yours and mine.

Acts 28:28 Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.

Let him who has ears to hear, hear what the Spirit is saying to him today.