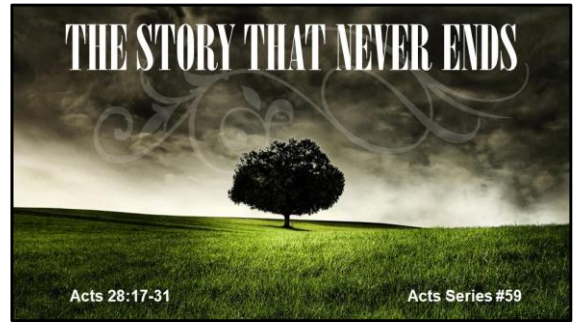




Message #59

“THE STORY THAT NEVER ENDS”  
(Acts 28:17-31)



THE FINAL PASSAGE

Paul is now in Rome as a prisoner, under house arrest, awaiting trial and possible execution, with a guard constantly chained to him. Some might think this is a terrible situation and one that prevented further ministry. But not Paul. Listen to what he says in his letter to the Philippians (written during this time in Rome)....

*12 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard<sup>[a]</sup> and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. (Philippians 1:12-14)*

Paul is obviously quite content with how things have turned out, because of the ministry opportunities.

**Do you think you would have the same attitude as Paul if you were in such a situation?**

It didn't take Paul long after his arrival in Rome to get active. No, he did not seek out a good lawyer to represent him in his trial. Nor did he set about getting support from the Christian community in Rome. No, the first thing he did, just after arriving three days earlier, was to ask for the Jewish leaders to visit with him. He was unable to go to the synagogue (as was his usual practice) or to meet with the Jewish leaders in their homes (because he was under arrest, so he asked them to come to him, which they graciously did.

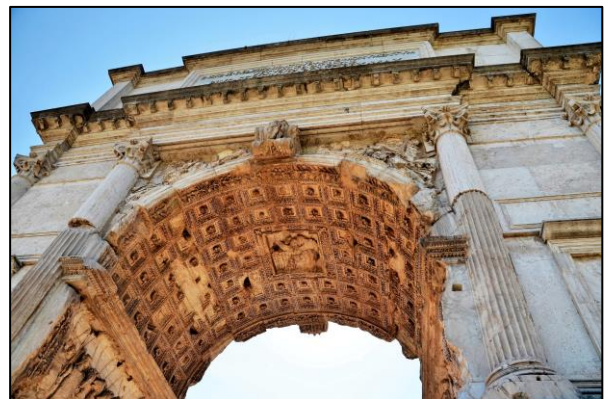
This would have been a delicate meeting and conversation for Paul and the Jews that assembled. Whilst Paul had, over the years, given up on specific Jews, he had never given up totally on his people as a whole.

**What is Paul's heartfelt attitude to his people, the Jews? See Romans 9:1-3**

Now, here in Rome, Paul wanted to reassure the Jewish leaders about his loyalty as a Jew. He is a prisoner and in Rome only because he invoked his right as a Roman citizen to be tried before Caesar (even though the Romans believed he was innocent of the charges brought against him in Jerusalem). He did so, he says, solely as a means of protecting himself....he is not there to bring any counter-charge against the Jews.

However, Paul believes and states that his presence in Rome is Israel". (This is a dispute relating to the Messiah.) Every Jew looked forward to the day when God's great deliverer would come, it was a completely orthodox expectation. The difference between Paul and his accusers was that he believed this "hope" had been fulfilled in Jesus ...and they did not.

**Paul claimed Jesus was the Messiah. Why do you think this was hard for the Jews to believe? What Old Testament passages point to Jesus as the Messiah? How would you go about persuading a Jew about Jesus today?**



Curiously, the Jews say they had heard nothing about Paul from Jerusalem. This is difficult to believe...but, if true, maybe the Jews felt vulnerable in Rome and wanted to maintain a low profile, avoiding any controversy. Whatever the reasons for their respectful response to Paul, some of them are interested in hearing more from/about this Christian missionary and to find out what all the fuss is about. And when they did return, their number had increased in size.

In a sense, Luke is bringing a constant theme of Acts back to the forefront in this final passage....to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. This had always been Paul's strategy and, indeed, it had been the strategy of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and the command to the ancient church (Acts 1:8). Now, Luke is highlighting the continuing heart of God for the Jewish people, as well as their continued obstinacy & rejection.

For a whole day Paul explained the Kingdom of God to these Jewish listeners. He worked hard to demonstrate that Moses and the Prophets had all pointed to Jesus as Messiah; that he was not a believer in a new religion, simply that he was enjoying what God had promised would happen.

Some were obviously receptive, others were not. But the final straw for many was when Paul quoted from **Isaiah 6:9** to them.

God had told Isaiah at the start of his mission that his preaching would have no effect on the people of Israel. The people had hardened their hearts, shut their eyes, and turned away from God. In quoting Isaiah 6 to these Jews in Rome, Paul applies this prophetic judgement to them (how to win friends and influence people!). In choosing not to heed Paul's words they reveal their true character as those in a long line of hardened sinners who have rejected the promise of salvation secured through the Messiah.

Even though there is a repeated rejection by the Jews, Paul ends this passage with confidence....confidence that the Gentiles will listen and be saved. Just as it has in the narrative of Acts, the gospel will meet a positive response in the most surprising of places and from the most unlikely of people.

**How do verses 24-28 fit in with Paul's experiences elsewhere?**

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**Do you ever experience frustration and impatience over the seeming "hard-heartedness" and rejection of the Gospel by people you are praying for & witnessing to? Do you ever feel like giving up on them?**

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**What do you think it means that "with all boldness and without hindrance" (28:31) Paul preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ?**

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**Paul took every opportunity to evangelize. Why was evangelism such a priority for him?**

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**How can we make evangelism more of a priority for ourselves? How can we go about it?**

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**The book of Acts has taken us from a few dozen believers in a single city to a multitude of churches throughout the Mediterranean – all in one generation. How does this excite you about your gospel witness today?**

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The Book of Acts finishes rather abruptly. If a movie finished like that you'd be pretty sure it was leaving it open for the possibility of a sequel.

**Why do you think Luke ends the book so abruptly? What will happen next? What is the "next chapter" that the Holy Spirit is writing?**

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Peter preached the kingdom in Jerusalem. Phillip proclaimed Christ in Samaria. Paul announced Christ around the Roman Empire. Where will you go and with whom will you share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**It's the Story that never ends!**